

4 March 2019

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Inquiry into Environmental Legislation Amendment (Protecting Dugongs and Turtles) Bill 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a public view on the current situation of our red listed dugongs and endangered turtles.

My understanding of current hunting laws today, are such that Australia does not permit hunting of either of either species, unless, the hunting is conducted under the proviso of Native Title Act. In 1993, The Australian Federal Govt introduced the Native Title Act for Indigenous and Torrens Strait Islanders as a direct result of the Mabo decision. Native Title Act, section 211 permits the hunting of red listed dugongs and endangered turtles.

The truth is that, whilst it is recognized that dugongs are red listed, turtles are endangered, there no restriction of how many animals can be taken per hunt, or on how these animals are hunted and killed, and the photographs clearly demonstrate the level of cruelty in which these animals are caught and suffer whilst being killed.

The Native Title Act specifies that hunting must be done under a permit. These permits are handed out free of charge to any person who indicates they have Indigenous or Torres Strait Islander heritage. This process is one of simple administration and does result in any controls over the hunt or kill of these animals.

Why is this permitted? The nature of traditional hunting is to hunt as you need, to feed your family. This appears to many people to be a far cry from what is actually occurring.

Firstly, the hunting methods are unacceptably cruel and they are also illegal. These animals are tortured in the process and we believe this to be deeply inhumane in 2019. We know better and would not accept this for domestic animals.

Turtles are speared in the back, made to pull the hunters in their boats until exhaustion, jumped on, then pulled into the boat. Boats used are no longer traditional vessels but are speedboats with powerful motors making catching the animal alot easier. But it doesn't end there, the turtles are flipped – left in the sun to cook, whilst alive, their front flippers cut off to ensure the hunter is not harmed, and then left to die in pain. In some cases, turtles are caught and tied up for days prior to being butchered.

Dugongs are hunted as they swim under the water in fright, until they need to come up for air. They are then harpooned in the back and again, made to pull the boat until they are exhausted. They are then drowned by either being held underwater or tied behind the boat and drowned as they are

towed at speed back to shore. Baby dugongs are captured and held as bait. Their calls to their mothers and fathers are used as a way of attracting new animals to kill.

Secondly this is not about food for family. Entire pods of dugongs are wiped out in the one hunt and these numbers are huge, some 16 to 20 dugongs in the one go, fathers, mothers, calves – animal age and sex are not a deterrent to the hunter. Female dugongs only have babies once every two and a half to seven years and the babies stay with their mother for some time.

It is well documented that turtles are killed 3 to 4 at a time, often left in the sun and tossed back into the sea as damaged goods if not fat enough. The illegal trade of dugong and turtle meat is commonly spoken of.

Dugongs are essential for seagrass cultivation – which sustains many other marine animals also harvested under Native Title.

The plight of the dugong was highlighted in 2010 in Abu Dhabi at a Regional Meeting of the Conservation Dugongs and Marine Turtles, attended by Australian specialists. No subsequent protection action was taken by the Australian Government and people worried about the future of these animals ask the question why?

If, for example, koala's or owls were being massacred in Australia at a similar rate, and with similar levels of cruelty, there would be a national outcry.

Current hunting activity shows there is no respect for these animals. photos stored on Facebook or sent directly to conservation advocates, that clearly supports this statement. They show the hunters proudly demonstrating their kills and that trophy hunting is alive and thriving in Australia.

The twitter pages that are dedicated to this topic are

These pages provide the hard evidence that is required for this Inquiry.

I ask the Committee to take the time to read through the above twitter feed. Several videos on this feed will clearly demonstrate the cruel nature of how our red listed dugongs and turtles are captured and killed. It is extremely difficult to watch these trophy videos and comprehend how Australian law allows this to continue.

We need a ban on all dugong and turtle hunting to allow for numbers of our red listed dugongs and endangered turtles to recover.

Failing that option, the Committee must support the Bill to limit the number of kills, to restrict the areas of hunting, and to insist on heavy penalties to stop the absolute cruelty.

I commend the Bill and urge the Committee to recommend that members support the Bill. This is a first step to protecting our red listed dugongs and endangered turtles.

Thank you for allowing me to respond to the Committee.

I look forward to the hearing outcomes

NAME WITHHELD