

Critter cullers turn our lives into roadkill

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Date: 02/07/2009
Words: 848
Source: SMH

Publication: Sydney Morning Herald
Section: News and Features
Page: 11

The word "paihamu", meaning "excellent forager", is said to be Maori for brushtail possum. But, as you will immediately see, the name which clearly postdates the translation of "Aotearoa" as "Land of the Wrong White Crowd" doesn't mean possum at all.

Rather it denotes the manifest unfitness of possum as an ingredient in the standard meat pie. Hence the phonetic rendering of pie harm you which also explains why so much possum meat is minced, mislabelled and returned to Australia as petfood. Indeed, so disdainful are Kiwis of our beloved *Trichosurus vulpecula* that, not content with persecuting what they carelessly tag the "common brushtail", they pay themselves a hundred bucks a pelt, call it conservation and use the fur for beanies and rugby scarves. (And no, the **critters** are not simply shorn).

One blogger, Tigerquoll, asks, "why has New Zealand not sought co-operative arrangements to repatriate Australia's possum's [sic] back to Australia?" Why indeed? Why not just catch the 35 million possums estimated to be systematically stripping NZ's tawa, rimu and pohutukawa at a rate of 12,000 tonnes a night and shove them home through some great sub-Tasman possum pipeline?

We could even have a sort of Christmas Island ritual by which these pesky pseudo-foreigners are not actually in the country until we say so. Before which point before the label flips back from "feral" to "endangered" we, too, could happily shoot the little varmints, pink noses and all. Which is exactly what the NSW Shooters' Party, struck by acute ditch-envy, wants. Not only possums; they also want to shoot sparrows, galahs, sulphur-crested cockatoos, doves, corellas and the wandering whistling tree duck *Dendrocygna arcuata*. And not only on private land but also in national parks. That way you reduce the child population, too.

How, though, will the ALP stop them? Stalking out of parliament is a fine but at best a temporary tactic. They boarded this Shooters' train by choice. Now that they don't like where it's going, can they simply hop off?

The answer is almost certainly no, judging by Nathan Rees's risible invitation after the puerile walkout, for Shooters to "help cull" under departmental supervision. This was never going to pacify the Shooters or control ferals, but rather disperse both to regroup and re-arm.

So perhaps we should prepare ourselves for life under what is effectively a Nile-Shooters coalition. What will it be like? Pretty special, if the entrails on the ground are anything to go by.

You thought Bjelke-Petersen was one chook short of the coop, well, lookey here. The record shows that the Shooters, the Nile tributary of the Christian Democratic Party and the ALP, have had a hellish little gang going for years, at least since Nile and John Tingle helped to coerce the infamous Part 3A legislation through parliament four years ago.

Why, though? What do the Shooters care for planning? Not a lot, frankly. Of their official 11-paragraph policy document, only two are remotely related to planning.

These deal with 4WD access rights to beaches, parks and forests (for killing purposes, natch) and the proposition that the Government should need special permission before "altering the level of its commitment and involvement in rural areas".

But by 2005, favours had been accepted, not least the huge windfalls to Shooters from both the 1990s gun-licensing system and the Game Council, set up in 2002. Here's how it works. The gun-licensing system delivers money to licensing bodies, especially the Sporting Shooters Association, of which Roy Smith was executive director from 1994 to 2007 and which, under his guidance, donated \$458,286 to the election campaign of, well, Roy Smith, now MLC.

The Game Council, stacked with eight hunters (including Roy Smith) to one vet, one Koori and a couple of token conservationists, is designed to make hunters effectively self-governing. Like a profession medicine, say only instead of saving lives, it takes them.

Meanwhile Fred Nile accepted in 2007 a specially created position as assistant president of the upper house (20 per cent salary increase, 14 per cent increase in allowances) saying "if the Government ... wants to honour me in this way I'd be a fool to say no".

Since then, the Nile-Shooters party has consistently supported the worst of Labor's bad law making, especially its relentless shredding of planning, heritage and environment.

Take the Threatened Species Conservation Bill (2008), giving advance biodiversity certification to all nominated "growth centres" regardless of actuality; the Heritage Amendment ("Wrecking Ball") Bill (2009); and the Homebush supercar legislation that, for two months a year, gives the racing authority absolute control over Sydney Olympic Park, leaving local property-owners and businesses with no rights of appeal over noise, hours, amenity or access. In all these, the Nile-Shooters coalition had the casting vote.

They also supported the Land Acquisition Act that allows councils to resume your house and sell it for profit to a developer, and opposed the Greens' bill to protect farmland from mining. So for most of us, life in this Nile-Shooters-run state may feel like roadkill on a 10-lane highway. Like the sauce bottle in a splatter movie. And what will Rees do, come September? Reckon he'll roll over, play possum. Thursday's Opinion article [□□ Critter cullers turn our lives into roadkill□□](#) should not have said the Shooters Party supported the Land Acquisition Act.