

Back Country Hunting



ANNUAL REPORT 2020

NT Firearms Council



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The NT Firearms Council (NTFC) wishes to acknowledge the support and cooperation of the Parks and Wildlife Commission of the Northern Territory (PWC) Directors, management and staff who have made the Back Country Hunting Program on Litchfield National Park not only possible, but the on-going success it is.

The Council would also like to recognise the work of our Executive Officer Alan Sprigg in undertaking the day-to-day administration of the program, NTFC delegate Brian Boyle and Councillor Tony Orr for the development, organisation and management of the program and to those involved in the BCH training and assessment sessions: Alan Specketer, Daniel Horwood and Brian Boyle. The Council also thanks the volunteers: Tony Orr, Matt Osborne and Brian who worked on clearing the campsites to open the block and Ian McKerrow, Grant Dean and Brian Boyle who worked with PWC to install gates and signs during 2020.

The Council would also like to acknowledge the kind use of the Darwin Rifle Club rooms for the BCH Accreditation sessions.

THE NT FIREARMS COUNCIL

The Northern Territory Firearms Council is an incorporated consultative and advisory body representing the interests of legitimate firearms owners and users throughout the Northern Territory. The Council is supported by the Northern Territory Government and solely funded by government financial grants which are used to resource the position of Executive Officer, fund the Council's operational functions, maintain the Mickett Creek Shooting Complex and manage the Council's Office in the Rifle Club building at Range #1.

1. INTRODUCTION

The primary purpose of the Back Country Hunting Program (BCH) is to provide hunters in the Northern Territory with areas of public land to hunt feral animals with firearms and to provide training, knowledge and information to assist hunters to hunt safely, legally, ethically and responsibly on public land. A pass in the Hunter Accreditation Course is one of the requirements for application to participate in the BCH.

To assist in the process of continual learning, the Northern Territory Firearms Council (NTFC) compiled a Hunter Accreditation Handbook. The Handbook was designed to be used by:

- hunters who:
 - wish to apply for access to the NT estate under the 'Back Country Hunting' initiative
 - want to further their knowledge of hunting methods, or
 - are hunting on public land for the first time.
- individuals, clubs and organisations as a learning guide for the reinforcement of knowledge and the safe and ethical practices of hunting.

The information provided in the Handbook is primarily based on the NSW Hunter Education Handbook which the Game Licensing Unit of the NSW Department of Primary Industries has kindly allowed the NTFC to use.



1.1 Participation in the BCH Program

Northern Territory Residents

Residents of the Northern Territory can participate in the BCH initiative subject to the following requirements:

- i. hold a current NT firearms licence.
- ii. be a current member of a PWC Approved Hunting Organisation.
- iii. have a BCH accreditation from a PWC approved BCH assessor.
- iv. have an appropriate BCH permit from PWC.

Residents outside of the Northern Territory

Residents of areas outside of the Northern Territory can participate in the BCH initiative subject to the following requirements:

- i. Hold a current firearms licence accepted by the NT Police.
- ii. Be a member of a hunting club or organisation that holds \$20 million public liability which covers all members who participate in hunting on public land under permit or licence.
- iii. Have a BCH accreditation from a PWC approved BCH assessor.
- iv. Have an appropriate BCH permit from PWC.
- v. Must be accompanied by an NT Resident with a BCH accreditation and Permit on the permitted hunt.

1.2 THE BCH TRAINING AND ACCREDITATION PROCESS

Hunter education training in accordance with the Handbook was provided at sessions organised at the Darwin Rifle Club and conducted by NTFC approved assessors.

Recognition of Prior Learning

To qualify for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in any of the fields covered in the Accreditation Course, the applicant must provide evidence of prior learning to BCH Assessor. The NSW Restricted Game Hunting Licence (R-Licence) was approved by the PWC and may be used as RPL for inter-State hunters for the BCH Program.

2. THE 2020 BCH PROGRAM REPORT

2.1 2020 BCH Program set-up

The facilities installed by PWC at the five camping areas in the hunting area continue to be enjoyed and respected by the hunters that use them. Three volunteers spent three days in May 2020 clearing grass at the campsites and around the toilets to protect the campsites and the toilets from planned burns or wildfires. The pit toilets were checked by Brian Boyle throughout the open period and all were functioning/held up well. Some fill-in work may be necessary around the toilets in 2021 as there has been some subsidence. This could be undertaken by BCH volunteers.



The NT Firearms Council organised and paid for the fabrication of a gate and the supply of steel posts for PWC signage throughout the block. In July 2020, three BCH hunters provided volunteer assistance over two days to PWC Rangers to install the gate at the southern end of Stapleton Track and a number PWC signs along the track.

The dual lock system with an NTFC combination lock on the entrance gate to the hunting block on Stapleton Track continues to work well. The combination lock was removed by the PWC after the block was closed in December 2020. The lock will not be placed back on the gate until the block is open after the wet season in 2021 when Stapleton Track dries out sufficiently to allow access.

2.2 NTFC BCH assessors

In 2020 there were two NTFC BCH approved assessors in Darwin: Alan Specketer and Brian Boyle; and one in Katherine: Daniel Horwood who ran Accreditation sessions. The NTFC would like to acknowledge the time and efforts by these gentlemen for conducting the accreditation sessions and assessments for the BCH Program.

2.3 BCH accreditations

128 hunters received BCH assessment and accreditation in 2020 (a marked increase from 48 in 2019), bringing the total BCH accreditations for 2016-2020 to 496. Fees collected in 2020 to cover NTFC administration costs for the accreditation courses totalled \$7,620.

2.4 BCH hunter permits and returns

269 BCH permits were issued in 2020. This is an increase of 108 from the preceding year when 161 permits were issued. Hunters reported hunting on 214 days of the 554 permitted days. The difference is due to hunters often not hunting on the first or last days booked in the permit. These days are generally spent travelling to or from the block and setting, or packing up camp.

291 feral animals were taken by hunters in 2020, an increase of 114 on the preceding year.

Feral animal	Number of animals	
	Taken	Seen but not taken
Pigs	196	422
Clean-skin cattle	9	67
Water buffalo	47	95
Cats	0	7
Horses	39	96
TOTAL	291	687

2.5 BCH permit fees

Hunters were charged a fee of \$25 per permit day booked. Total BCH Permit daily fees received by the NTFC for 2020 was \$13,860. As per the Program MoU, these fees have been deposited in a trust account for expending in the BCH Program after consultation/approval by PWC.

An administration fee of \$30 was charged to cover NTFC Executive Officer time for processing permits. Income received for the administration fee totalled \$8,160. The administration fee does not meet the cost (\$11,678) of processing and administering the Program, but the NTFC agreed at its' February 2020 General Meeting to continue supporting this important Program.

2.6 BCH hunter compliance with permit conditions

There were no issues with permitted hunters complying with permit conditions in the BCH block in Litchfield for the 2020 hunting period from May to November. There were several short notice closures of the hunting block in the hunting period due to fires in the area and hunters willingly complied with closures or requests to leave the area. Hunters also provided four reports of illegal hunting for PWC as part of the program. This lead to four successful infringement notices.



Hunters also provided a number of reports of unexploded ordinances in the area as well general information on weeds and historical sites.

EXPANSION OF BCH PROGRAM TO OTHER AREAS

The introduction of the BCH Program has been a resounding success. The NTFC would like to enter into discussions with PWC and the NT Government to ascertain other areas where the BCH Program can be undertaken.

