

Deer in Victoria



Yarra Catchment Agency
Deer Management Forum
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Introduction

- There are diverse community views regarding the value of deer in Victoria
- Some community members view wild deer:
 - As an important game hunting resource (32,000 licensed hunters removed 58,000 deer in 2014. 126% increase in last 10 years. In 2013, game hunting contributed \$439 million to regional economies)
 - As having intrinsic value (result of tree changers, similar views for Rusa in NSW Royal Botanic Gardens and Red in QLD Brisbane)
- Other community members view wild deer as a problem:
 - Competition with primary production and agriculture
 - Destruction of infrastructure
 - Vehicle accidents
 - Environmental damage
 - Dangerous behaviour associated with illegal deer hunting

History

- 26 species of deer released into Victoria since 1860 by the Acclimatisation Society
- 4 species of deer with self-sustaining populations (Sambar, Fallow, Hog and Red)
 - Fallow Deer protected until 2001 and then 2006
 - Rusa and Chital Deer protected until 2006
 - Hog Deer actively relocated until 1980 (Serendip Sanctuary)
- Deregulation and collapse of deer industry in 1990s – led to broad scale illegal release of Fallow Deer throughout Victoria
- Current research has provided some evidence that bushfires and controlled burn programs have significantly increased the dispersal and abundance of Sambar Deer throughout eastern Victoria



Legislative framework

- There is legislative conflict regarding the management of deer

Legislation	Statutory instruments	Comment
<i>Wildlife Act 1975</i>		All deer are protected as wildlife, are not to become extinct and are to be managed sustainably Six species (Chital, Rusa, Sambar, Fallow Red and Hog) are declared game
<i>Wildlife Act 1975</i>	Governor in Council Unprotection Order	All deer (except for Hog Deer) are unprotected on private property where there is demonstrable evidence they are causing damage – can be destroyed by landholders and agents with prescribed methods (including spotlight)
<i>Wildlife Act 1975</i>	28A	Provides authorisation for any person to destroy wildlife where permitted
	Wildlife (Game) Regulations 2012	Prescribes methods, bag limits and seasons for deer. Except for Hog Deer there are no bag limits or seasons for the hunting of deer (with the exception of using hounds to assist in Sambar Deer hunting); cannot spotlight
<i>National Parks Act 1975</i>		Obliges the state to control introduced fauna (including deer) and flora within the parks estate Provides a number of parks where deer hunting can occur (8.5m ha of public land available for deer hunting)
<i>Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994</i>		All deer species except for Chital, Hog, Red, Wapiti, Sika, Sika-Red hybrids, Fallow, Rusa and Sambar are prohibited pest animals

Departmental roles

Agency	Responsibility
DELWP	Management of states' wildlife policy States' Crown Land manager
DEDJTR	Making and enforcing animal welfare standards Statewide policy for game management Management of states' pest animal policy Management of commercial food safe handling policies
GMA	Licensing and regulating deer hunters
Parks Victoria	Managing deer on the parks estate and providing access for deer hunting where legislation provides
Victoria Police	Licensing firearms users and enforcing firearm law



Current control options

- Landholders:
 - Remove deer through unprotection order (subject to conditions) – this include spotlights
 - Remove deer under an Authority to Control Wildlife (requires permit but allows different conditions to be prescribed compared to unprotection order)
 - Can allow recreational hunters to assist in removal
- Land managers:
 - Remove deer under an Authority to Control Wildlife (requires permit but allows different conditions to be prescribed compared to unprotection order)
 - Can allow recreational hunters to assist in removal
- Recreational hunters:
 - Can hunt deer with a licence. Can use dogs and hounds to assist. Cannot spotlight

Some misconceptions or issues

Proposal	Comment
Allow recreational hunters to spotlight deer	Effective method, however, significant public safety issue
Classify game deer as pest animals and remove from wildlife list	<p>Will allow spotlighting on Crown Land (excluding parks estate) – significant public safety issue</p> <p>Will remove recreational hunting from the parks estate</p> <p>Will remove prescribed methods for hunting deer (i.e. unrestricted) – significant safety and welfare issues</p> <p>Provide an obligation for land managers (DELWP and PV) to manage and eradicate deer populations - expensive</p> <p>Landowners will be obliged to manage deer on their property and can face prosecution for failing to do so - expensive</p>
Poison deer	Currently no approved poison for deer in Australia. Could have significant issues with non-target casualties
Commercial processing of deer (includes pet food and table quality)	<p>Require legislative change – need to be a consumable animal under the Meat Industry Act.</p> <p>Regulatory framework would need to be implemented</p> <p>Could provide perverse incentive for illegal hunting</p>
Commercial culling	Most effective way is considered helicopter shooting. Has never been tested in Victoria forested environments - community opposition, safety and welfare concerns - expensive

State of play

- Managed as a game resource
- Reduction in red-tape to allow landholders to manage problem deer on their properties
- Land managers employ asset based management and control programs

There is a recognised need for a whole of government statewide deer management strategy to address competing interests – this needs to be led by departments responsible for policy

