

Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water & Environment

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Ms Monika Sheppard
Senior Research Officer
Senate Environment and Communications Committee

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Dear Ms Sheppard

Further to your request of 8 October 2020 to appear before the above Committee, I provide the following information in relation to the Terms of Reference. It is an update to the written submission provided by this Department on 31 October 2018. The information provided in the original submission remains accurate.

a. The current and potential occurrence of feral deer, pigs and goats across Australia

The Tasmanian Government is implementing its commitment to undertake a census of the wild fallow deer population in Tasmania with the aerial survey component now completed and reported upon. Further information on the deer census project, and the reports and detailed findings from the recent aerial surveying component, can be found at <https://dpipwe.tas.gov.au/agriculture/game-services-tasmania/wild-fallow-deer-census>.

In summary, this aerial survey covered the part of the State considered the traditional deer range where most wild deer are found. Wild deer abundance within this area was estimated at approximately 54 000 with this population dispersed throughout this range. Analysis of the results of annual spotlight surveys undertaken within the aerial survey area indicated the wild deer population has increased by about 5.4% each year over the period 2006-2019. Over the same period, approximately 10 000 to 30 000 deer have been taken each year under game licences and crop protection permits.

In releasing the results of this survey, the Government announced the development of a new Wild Fallow Deer Management Plan for Tasmania. This Plan will collate the aerial survey results, existing deer management strategies and identify any new actions required, as well as recognise the Contemporary Quality Deer Management (QDM) Statement released in 2019. The Plan is to be developed by the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE) through a consultative process with stakeholders including the Tasmanian Game Council.

The next stage of the overall deer census project is to estimate wild deer abundance in other areas of the State (including the TWWHA, parks and reserves) over the next two years using camera traps and citizen science, being methodologies best suited to surveying low and very low animal populations.

This survey work is the first of its kind for wild fallow deer in Tasmania, hence it will serve as a benchmark against which future management strategies and surveys can be evaluated.

b. The likely and potential biosecurity risks and impacts of feral deer, pigs and goats on the environment, agriculture, community safety and other values

The results of the above surveys will enable the geographic distribution of wild fallow deer to be defined and thus able to be used as inputs when formulating biosecurity response plans.

The Wild Fallow Deer Management Plan is being developed by consulting a comprehensive and diverse range of stakeholders and thus will take account of the outcomes desired by them so a balanced approach to future wild fallow deer management can be achieved.

DPIPWE is collaborating with the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions through a project that seeks to understand the genetic diversity of wild fallow deer to improve modelling of their likely impact as transmission agents for exotic diseases. The results of this work would help prioritise response strategies to an exotic disease incursion for which wild fallow deer may be a vector.

There is some speculation within the farming community as to the role of wild fallow deer in transmitting diseases such as ovine Johnes Disease and ovine footrot. To date, there is no science-based evidence to understand the role of wild fallow deer in transmitting these diseases across the landscape under Tasmanian conditions.

c. The effectiveness of current state and national laws, policies and practices in limiting spread and mitigating impacts of feral deer, pigs and goats

A review of the *Wildlife (General) Regulations 2010* and the *Wildlife (Deer Farming) Regulations 2010* is currently being undertaken to ensure these remain contemporary.

Commencing this year the Tasmanian Government removed restrictions on the number of antlerless (female) fallow deer permitted to be taken under Crop Protection Permits and game licences as well as extending the antlerless deer season to encompass the period 15 March to 15 November. Crop Protection Permits for antlerless deer are now being issued for five years to reduce regulatory burden on landholders and hunters. Quotas and tagging requirements on antlerless deer were also removed. Holders of Crop Protection Permits and recreational hunting licences are required to provide annual take returns to enable long-term monitoring of deer numbers and the impact of deer management strategies to be assessed. Take return data will also complement the outcomes of the wild fallow deer census currently being undertaken.

The impact of these changes is yet to be evaluated as take returns relevant to them are not yet due. The next aerial survey will enable the impact of these changes to be quantified as will results from annual spotlight transect surveys which indicate trends in abundance.

Further information on the changes to antlerless fallow deer management in Tasmania is available here: <https://dPIPWE.tas.gov.au/agriculture/game-services-tasmania/changes-to-antlerless-fallow-deer-management>.

d. The efficacy and welfare impacts of currently available controls and containment tools and methods, and the potential for new control and containment tools and methods

Animal welfare is a high priority for the Tasmanian Government together with landholders, hunters the general local community and our trading partners. A risk management approach has been used to refine the period when fawns are most likely to be dependent on their lactating mothers for survival and therefore at risk of adverse animal welfare outcomes if female deer are shot. Crop Protection Permits and game licences for taking antlerless (female) deer during the period 16 November to 14 March are generally not issued, to minimise the risk of adverse animal welfare outcomes for milk dependent fawns. Additional science-based work is planned to inform whether this no take period for antlerless deer can be further refined to potentially provide greater flexibility for farmers to manage deer that may be grazing on maturing crops.

The Government recently commissioned a consultant to determine the feasibility of conducting a limited fixed-term trial to evaluate the potential for deer farmers and landholders to supply value-added wild deer products for the regulated food or restaurant trade. The report from the consultant will be independently reviewed prior to being considered by the Government. Further information on the Wild-shot Deer Feasibility Study is available here: <https://dpiwwe.tas.gov.au/agriculture/game-services-tasmania/wild-shot-deer-feasibility-study>.

e. Priority research questions

There are a number of non-lethal deterrence devices (lasers, audible and visual) reputed to scare off or move on wildlife (including deer) from areas where their presence is undesired usually due to their potential to damage high value crops and pastures. The effectiveness of these devices to deliver acceptable outcomes has not been determined under Tasmanian conditions and rarely under Australian conditions. Similarly, alternatives to shooting to remove deer from closely settled peri-urban areas requires investigation.

The role of deer as transmission agents for domestic livestock diseases is not well understood but potentially very important because deer being landscape dwellers have the potential to move between many properties with varying domestic livestock disease status.

Whilst research into these issues may be expensive, species and environment dependent results would have a level of national applicability.

f. The benefits of developing and fully implementing national threat abatement plans for feral deer, pigs and goats

Wild fallow deer is scheduled as Partly Protected Wildlife under the *Nature Conservation Act 2002*. The Tasmanian Government recognises the importance of managing the species in a balanced manner for multiple outcomes. The Wild Fallow Deer Management Plan currently under development will recognise these multiple outcomes and may identify areas where deer are managed differently to achieve agreed outcomes. As previously noted, the new Plan will, among other elements, recognise the Contemporary Quality Deer Management (QDM) Statement. Quality deer management aims to achieve high quality deer herds, and reduced impact of browsing wildlife achieved through cooperative engagement between landholders and game hunters, and Government. QDM aims to manage wild fallow deer so as to deliver the outcomes desired by farmers, foresters game hunters and conservationists. A copy of the QDM Statement, including core principles, outcomes and the specific elements of QDM is available here: [https://dpiwwe.tas.gov.au/Documents/Quality%20Deer%20Management\(1\).pdf](https://dpiwwe.tas.gov.au/Documents/Quality%20Deer%20Management(1).pdf)

Tasmania would welcome the opportunity to engage nationally in the development of management plans where they are appropriate to local Tasmanian conditions and policies. A national approach to develop management strategies that recognise the different approaches that may apply in jurisdictions is sensible, potentially where they provide the opportunity to develop and share research and knowledge, and provide associated economies of scale to leverage resources to help manage populations in line with each jurisdiction's local management objectives.

Yours sincerely

Tim Baker
SECRETARY

30 October 2020