



Submission to Wild Fallow Deer Management Plan Project

I wish to re-emphasise the scale of commercial opportunity commercial use of deer offers Tasmania.

Scale of venison trade

Lenah Game Meats currently purchases wild harvested venison suitable for human consumption from Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia. Throughout 2020 typical weekly purchases have been 5-6 tonne of boneless meat, plus offal's and other co-products.

We sell this product to Mainland buyers, as well as Tasmanian restaurants and every major Tasmanian Woolworths, Coles and IGA supermarket. We expect this trade to extend to a further 200 mainland supermarkets in the New Year.

In addition we know of considerable export interest in wild venison, for example Minister Barnett's delegation to China last year met with representatives from China State Farms (one of the worlds largest agri-business companies) who expressed strong interest in importing Tasmanian wild venison.

Lenah's existing trade in venison is worth \$3M/year and 30-40 jobs, this is without further expansion, however the vast bulk of this benefit is being enjoyed by interstate companies, rather than Tasmania.

Benefit to agriculture

Commercial harvesting of deer could offer farmers a timely and flexible means of crop protection to add to their tools in mitigating deer crop damage. In dozens of conversations with Tasmanian farmers during 2019, estimates of the productivity loss from deer vary from \$50,000-\$200,000 per farm per year.

In 2015, 459 individual farms were issued 751 deer crop protection permits (DPIPWE 2016). The government cannot update the figure for the number of farms issued permits in recent years, but in 2018, 872 permits were issued. Using the same ratio of permits issued per farm as in 2015, then the 2018 figure of 872 permits issued equates to 532 farms with deer problems.

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Using this data it's possible to calculate a range of estimates of deer direct costs to Tasmanian agriculture.

Number of farms affected by deer	Annual productivity loss/farm	State wide productivity loss
532	\$25,000	\$13.3M
532	\$50,000	\$26.6M
532	\$75,000	\$39.9M

If more flexible and timely crop protection by commercial shooting reduced this damage by only 25% then it could save Tasmanian farmers something like \$10M/year.

Strengthening existing business

A wide range of Tasmanian non-farm businesses support the commercial use of deer because it will improve their viability. Many of these have endorsed the attached proposal. In addition the viability of the estimated 40 currently operating commercial game meat harvesters stand to improve significantly from access to deer. In many cases these harvesters are already culling deer using crop protection permits as a service to the farms they shoot on. The carcasses however are too often simply discarded and this is an actual cost to the harvesters in time and resources. *For example, one commercial shooter who supplies Lenah has himself shot between 600-1100 deer each year since 2015 under crop protection permits, of these only about 50/year have been utilised.* The deer shot and left to rot each year by this one commercial shooter alone, if utilized, could have generated another full time job.

Lenah alone also deals with another 8 commercial shooters, all of whom also shoot deer as a service to the farms they harvest on. Being able to sell these deer and opportunistically take other deer seen would significantly improve the financial viability of the states existing 40 game meat harvesters.

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The improvement in the viability of commercial shooting delivered by access to deer would also encourage other entrants to the industry and increase the supply of wallaby and other game animals to the game meat processing sector. This increase in supply capacity would in turn strengthen the financial viability of the more than 15 existing game meat processors in the State.

Thus between farmers, restaurants, food retailers, game harvesters and game processors there are perhaps 1000 Tasmanian businesses which stand to gain financially from a commercial harvest of wild deer. A commercial harvest would generate a considerable number of new jobs and over \$15M/year in new income for the state.

Negative impacts

Many recreational shooters have claimed that commercial use will decimate deer herds. Based on the regulatory requirements of commercial shooting and fallow deer behavior this seems unlikely.

In order to supply deer for commercial use the animal must be head shot, then bled, then hung, then eviscerated. These activities of themselves place a time limit on how many deer a commercial shooter can take a night.

The behavior of fallow deer places an even greater limit on the number which can be taken. In order to head shoot a deer it must be standing still, if a high powered rifle is discharged within several hundred metre of any deer then as a general rule they are no longer stand still. Fallow deer are extremely flighty animals and will run as soon as a high powered rifle is discharged. This places a significant limitation on how many deer a commercial shooter can take in a night. In practice, outside of extremely high population densities (on an irrigated crop during drought for example), commercial deer shooting will simply be a matter of commercial game shooters opportunistically taking whatever deer they happen to see and get a good shot at. This will not 'decimate' populations.

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In balance, commercial use of deer offers considerable and demonstrable commercial and societal benefits to the State. Well over 1000 individual businesses stand to benefit from it, with 40 potential new jobs in deer processing alone, without down-stream benefits. Where-as in opposition to it the main claim of decimating herds seems to be unsupportable when viewed against the reality of deer behavior.

At a time when Tasmania, more than ever, needs all the jobs it can get it seems self-evident that a new industry offering jobs, supported by existing markets, utilizing a wasted resource should be welcomed.

Regards

A handwritten signature in red ink, appearing to read "John Kelly".

John Kelly
Proprietor

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