



The Secretary,
Agriculture, Fisheries, Forestry Committee
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra
Primary.Industries.Reps@aph.gov.au

Inquiry re: Impact of Pest Animals on Agriculture

This is a report regarding the environmental & agricultural impact of Feral Deer within the Curdies River Valley and its tributaries.

The Curdies Valley

The Ecological Vegetation Communities (EVCs) along these streams and gullies have been classed as Herb-rich Foothill Forest (Vulnerable), Damp Heathland / Damp Heath Woodland (Vulnerable), Lowland Forest (Vulnerable - Depleted) and Damp Heath Scrub (Vulnerable) by the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE). These areas also contain many State and Nationally listed species of flora & fauna (e.g. the Endangered Lime Fern listed under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act).

The protection & enhancement of this environment including the biodiversity of plant & wildlife populations, valuable riparian eco-system & water quality, has been severely compromised by an increasing Feral Deer population.

Exclusion of livestock from the remnant forest & waterways including the restoration of stream banks by adjoining landholders has been promoted & assisted by the Corangamite Catchment Management Authority, DSE, Greening Australia and the Heytesbury District Landcare Network.

Control Program, Deer Species

Until a Feral Deer Control / Eradication program was formalised by Members of the Curdies Valley Landcare Group with the DSE Flora & Fauna Enforcement Officers utilising Approved Shooters, the restoration of these waterways were in doubt.

The Control Program commenced 18 months ago on 2 farms however the CV Landcare Group found it necessary to employ a Professional Shooter 10 months ago as the program continued to expand, now encompassing 10 farms, each requiring Wildlife Control Permits. It is expected the Control Program will finally operate across 15 to 20 farms covering a distance of approximately 36 Km along the Curdies River including its tributaries.

140 Feral or Wild Deer have been culled to date, 125 of these deer have been shot by the 2 DSE authorised shooters (Control permits), the other 15 Deer shot by local deer hunters. We estimate 180 to 240 Wild Deer will need to be culled to ensure that the long-term success of the Control Program is achieved.

An approximate breakdown of the Deer species within the Curdies Valley is

- Sambar 65%, (some are Sambar X Rusa)
- Fallow 25%
- Red, Chital, Hog, 10%

Feral & Wild Deer have occupied the Curdies Valley for approximately 25 years. The establishment of these populations have occurred primarily for 2 reasons –

- Red, Fallow & Chital Deer have originated from local deer farms due to inadequate fencing & management and deliberate release.
- The large Sambar population has resulted from the deliberate liberation by Deer Hunters for the purpose of sport & trophy hunting and more recently the safari styled hunt / guiding industry. The small recent population of Hog Deer are being “managed” by local deer hunters for the purpose of expanding the population.

Victorian Legislation

All Wild, Feral & Illegally Liberated Deer have the legislated status of **Protected Wildlife** thus enabling Deer to be managed & regulated as a Game Species.

All Crown Land along the waterways within the Corangamite Shire has the legislated status of **Recognised Deer Habitat**.

At what point does the protection of an introduced & destructive feral species, protected only for the provision of recreational hunting, cease to take priority over the existence of high conservation value riparian forest & natural habitat?

DSE Flora & Fauna Officers have also observed damage to the important population of Lime Ferns caused by Feral Deer.

The DSE state that when damage to private property, fodder crops / fencing and native vegetation occurs, the landowner can be issued with an **Authority to Control Wildlife Permit**. This is fundamentally flawed, as the damage must have already occurred before the permit can be issued!

It should also be noted that the Protected Wildlife status of Deer severely hampers an individual or group from attaining funding from various conservation authorities to carry out Feral Deer management & control.

Relevant Quotes

Dennis Keith, Veteran Deer Stalker, Sporting Shooter Magazine. Jan 2003

“Deer are great travellers and like to push into and colonize new territory. They also travel well in the back of trucks. Some individuals wishing to take advantage of having a local deer population where there were previously none have adopted this practice with gusto. The result is that there are now herds of deer of varying species cropping up all over the place”

Dr H. J. Frith, Chief of Wildlife Research Division CSIRO, Wildlife Conservation. 1979

“One of the most pressing needs in wildlife conservation is to discover what is the place of the Sambar in the ecology of the south-east highlands. If the presence of the deer is adverse to native flora & fauna, then how can they be controlled? If they are not adverse, then how could they be managed for long-term productivity as game animals?”

“There is need for a thorough survey of the distribution and numbers of the various species of deer throughout the continent. Much of this information is already known to landholders and hunters, but

many landholders do not publicize their knowledge because of a real fear of being invaded by hunters. Many hunters who are on a good thing in deer-hunting do not welcome wide publicity.”
“No sensible management or control plan is possible until the above work is established and there is a feed-back of objective data. In the meantime, conservationists will continue to think of deer as a probable menace and some pastoralists will think of them as a pest, while hunters will think of them as the premier game animal of the country. Some people will remain confused.”

Curdies Valley Landcare Group Contacts:

President:

Richard Gloyne

Curdies River Rd

Timboon 3268

draintech@gatewaybbs.com.au

Secretary:

Beth Grant

RMB 1175

McDonalds Rd

Scotts Creek 3267

Heytesbury District Landcare Network Co-ordinator:

Becky McCann

Shop 1, 47 Main St

Timboon 3268

Phone 5598 3755

Fax 5598 3754

Curdies Valley Landcare Group Feral Deer Control Program Co-ordinator:

Dean Drayton

P.O. Box 23

Timboon 3268

curdieview@eftel.net.au



Typical streamside damage



Sambar Deer



Sambar Deer