



Controlling deer in Victoria

AN OPEN LETTER TO

**The Hon.
Jaclyn Symes**

Minister for
Regional Development,
Agriculture and Resources
Level 36, 121 Exhibition St,
Melbourne VIC 3000

jaclyn.symes@parliament.vic.gov.au

**The Hon.
Lily D'Ambrosio**
Minister for Energy,
Environment and
Climate Change

Level 16, 8 Nicholson St,
East Melbourne VIC 3002

lily.dambrosio@parliament.vic.gov.au

**The Hon.
Lisa Neville**

Minister for Water
Minister for Police and
Emergency Services
Level 17, 8 Nicholson St,
East Melbourne VIC 3002

lisa.neville@parliament.vic.gov.au

2 May 2019

Dear Ministers Symes, D'Ambrosio and Neville,

We are writing to you in your roles as key natural resource Ministers in the Victorian Government.

We are concerned that Victoria's Draft Deer Management Strategy (2018) fell far short of addressing the considerable problems feral deer bring to peri-urban and regional communities, and to wetlands, catchments and the natural environment.

We offer here some recommendations for the final strategy; it is a critical opportunity to control deer populations and to reverse the increasing impacts they are having.

We agree with the rough estimate for the state's deer population, as documented in the draft strategy, at *'between several hundred thousand up to one million or more'*. The population is growing rapidly at an exponential rate¹, and far exceeds the capacity for control by recreational hunters. Research into the native habitats of the four main species of deer in Victoria indicates that they can continue to extend their range, potentially occupying almost every habitat in the nation².

Victoria's biodiversity is at risk. Deer are seriously impacting Victoria's finest natural areas, from the coast to the Grampians, from rainforest gullies to the high country. Almost every type of native plant is browsed by Sambar Deer, and trampling, breaking and ringbarking plants by antler rubbing all add to those impacts. Decades of volunteer and government-funded revegetation programs across Victoria have already been damaged or are now threatened by deer.

The two largest species of deer, Sambar and Red, are both adapted to wet climates and make extensive use of bogs and wetlands where their wallowing, trampling and browsing has a major impact on water quality and quantity in our catchments.

The livelihoods of farmers, especially in orchards, vineyards and market gardens, are being threatened; even backyards and gardens are invaded.

The growth of illegal hunting due to the easy availability of deer has become a safety concern in many rural and semi-rural areas. Deer are an increasing hazard on our roads.



Effective, safe and humane deer control is possible, but it will require an integrated, large-scale, adequately-resourced program. We believe a workable final strategy would greatly benefit from:

Making appropriate legislative and regulatory changes

- Amend both the Wildlife Act (1975) and the Catchment and Land Protection Act (1994) to recognise all deer as pest species. This would align these Acts with Victoria's National Parks Act (1975) and Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act (1998), the federal Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999), and Victoria's biodiversity strategy: *Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037*.
- Remove regulatory barriers affecting the capacity of public land managers to control deer.
- Increase penalties for illegal hunting, and for the translocation of live deer.
- Establish a state government Professional and Volunteer Firearms Competency Accreditation, and a Peri-urban Firearms Protocol or Code of Practice, to improve public safety and encourage humane control.
- Farmed deer must be tagged, and fences maintained to standards in accord with the Australian Deer Industry Manual no.2.

Planning for success

- Establish a state-wide zoning system for deer control that prioritises management for, at least, national parks and other protected areas, and threatened species and communities currently identified in legislation. Remove the draft's 'resource zone', as harmful invasive species should not be protected as a resource.
- Set evidence-based targets for effective control of deer.

Building capacity and partnerships

- Allocate adequate, recurrent funding to public land managers for pest control operations.
- Build capacity in the professional pest control sector, including for remote area management and aerial shooting.
- Expand the engagement of professional and accredited recreational shooters in targeted programs managed by Parks Victoria.
- Resource a deer-specific targeted baiting strategy for the state.
- Work collaboratively with other states and territories, and with the federal government.

Building effectiveness through knowledge

- Support research into additional control methods, including the development of genetic and/or biological controls, baiting options, trapping and other remote area control possibilities.
- Investigate control measures that have been effective in other jurisdictions or overseas, and implement them where they may be effective in Victoria.
- Resource an ongoing program to monitor:
 - deer populations and distribution
 - the effectiveness of control measures
 - the costs and impacts of deer populations on the environment, agriculture, the economy and the Victorian community.

While complete eradication is scarcely feasible, we believe serious application of the range of strategies above is essential to reverse deer impacts to waterways, wetlands and rural communities, and to recover the integrity of Victoria's natural heritage.

References:

- (1) Hone, J., Duncan, R.P., Forsyth, D.M. (2010). Estimates of maximum annual population growth rates of mammals and their application in wildlife management. *Journal of Applied Ecology*, 47, 507–514.
- (2) Davis, N.E., Bennett, A., Forsyth, D.M., Bowman, D.M.J.S., Lefroy, E.C., Wood, S.W., Woolnough, A.P., West, P., Hampton, J.O., Johnson, C.N. (2016) A systematic review of the impacts and management of introduced deer (family Cervidae) in Australia. *CSIRO Wildlife Research*, 43, 515–532.

Continued ...

We hope you find these recommendations useful, and are able to incorporate them in the final strategy.

Science and research

Research Centre for Applied Alpine Ecology

Assoc. Prof. Ewen Silvester, Centre for Freshwater Ecosystems, La Trobe University (Director).
Dr Ian Mansergh, Adjunct Professor (Deputy Director).

Research Centre for Future Landscapes, La Trobe University

Prof. Andrew Bennett, Professor of Ecology (Director).
Dr Jim Radford (Principal Research Fellow).

Dr Euan G. Ritchie

Associate Professor in
Wildlife Ecology and Conservation,
Deakin University

Prof. Michael Clarke,

Professor of Zoology,
Dept of Ecology Environment & Evolution.
School of Life Sciences, La Trobe University.

Prof. Ary Hoffmann FAA

School of Biosciences,
University of Melbourne.

Prof. Don Driscoll

Director, Centre for Integrative Ecology,
Deakin University.

Prof. Brendan Wintle

Professor Conservation Ecology, School of Bioscience, University of Melbourne.

Land management and environmental consultants

Dr Graeme L. Worboys

Protected Area Management Specialist

Andrew McMahon,

Director & Principal Ecologist, Ecology Australia

Lincoln Kern

Managing Director, Practical Ecology

Damien Cook

Director, Rakali Ecological Consulting

Industry

Wine Yarra Valley

Franco D'Anna, President.
General Manager, Hoddles Creek Estate, Yarra Valley.

Environmental Farmers Network

Andrew Bradey, for the Committee

Dunkeld Pastoral Co Pty Ltd

Cecilia Myers, Director

Gippsland High Country Tours

Jenny Laurence. Principle Guide

Alpine River Adventures

Richard Swain, Owner/Operator

Grampians Estate Winery

Tom Guthrie, Treasurer Grampians Winemakers

“

Victorian environments and native species are already under tremendous pressure, and a rapidly expanding deer population poses a very serious additional risk that could cause substantial economic, environmental, and cultural losses.

”

DR EUAN RITCHIE,
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR IN WILDLIFE ECOLOGY
AND CONSERVATION, DEAKIN UNIVERSITY

“

Twenty years ago one would see the odd single deer, we now have mobs of up to 50 causing damage to grape crop yields and pasture.

”

TOM GUTHRIE,
GRAMPIANS ESTATE WINERY

Continued ...

Environment non-government organisations

NATIONAL

Invasive Species Council

Andrew Cox, CEO

Environmental Justice Australia

Nicola River, Acting Executive Director

Australian Conservation Foundation

Jess Abrahams, Nature Campaigner

STATE-WIDE

Victorian National Parks Association

Matt Ruchel, Executive Director

Environment Victoria

Jono La Nauze, Director

Friends of the Earth, Melbourne

Cam Walker, Campaigns Co-ordinator

Field Naturalists Club of Victoria

Maxwell Campbell, President

Australian Plants Society (Vic)

Neil Marriott, Conservation Officer

REGIONAL

Environment East Gippsland

Jill Redwood, Convenor

Gippsland Environment Group

John Hermans, President

Friends of Box-ironbark Forests

Bernard Slattery, Acting Secretary

Cardinia Deer Management Coalition

Mike Hall BVSc, President

Network for a Sustainable East Gippsland

Dr Deb Foskey, Convenor

Healesville to Phillip Island Nature Link Inc

Dr Pat Macwhirter, President

Bairnsdale and District Field Naturalists Club

Pat McPherson, President

Wombat Forestcare

Gayle Osborne, Convenor

Healesville Environment Watch Inc

Maureen Bond, Secretary

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club

George Broadway, President

St Arnaud Field Naturalist Club Inc.

Anne Hughes, President.

Bendigo District Environment Centre Inc

Simon Perrin, spokesperson

Latrobe Valley Field Naturalists' Club

Rose Mildenhall, Secretary

Landcare and other volunteer organisations

Landcare Victoria Inc.

Susi J. Johnson, Executive Officer

Middle Yarra Landcare Network

Artur Muchow, Landcare facilitator

Northern Yarra Landcare Network

John Birse, President/Treasurer

“

Deer are the most serious pest species threat our valley, the Cardinia Creek catchment, has ever seen.

”

MIKE HALL, PRESIDENT,
CARDINIA DEER MANAGEMENT COALITION

“

The activity of deer in the alpine and sub-alpine regions can result in severe damage to the hydrology of peatlands and upland streams, with associated detrimental effects on water quality of mountain catchments.

”

BRENDAN WINTLE,
PROFESSOR OF CONSERVATION ECOLOGY,
SCHOOL OF BIOSCIENCE,
UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE.

Continued ...

Yarra Ranges Landcare Network

Anne Fitzpatrick, Landcare facilitator

Central Victorian Biolinks Alliance Inc.

Peter Mitchell, Secretary

Harbury Trust for Nature Committee of Management

Elizabeth Fraser, Trust for Nature covenanter

Tambo Bluff Landcare Coastcare

Jonathan Smith, President

Community Weed Alliance of the Dandenongs Inc

Jane Hollands, Treasurer

Cannibal Creek Landcare

Pam Cunningham, Secretary

Monbulk Landcare Group

Bill Incoll, Secretary

Macclesfield Landcare Group

Ron Sawyer, President

Community Weed Alliance of the Dandenongs Inc

Jane Hollands, Treasurer

Lakes Entrance Landcare

B. Favell, President

Toomuc Landcare

Joy Carberry, Secretary/Treasurer

Johns Hill Landcare Group Inc

Anna Van der Peet, President

Andersons Creek Landcare Group

Robin Gillespie, President

Jumping Creek Catchment Landcare Group

Tracey Wood, President

Black Range Landcare Group

Neil Marriott, President

Golden Point Landcare

Jennifer Pryce, Secretary/Treasurer

Project Platypus

Allistair Stephens, Program and Team Manager

‘Friends of’ volunteer groups

Friends of Sherbrooke Forest Inc

Mira Freshwater, Treasurer. Vivien Freshwater, Secretary,

Sherbrooke Lyrebird Survey Group

Alex Maisey, Convenor

Friends of Ferny Creek Inc.

Jenny Adam, Secretary

Friends of Sassafras Creek

Jane Hollands, Treasurer

Friends of Errinundra

Deb Foskey, President

Friends of Merri Creek

Ray Radford, Secretary

Mount Worth Friends

Paul Strickland, Vice President

Friends of Baw Baw National Park

Peter Maffei, President

Friends of Wright Forest

Noel Gross, Convenor

Friends of Wilson Reserve

Robert Bender, Vice President

Friends of Bogong

Jim Harker, President

“

Deer are currently destroying our riparian habitat.

”

ANNA VAN DER PEET, PRESIDENT,
JOHNS HILL LANDCARE GROUP INC.

“

As an ecotourism accredited tour operator, we record feral animal impacts observed during tours. We have been alarmed by the massive increase in deer.

”

JENNY LAWRENCE,
GIPPSLAND HIGH COUNTRY TOURS

“

Large populations of feral deer are rampant destroyers across the Yarra Ranges.

”

MAUREEN BOND, SECRETARY
HEALESVILLE ENVIRONMENT WATCH INC.

Continued ...

Friends of the Warramate

Dennis Barton, Secretary

Friends of Cornish Hill

Margaret Thomas, Chairperson

Friends of Gembrook Park

Ian Swyer, President

Friends of Warrandyte State Park

Artur Muchow, Secretary

Friends of Lysterfield Park and Churchill National Park

Tony Forster President

Friends of the Yarra Valley Parks

Clive Edington, President

Friends of Tarra-Bulga National Park

David Akers, President

Friends of the Cobberas

Jenny Lawrence, Secretary

Friends of the Grampians/Gariwerd

Bill Gardner, Secretary

Friends of Emerald Lake Park Inc.

Sheila Hampson, President

Friends of Glenfern Valley Bushlands

David Moncrieff, President

Friends of Mallacoota

Max Elliott Secretary

Bushwalking groups

Bushwalking Victoria

Colin Macdonald, President

Bushrangers Women's Walking Club

Glenda Vuillermin, President

Melbourne Women's Walking Club

Allison Towner, President

Strzelecki Bushwalking Club

Graham Duell, President

And...

Barry Jones, AC, FAA, FAHA, FTSE, FASSA, DistFRSN, FRSV, FRSA, FACE

Minister for Science 1983-90

Brian Walters AM QC

Barrister

Dr Geoff Mosley

World Heritage consultant

Gaye Gadsden and David Carr

Conservation covenant landholders, Yellingbo

Karen Alexander, OAM

Deputy Chair, Victorian Farm Tree and Landcare Association (retired)

Sue Harris

Environment Planning Officer, Cardinia Shire Council (retired)

Graham Parkes PSM, AFSM

Public Land manager (retired)

Peter Lawrence

Ranger in Charge Wonnangatta Moroka Unit, Alpine National Park (retired)

Dr Bill Holsworth

Former UNESCO consultant and Land Conservation Council Member

“

Deer are a growing threat to native and agricultural vegetation in East Gippsland. We need evidence-based strategies to reduce their numbers.

”

DR DEB FOSKEY,
NETWORK FOR A SUSTAINABLE EAST GIPPSLAND

“

We are now seeing the rapid spread of deer populations into our most remote and intact wilderness areas. Strong policy and well resourced management programs are crucial to protecting the most valuable and vulnerable areas of our state.

”

GRAHAM PARKES PSM, AFSM

For further information:

Phil Ingamells, Victorian National Parks Association.

Mobile: 0427 705 133 **Email:** philipi@vnpa.org.au.

Authorised by Matt Ruchel, Executive Director, Victorian National Parks Association, Level 3, 60 Leicester St, Carlton, VIC 3053.