

AN OPPORTUNITY NOT TO BE MISSED: ERADICATION OF FERAL DEER FROM WESTERN VICTORIAN NATIONAL PARKS AFTER BUSHFIRES

An open letter to

The Hon. Tanya Plibersek
Minister for the Environment & Water
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The Hon. Steve Dimopoulos
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Minister for Outdoor Recreation
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CC: Chief Fire Officer Chris Hardman, Forest Fire Management Victoria
Dr Mark Norman, Chief Conservation Scientist, Parks Victoria
Sarah Harbidge, Executive Director, Biodiversity
James Todd, Chief Biodiversity Officer

7 March 2025

Dear Ministers Plibersek and Dimopoulos,

Following the widespread bushfires that have impacted a majority of the Grampians (Gariwerd) National Park, the Little Desert National Park and Mount Buangor State Park in Victoria's West there is a need for immediate and long-term support to protect the ecosystems, wildlife and plants as they recover from this major bushfire from the impacts of feral deer and other invasive species.

Feral deer and other invasive species such as pigs, foxes and feral cats impact environmental and cultural assets, agricultural production and pose a growing risk to biosecurity and community safety.

The Grampians (Gariwerd), Little Desert National Parks and Mount Buangor State Park are critical habitat for a raft of Commonwealth and State listed endangered species as well as being important Protected Areas within the National Reserves System.

A Table of these species, ecosystems and threatening processes is attached in the appendices of this letter.

The Grampians National Park (Gariwerd) is a significant and precious cultural landscape and listed National Heritage Place under Commonwealth law due to its Aboriginal cultural heritage, scenic and biodiversity values

The inhibiting of post fire recovery by feral deer as well as direct loss of habitat and ecosystem function, damage to waterways and water quality, and the economic impact on farmers and plantations is recognised in the National Feral Deer Action Plan 2023-28 (National Feral Deer Action Plan Working Group) and the West Victoria Deer Control Plan 2023-2028 (Victoria Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action 2023).

The time to act is now while large fire affected areas of the Grampians/Gariwerd, Little Desert National Parks and Mount Buangor State Park are without tree canopy for a short period of time. This provides an ideal opportunity for aerial shooting to efficiently eliminate the remaining feral deer population from these parks under optimal conditions.

The West Victoria Deer Control Plan 2023-2028 prescribes local elimination of deer in Grampians/Gariwerd National Park (greater than 5 years) and the Little Desert National Park borders the north west local elimination/prevention area. The fires provide the opportunity to now bring forward those elimination outcomes at this optimum time and support the Recovery Plans of many threatened species

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and vegetation communities found within the parks. Once this is achieved, deer can be prevented from re-establishing and the impact of deer on adjoining landowners is removed. Elimination and prevention is far cheaper than funding ongoing control programs and will increase the parks and wildlife resilience to changes such as bushfire.

As an example, the Feral Pig Eradication Program on Kangaroo Island took advantage of optimum post fire conditions. The 2019-20 fires killed most of the estimated 5-10,000 feral pigs on the island, creating a unique opportunity to eradicate the small remaining population that has now been achieved very efficiently.

These parks are highly visited with over 1 million visitors a year, drawing visitors from across the world. As we have seen these regional areas require ecologically healthy ecosystems and wildlife in abundance to ensure future visitation and tourism opportunities for these regions, and to ensure Traditional Owners can continue to care for and manage Country according to cultural values. Invasive species such as feral deer threaten these values if left unmanaged.

We call on you to release all the tools to eradicate feral deer from these areas and reduce invasive species numbers while these ecosystems recover.

This must include Thermal-assisted helicopter, ground shooting, detection dogs and trapping where needed. Aerial control of invasive species has developed to be an efficient culling technique used across Australia including the Thermal assisted aerial culling (TAAC) method used by NSW FFAST teams and in South Australia for implementation of their feral deer eradication program. We encourage the Victorian Government to utilise and take advantage of TAAC efficiencies.

We the undersigned groups and effected individuals call on the State of Victoria and the Commonwealth of Australia to fund and implement a 5 year eradication and monitoring program to eradicate feral deer and where possible other pest species such as goats and pigs from the Grampians/Gariwerd and the Little Desert National Parks.

If possible we would like to brief you both on the opportunity to eradicate feral deer. Please contact Parks and Nature Campaigner Jordan Crook on 0401635573 or jordan@vnpa.org.au

Yours Sincerely,

Catherine Carlyle

Secretary
Friends of Grampians- Gariwerd

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