



Response to the Legislative Council Government Administration Committee “A” Inquiry and Report on Wild Fallow Deer in Tasmania

November 2017

The Tasmanian Government acknowledges that there are diverse views in the community about the management of wild fallow deer and accordingly is committed to maintaining a sensible balanced policy for deer across hunting, agricultural, environmental and wider community interests.

The Government supports deer hunting as an important traditional recreation and maintaining deer as a world class hunting resource. We support landholders to manage the impacts of deer on agricultural productivity and the environment through providing for efficient and contemporary management tools and programs. We also support the right for farmers to responsibly farm deer as a legitimate and valuable livestock enterprise, and the fostering of a strong deer farming industry. Furthermore, consistent with Tasmania’s Sustainable AgriFood Plan and our target to grow the value of agriculture to \$10 billion by 2050, the Government supports farmers developing value-adding opportunities for deer products.

On the whole the system for managing deer in Tasmania has evolved over time and continues to serve its purpose well. The Government made a number of small but valuable changes to deer management (seasonal) arrangements over the past three years which have assisted landholders to better manage deer. Through making some further sensible improvements a contemporary approach will continue to deliver balanced outcomes for deer management into the future. The Government’s actions are informed by the recommendations and issues raised in the Legislative Council Committee’s final report.

CURRENT STATUS OF FALLOW DEER IN TASMANIA

Fallow deer in Tasmania are a partly protected species under the *Wildlife (General) Regulations 2010*. Annual seasons are proclaimed for the taking of male deer and antlerless deer. Outside of the seasons, deer may be taken under Crop Protection Permits issued to landowners who are suffering browsing damage from deer or implementing Quality Deer Management harvest quotas.

Under the *Wildlife (Deer Farming) Regulations 2010*, farmed Fallow deer are regarded as those deer farmed for both commercial (meat and antler products) and non-commercial (hobby farms) purposes.

Positive Reset of Quality Deer Management

Quality Deer Management (QDM) has operated in Tasmania for over twenty years as the foundation for managing wild fallow deer to ensure a high quality, healthy and sustainable hunting resource is available to the hunting community, while also providing a framework and

effective tools for farmers and other land managers to manage unwanted impacts of deer populations on their properties.

The Government supports the fundamental principles of QDM to manage a healthy deer herd in balance with the habitat in which the deer reside. This includes having clear deer management goals taking into account biological, cultural and social factors and the cooperative involvement of landholders, hunters and resource managers.

We will work with stakeholders to define QDM in a modern context and as the basis for the future management of wild fallow deer across the Tasmanian landscape. The QDM approach will consider the traditional range (area) of deer in Tasmania and incorporate a number of tools including, but not limited to, voluntary property based game management plans and cooperative arrangements between landholders and hunters, crop protection permits, regulated deer hunting licenses, statewide-population monitoring, and population management in 'non-traditional' areas.

Action – *The Government will develop a contemporary statement on Quality Deer Management (QDM) in consultation with a new Tasmanian Game Council and stakeholders to provide clear guidelines for the future management of wild fallow deer in Tasmania.*

Advice on deer management

Many stakeholders make a valuable contribution to Tasmania's game management arrangements, including for wild fallow deer, and it is important that advice to the Minister represents a balance of stakeholder views.

A Game Management Liaison Committee (GMLC), established in August 2001, currently advises the Minister on game species issues, including wild fallow deer. The GMLC is currently chaired by the DPIPW and comprises Department staff (including Parks and Wildlife Service) and representatives from hunting groups, the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association, and Sustainable Timber Tasmania.

The GMLC has served its purpose, however there is capacity for more integrated advice to be provided to the Minister across the broader range of issues affecting the management of game species including wild fallow deer, and other species that impact on landholders, agricultural productivity and the environment.

A contemporary and independent advisory body, named the Tasmanian Game Council (TGC), will be established to replace the current GMLC and perform a broader role. The TGC will have an independent chair and membership, with DPIPW providing Secretariat and policy support. The Terms of Reference of the new Council will include advising on the delivery of contemporary and effective QDM in Tasmania, hunting and game management, and browsing animal management (including for example, wallaby, possum, and pest birds) matters. Because deer are currently regulated as partly protected wildlife in Tasmania, it is appropriate that matters affecting the deer farming industry are also considered by the Council to ensure sound and balanced policy advice that also supports farmed deer industry development.

Membership will be appointed by the Minister and include representatives from the hunting community, farmers and graziers, deer farmers, natural resource management, private land conservation and additional members appointed by the Minister based on skills and

experience as needed. Membership will be outlined in, and subject to, the development of a Terms of Reference for the new Council in consultation with stakeholders.

Action – *The Government will establish a Tasmanian Game Council to provide advice to the Minister on delivering contemporary and effective QDM in Tasmania, hunting and game management, browsing animal management and deer farming matters.*

Department support for deer management

The DPIPWE undertakes an important range of regulatory, advisory functions, and support roles to landholders and hunters when it comes to the management of deer, and also other wildlife species. The same responsibilities and Departmental expertise is applied to the management of wildlife that causes browsing damage to crops, pasture and agricultural productivity and also natural (environmental) values.

It is acknowledged that the increasing wild deer population and commensurate management issues, coupled with supporting landholders to manage increasing browsing animal populations, is placing increasing demands on the Department's resources. DPIPWE recently amalgamated staff working in game management and browsing animal management into one Unit.

The Government will further align Department resources in this area in line with the broader remit of the new Tasmanian Game Council. In recognition that landholders, farmers and hunters are the key clients, there will also be a stronger primary industries focus to the way the Department delivers game and browsing animal services.

Action – *A new Game Services Tasmania will be established and appropriately resourced within DPIPWE to support landholders, farmers and hunters to effectively manage deer and all issues relating to game and browsing animals in Tasmania.*

Game Services Tasmania, will efficiently manage all issues relating to hunting, game and browsing animals in Tasmania in an integrated way. It will have a charter to develop, administer and implement contemporary Quality Deer Management arrangements in Tasmania and efficiently administer the management of wild fallow deer and browsing animals (including for example, wallaby, possum, and pest birds).

Working closely with landholders, farmers and the hunting community, Game Services Tasmania will have a strong policy and functional alignment to primary industries and supporting the Government's Sustainable AgriFood Plan and target to grow the value of agriculture to \$10 billion by 2050. Accordingly, matters affecting the deer farming industry will also be considered by Game Services Tasmania.

Game Services Tasmania will have responsibility for:

- liaising and providing advice to landholder, hunting and farming clients, including in relation to QDM, voluntary property based game management plans and arrangements, and browsing animal management;

- administering a contemporary, efficient permitting system for the taking of game and wildlife (and browsing animals), including existing facilities for crop protection, hunting and other permits;
- monitoring and managing wild fallow deer populations and the populations of other game and browsing animal species across the Tasmanian landscape (including undertaking a wild deer population census);
- developing active management strategies for wild fallow deer populations in satellite locations and in ecologically sensitive and important areas;
- managing access arrangements for wild fallow deer hunting opportunities on public lands and facilitating private arrangements;
- supporting responsible deer farming and industry development as a livestock primary industry;
- providing game and browsing animal management advice to other areas of DPIPWE and to the Minister;
- other related matters as identified and appropriate.

Estimating the wild population

A robust understanding of the distribution and size of the wild fallow deer population will inform QDM strategies and the future development and monitoring of deer management measures undertaken in Tasmania.

Action – *The Government will undertake a comprehensive state-wide census of wild fallow deer in Tasmania.*

DPIPWE will work with the University of Tasmania and other stakeholders to develop appropriate methodologies and commence the statewide census in 2018. The findings of the census will inform specific QDM strategies and current wildlife monitoring programs. DPIPWE's spotlight surveys are used to manage a variety of wildlife across the state and will be maintained, and expanded where necessary, to provide detailed trend data on wild fallow deer populations into the future.

Action – *DPIPWE will work with research partners on a project that will assess the distribution and numbers of wild fallow deer in parts of the TWWHA. This project will complement the state-wide census.*

This proposed three year project will provide valuable baseline information and improved understanding of the status and impacts of deer on land with high conservation value and identify factors that might predict their occurrence. This will enhance DPIPWE's ability to prepare for and manage wild fallow deer populations on these lands in collaboration with resource managers, public land managers and other stakeholders.

Action – *An overarching review of the effectiveness of deer management strategies will be conducted five years from the first state-wide census. Inherent in any review will be an appropriate assessment of the wild fallow deer population at that time.*

Managing unwanted impacts of wild fallow deer

DPIPWE is already working with resource managers, public land managers and stakeholders to control the spread of deer into environmentally sensitive areas outside the traditional deer range including managing satellite populations. This potentially includes high value areas of reserved land, including the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA), Conservation Areas, Regional Reserves and/or Game Reserves.

DPIPWE will continue to monitor and manage satellite populations and will pursue targeted population control programs. This includes investigating opportunities for additional regulated recreational hunting in a legal, safe and responsible manner where land management frameworks allow. In doing so DPIPWE will use information from the state-wide population census and other population surveys to inform demarcation arrangements and management strategies across different areas of the Tasmanian landscape.

In addition, DPIPWE will continue to work with private landholders, with recognised conservation values on their properties, to provide advice and assistance on the range of management options available to minimise the impacts of wild fallow deer on their land.

Action - *DPIPWE will work with public land managers, landholders and the private land conservation sector to coordinate targeted control programs to manage emerging satellite populations, and populations moving into and/or impacting on areas with significant conservation values including the TWWHA.*

Action – *The Government will investigate opportunities for regulated recreational hunting in the TWWHA and other Reserves in a legal, safe and responsible manner where land management frameworks allow.*

The DPIPWE administers a well-recognised and responsive crop protection permit system to enable landholders to manage deer on their properties and the browsing damage to crops, pasture and agricultural productivity and also natural (environmental) values.

As a new measure to support farmers managing deer on their property, five year crop protection permits for deer will be made available, as compared to the current annual permit. The permits can be issued by changes to DPIPWE's administrative arrangements, and would not require legislative amendment. The permits will be managed with appropriate checks and balances including the provision of returns (reporting) on the deer taken to assist in understanding population dynamics.

Through a statutory review of the regulations pertaining to managing deer, further opportunities to support landholders to manage deer by streamlining or reducing red tape will be explored.

Action – *The Government will implement 5 year crop protection permits for deer and explore further opportunities to support landholders to manage deer by streamlining or reducing red tape.*

Supporting deer farmers and landholders to develop value-adding opportunities

The Government is not supportive of amending crop protection permits to allow for commercialisation of wild deer for human consumption or the pet food market. Crop protection permits are for a specific purpose and are not the appropriate mechanism for authorising this use. Commercialising wild deer taken from crop protection permits raises concerns including:

- Potential negative impacts on the profitability and viability of Tasmania's deer farming industry and downstream businesses and jobs that rely on those farms,
- Quality control of wild product and potential impacts on the markets (and reputation) for farmed deer products,
- Regulating the food health and safety for the product and the ability to supply a year round wild product.
- Impacts on recreational hunting opportunities and arrangements between landholders and hunters.

There are also risks to policing (law enforcement) from placing a monetary value on wild deer potentially incentivising poaching and also the potential for unregulated product entering supply chains for either pet or human consumption.

Deer farming is a legitimate and long-standing livestock enterprise on some Tasmanian farms. Whilst relatively small compared to other red meat sectors, it is nonetheless an important local economic contributor supported by a small number of small meat processing businesses, with potential to contribute to the Government's Sustainable AgriFood Plan and target to grow the value of agriculture to \$10 billion by 2050.

Action – *The Government will work with deer farmers and other stakeholders to support farmed deer industry development including, the branding and marketing of farmed deer products, potential to expand and facilitate local processing opportunities, and supply chain product integrity.*

The Government also acknowledges that there is genuine interest and potential in developing value-added and branded wild deer products particularly for the restaurant and food services trade. The Government is open to considering a regulated approach, including specific-purpose permits, whereby deer farmers and landholders have the opportunity to develop niche value-adding businesses from wild deer products. Any such arrangements would be strictly regulated and conducted within the QDM framework, voluntary property based game management arrangements and primary produce and food safety requirements. The intent being to, if feasible, support the development of complementary new markets for good quality Tasmanian deer meat products, from both farmed and wild sources.

Action – *The new Tasmanian Game Council will be requested to provide advice on 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.*

In providing advice on a potential trial it is envisaged the Tasmanian Game Council would consider:

- The results of the statewide population census.
- Appropriate timing and processes to identify a small number of interested landholders working with local meat processors, or similar, for the trial.
- Departmental resources required to support interested landholders to facilitate all arrangements, agreements, and special permits necessary for the trial to proceed in a controlled and sustainable manner, and consistent with quality deer management arrangements and property based management plans.
- The appropriate permit and regulatory requirements to ensure consistency with what is required of commercial deer farmers.
- Relevant food safety, compliance, product integrity and policing (law enforcement) issues.
- Appropriate limited numbers of wild deer to be permitted to be taken for the purpose of the trial, and the appropriate methods to take deer; for example, the merits of capture and live transport to a processing facility in preference to field shot and field dressing techniques.
- Processes for socio-economic evaluation of any trial including from both a potential future value-adding industry opportunities and any impacts on the deer farming industry.
- With a view that approval for any such arrangements to continue beyond a trial would be determined based on the assessment of the trial.

Reviewing Tasmania's deer management regulations

Two key pieces of legislation regulate the management of wild fallow deer in Tasmania: the *Wildlife (General) Regulations 2010* and the *Wildlife (Deer Farming) Regulations 2010* are required to be reviewed by 2020.

The statutory review of the regulations will help ensure the management of deer is flexible and appropriate into the future.

Action – *By the end of 2019 the Government undertake the statutory review of the Wildlife (General) Regulations 2010 and the Wildlife (Deer Farming) Regulations 2010 to ensure there is a contemporary and responsive framework for wild deer management and the development of the farm deer industry in Tasmania.*

Detailed consultation with stakeholders including the Tasmanian Game Council, landholders, hunters, deer farmers, and the Tasmanian community will be undertaken during the review of the regulations.

The timing of the review allows for consideration of up-to-date population estimates (from the statewide census) and contemporary quality deer management approaches to be included. Measures to reduce red-tape for landholders to manage deer would be considered, including, but not limited to, appropriateness of bag limits, open season arrangements, reporting and tagging requirements. The review will also consider matters such as the penalties for poaching deer.

Issues affecting the development of the deer farming industry in Tasmania will also be examined.

Fawning season arrangements

Under current fawning season arrangements, female deer are not permitted to be shot for crop protection or other purposes between early November and the end of February.

Action – *Fawning season arrangements for recreational hunting within the traditional deer range will be maintained.*

Hunting must be conducted safely and humanely, without causing undue suffering to the animal, and all hunters are required to comply with the *Animal Welfare Act 1993*. The *Code of Practice for the Hunting of Wild Fallow Deer in Tasmania* (2012) developed by the Tasmanian Deer Advisory Committee provides deer hunters with guidelines on the appropriate use and management of fallow deer. The Code provides a clear statement of what is considered best practice, and is an approved Animal Welfare Guideline under the *Animal Welfare Act 1993*.

Fawning season restrictions may be varied in limited circumstances where targeted and regulated population control strategies are undertaken under the oversight of DPIPW for satellite populations or in conservation areas, e.g. the TWWHA. Such campaigns will be consistent with the contemporary quality deer management framework and all requirements of the *Animal Welfare Act 1993*.

Attachment: Tasmania Government response to the Committee's recommendations

#	Committee Recommendation	Government Response	
1	The Tasmanian Government commission an independent investigation(s) to examine the management of wild fallow deer populations in Tasmania with particular reference to the following –		The Government's response to each of the issues raised under Recommendation 1 is as follows below.
1a	An assessment of the current numbers of deer and future population projections;	Supported	The Government will undertake a comprehensive state-wide census of wild fallow deer in Tasmania.
1b	The extent of any population spread into non-traditional ranges (including reserves and the World Heritage Area);	Supported	DPIPWE will work with research partners on a project that will assess the distribution and numbers of wild fallow deer in parts of the TWWHA. This project will complement the state-wide census.
1c	Whether the legislation associated with the management of wild fallow deer is appropriate in response to the increasing population and the needs and expectations of landowners;	Supported	By the end of 2019 the Government will undertake a statutory review of the <i>Wildlife (General) Regulations 2010</i> and the <i>Wildlife (Deer Farming) Regulations 2010</i> to ensure there is a contemporary and responsive framework for wild deer management and the development of the farm deer industry in Tasmania.

1d	A suitable body or committee to advise the Minister on wild fallow deer with appropriate and balanced representation from all stakeholders within the deer industry, including representatives from various sectors such as commercial land owners, land conservancy groups, deer farmers, recreational hunters and meat processors;	Supported	The Government will establish a Tasmanian Game Council to provide advice to the Minister on delivering contemporary and effective QDM in Tasmania, hunting and game management, browsing animal management and deer farming matters.
1e	Whether the current deer management system (quality deer management) adequately reflects the increasing wild fallow deer population and its impact on the various stakeholders;	Supported	The Government will develop a contemporary statement on Quality Deer Management (QDM) in consultation with a new Tasmanian Game Council and stakeholders to provide clear guidelines for the future management of wild fallow deer in Tasmania.
1f	Whether the current resources allocated to the Wildlife Management Branch within DPIPWE is appropriate to manage wild fallow deer into the future;	Supported	A new Game Services Tasmania will be established and appropriately resourced within DPIPWE to support farmers and hunters to effectively manage deer and all issues relating to game and browsing animals in Tasmania.
1g	The Department establish a secure registration database system that could potentially enable better access for recreational shooters to properties;	Supported in part	A new Game Services Tasmania will be established and appropriately resourced within DPIPWE to support farmers and hunters to effectively manage deer and all issues relating to game and browsing animals in Tasmania. It is not evident at this stage that a registration database for private properties is required or feasible when hunter-landholder property game management arrangements or industry programs already exist (for example controlling wild deer is identified as part of the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia's farmer assist program).

1h	An increase of the bag limit for fallow deer and the length of the open season for recreational hunting to obtain the limit.	Supported	The current bag limit and open season arrangements for deer will be considered as part of the statutory review of the <i>Wildlife (General) Regulations 2010</i> and the <i>Wildlife (Deer Farming) Regulations 2010</i> .
2	The current fawning season arrangements should be maintained.	Supported	Fawning season arrangements for recreational hunting within the traditional deer range will be maintained.
3	Eradicate deer populations in World Heritage and other areas classified as conservation land and consideration given to recreational hunters as a resource.	Supported	DPIPWE will work with public land managers, landholders and the private land conservation sector to coordinate targeted control programs to manage emerging satellite populations, and populations moving into and/or impacting on areas with significant conservation values including the TWWHA. The Government will investigate opportunities for regulated recreational hunting in the TWWHA and other Reserves in a legal, safe and responsible manner where land management frameworks allow.
4	The Department develop a process to facilitate consultative engagement with communities to raise concerns about wild fallow deer in order to determine whether the population should be removed.	Supported	A new Game Services Tasmania will be established and appropriately resourced within DPIPWE to support farmers, and hunters to effectively manage deer and all issues relating to game and browsing animals in Tasmania. A key role of Game Services Tasmania will be to undertake public engagement and communication strategies.
5	Consideration given to a 'demarcation arrangement' to ensure deer populations are confined to their traditional ranges.	Supported	Game Services Tasmania will use information from the state-wide population census to inform demarcation arrangements and management strategies across different areas of the Tasmanian landscape.

6	A registration system be established by the Department to enable private land which has been assessed to have important conservation values be granted permission to undertake ongoing eradication programs of wild fallow deer, except for the fawning season. The registration system would require the reporting of eradicated deer numbers to ensure that accurate records are available.	Supported	<p>DPIPWE will continue to work with private landholders, with recognised conservation values on their properties, to provide advice and assistance on the range of management options available to minimise the impacts of wild fallow deer on the their land. Whether a specific registration system is required will be considered further.</p> <p>See Recommendation 7 for further information on reporting of deer numbers.</p>
7	The one year crop protection permit system be extended to five years.	Supported	<p>The Government will implement 5 year crop protection permits for deer and explore further opportunities to support landholders to manage deer by streamlining or reducing red tape.</p> <p>The permits will be managed with appropriate checks and balances, including the provision of returns (reporting) on the deer taken to assist in understanding population dynamics.</p>

8	Taking into account appropriate health regulations and standards, crop protection permits be amended to enable wild fallow deer to be commercially harvested for human consumption.	Not supported	<p>The Government is not supportive of amending crop protection permits to allow for commercialisation of wild deer for human consumption.</p> <p>The Government will work with deer farmers and other stakeholders to support farmed deer industry development including, the branding and marketing of farmed deer products, potential to expand and facilitate local processing opportunities, and supply chain product integrity.</p> <p>The new Tasmanian Game Council will be requested to provide advice on 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.</p>
9	Crop protection permits be amended to enable wild fallow deer to be commercially harvested for pet food consumption.	Not supported	The Government is not supportive of amending crop protection permits to allow for commercialisation of wild deer for the pet food market.
10	An appropriately resourced education and information program is put in place to advise on any changes to the current system.	Supported	The Government will establish a Tasmanian Game Council to provide advice to the Minister on delivering contemporary and effective QDM in Tasmania, hunting and game management, browsing animal management and deer farming matters.

11	A five year evaluation of wild fallow deer to be completed to determine the effectiveness of strategies introduced as a result of this report.	Supported	<p>DPIPWE will work with stakeholders to implement the actions outlined in the Government's response.</p> <p>An overarching review of the effectiveness of deer management strategies will be conducted five years from the first state-wide census. Inherent in any review will be an appropriate assessment of the wild deer population at that time.</p>
12	A regular five yearly review of the wild fallow deer population and distribution be completed for the purpose of effectively managing the population.	Supported	<p>An overarching review of the effectiveness of deer management strategies will be conducted five years from the first state-wide census. Inherent in any review will be an assessment of the wild deer population at that time.</p>
13	Review the current poaching penalties with a view to substantially increasing them.	Supported	<p>The current poaching penalties for deer will be reviewed as part of the statutory review of the <i>Wildlife (General) Regulations 2010</i> and the <i>Wildlife (Deer Farming) Regulations 2010</i>.</p>