



Tasmanian Deer Advisory Committee Inc.

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Legislative Council Inquiry into the Wild Fallow Deer Population in Tasmania

The Tasmanian Deer Advisory Committee (TDAC) would like to make a submission on the Legislative Council Inquiry into the Wild Fallow Deer Population in Tasmania.

Background of TDAC

TDAC has representatives from over 20 Hunting Association & Clubs, the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Assoc. (TFGA) and Forestry Tasmania (FT).

Aims

To maintain Tasmania's wild fallow deer herd, in a high quality state in harmony with the agricultural practices and environment and managed as a recreational resource for sustainable ethical harvesting.

To achieve its aim the Committee has established the following as its objectives:

Objectives

To co-ordinate and participate in the development of a management plan for wild fallow deer in Tasmania that may most closely meet long term expectations of the Tasmanian community.

To develop and promote, the adoption of an appropriate management programme for wild fallow deer in Tasmania.

To conduct and facilitate any such research into wild or domestic fallow deer as may be necessary to develop, manage, or maintain a Tasmanian wild deer management programme.

To actively promote the role of ethical hunting as a principal tool in a Tasmanian wild deer management programme.

To advise the Secretary of the Department of Primary Industries and Water (or equivalent body) on issues concerning the fallow deer resource of Tasmania.

History of fallow deer in Tasmania

Fallow deer were introduced into Tasmania from England stock in 1836 to provide a hunting resource. During the years that followed, fallow deer were released in different areas and this resulted in what became known as 'the traditional deer range'. This area was occupied by fallow deer, from Kempton to Launceston (South- North) and from Ouse to the East Coast (West- East) and for the purposes of ongoing management of fallow deer; this area is still considered and referred to as the traditional deer range.

The fallow deer population has increased steadily since its introduction with estimates in the 1970s of 8,000 animals, estimates from a limited state-wide survey in 1990 indicating a population of 16,000 to 20,000. It is now estimated that the population had reached around 30,000, although it is likely that herd numbers go up and down (or just become more visible) in some areas depending on feed, drought, hunting pressure and other environment pressures.

Since the 1970s, the area occupied by deer has expanded significantly beyond the area considered to be the traditional deer range. This has happened as a consequence of a variety of factors, including escapes and releases from deer farms plus natural expansion of the population.

Fallow deer hunting has been conducted since their introduction and hunting arrangements have continued to change in that time. At present, the season is in two parts; the 1st season which is for bucks, runs for 6 weekends and 5 weeks during March with the last 4 weekends and 3 weeks open for antlerless deer as well. The 2nd season opens again in mid May for 8 weekends and 7 weeks with a limit of 1 buck and 2 antlerless deer or 3 antlerless deer been allowed to be taken over the two seasons. The 2016 season has seen the first changes in over 20 years; these changes have added an extra week to the buck season and an extra antlerless tag to the hunting license. TDAC also proposed to extend the 2nd antlerless season by 4 months. This was rejected by the Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Assoc. (TFGA).

Fallow deer farming

Fallow deer is the only species of deer farmed in Tasmania. The industry developed in Tasmania during the mid-1970s when a small number of farmers attempted to establish deer farming enterprises based on wild-caught foundation stock. This generated considerable conflict between hunters and farmers due to concerns from the hunting community that deer numbers in the wild would be severely reduced and hunters would lose access to land for deer hunting purposes. Neither outcome eventuated.

During the late 1980s, the number of deer farms increased significantly. However the new industry was unable to establish itself on a broad-scale and the early 1990s saw a rapid exodus from the sector. As a consequence, there are only approximately five commercial (i.e. producing commercial meat and velvet) deer farms currently operating.

In recent years, small-scale fallow deer farming has grown significantly in popularity, but only in terms of personal use, hobby farms and wildlife display rather than for commercial meat and velvet production.

The decline of commercial deer farming has had an unplanned impact on the range of deer in Tasmania. Some farm deer herds were released or escaped in areas that were outside the traditional deer range resulting in herds becoming established in new areas.

The Partly Protected Status of Fallow Deer

Fallow deer (*Dama Dama*) were introduced into Tasmania in 1836 and pre-date the introduction of Trout by some 28 years. Unlike trout, which were originally introduced for commercial purposes, deer were introduced for sport hunting.

Fallow deer have always enjoyed protection under various Government edicts until 1928 when the *Animals and Birds Protection act* was passed into law. This was the first act that provided protection to animals other than those animals that existed on reserved land. Seasons and bag limits were regulated to provide hunting opportunities into the future.

It should be noted that fallow deer are not the only introduced animal that are protected under Tasmanian law. The Wood duck has only been in Tasmanian since the 1980's; however they have the same status as fallow deer. There are several other species of introduced animal that enjoy a higher standard of protection than the "partly protected" status bestowed on Fallow deer, each for its own reason two of these being the Sugar Glider and Lyrebird.

Tasmanian fallow deer herds are the largest wild fallow deer herds left in the world and are considered the best managed by many. Even in Europe, the home of fallow deer, they now exist in fenced estates. Thus the herd is a world class genetic resource.

Wild Tasmanian fallow deer are a highly prized hunting resource, both as meat and trophy animals and as license sales show, hunting them has become more popular over-time and has steadily continued to rise. Some 5,050 licenses were sold in 2016, up from 2735 in 2000. To achieve at this level goes against Tasmanian population increase trend. 94 licenses were sold to mainland visitors, which represents 100% increase in the last five years. It is important to note that license sales generated about \$327,000 income to State funds.

Fallow deer are a catalyst in under-pinning many Property Based Game Management Plans, which was an initiative of DPIPWE in the 1980's and was further advanced in 1993 to 1997 by the work of Brian Murphy, a wildlife biologist who was engaged by the Tasmanian Deer Advisory Committee in cooperation with the Government, to undertake a comprehensive study into all aspects of deer management in this state.

Following comprehensive research into all aspects of the issues and engaging with all stake holders Mr. Murphy produced a 120 page report which, with some minor variations, forms the basis of current management practices, encompassing "Quality Deer Management" and "Property Based Game Management".

The latter of these two initiatives, provides a very real service to those landowners who adopt it, by controlling all nuisance wildlife, weeds and infrastructure matters on their properties. This provides access to deer hunting as the reward to those hunters who participate.

Further, the role of a managed fallow deer herd under the above scenario, both at property and regional level, has demonstrated its ability to contribute toward State Government policy objectives. Specifically, a key objective under previous governments has been to meet reduced usage targets of 1080 poison for native browsing animal control purposes.

Landowners who have a managed Fallow deer herd on their property are in the fortunate position (via freely available shooting control) of having a limited reliance on 1080 poison to manage native browsing animal damage and in doing so, have an investment in terms of how they manage this issue beyond 2016.

Environment Impacts on Public and Private Lands

The current range of deer in Tasmania is largely on pre impacted landscape and is, in broad terms, from Kempton to Launceston (South- North) and from Ouse to the East Coast (West- East). They exist in varying densities in this area due to a number of factors i.e. suitable habitat, food, human population, etc. Fallow deer are very much part of the social and cultural fabric of rural life in this area.

As previously mentioned the fallow deer range is an impacted landscape, being utilised for Forestry and primary production therefore any negative environmental impacts are difficult to quantify especially given the abundance of other animals in the landscape, both domestic and native.

This is not to say they do not impact on primary production; however they have not displaced any native species, unlike the previously mentioned trout which are responsible for the extinction of four Tasmanian native fish. In terms of impact on primary production it is clear that native animals, Bennett's Wallaby, the Tasmanian Pademelon and the Brushtail Possum are placing far and away the biggest burden on Tasmanian farmers.

There are those who regard any introduced animals as fundamentally bad and as such they should not have a place in the landscape. This is an idealistic view that should be discounted especially as Fallow deer are largely an inhabitant of settled landscapes which will never be restored to pre European settlement condition whilst ever there is an economic need for food and shelter!

It is recognized that Fallow deer can become a problem on primary production land for both farmers and forestry. Where this occurs permits are issued to reduce numbers and disperse herds. In some cases pre-emptive permits are issued to landowners/managers prior to crops being planted when problems can reasonably be expected to occur.

Since 2007, The Parks and Wildlife Service have authorised a ballot system for the hunting of deer on three Conservation Areas in the Central Highlands. For the past nine years the coordination, communication, liaison with hunters, issuing of permits and maps and drawing of this ballot has been undertaken within the Wildlife Management Branch, by the (GMU).

These areas include:

Conservation Area

Top Marshes 2728.11 ha

Five Mile Pinnacles 483.72 ha

Great Western Tiers 22876.75 ha

As deer licence sales are continuing to grow from 2735 in 2000 to 5050 in 2016, this is putting more pressure on access to private land and state owned land. Fair and equitable access, as currently managed by Forestry Tasmania and Parks and Wildlife Service has received positive feedback. In addition this process works through access, maximum and minimum hunter densities, addresses hunter safety and finally ensures that hunters have the appropriate permits, licences and insurances.

The TDAC have worked through an appropriate process with The Parks and Wildlife Service to establishing hunting in the following Regional Reserve and Conservation Areas in 2017.

Regional Reserve

St Pauls 4394.94 ha

Castle Cary 5995.03 ha

Conservation Area

Great Lake 8793.28 ha

Unnamed CA Tooms Lake 1498.18 ha

The TDAC is also pleased that the current draft of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage area recognises deer hunting as a legitimate activity in part of the TWWHA. TDAC has for many years monitored the wild fallow deer populations within the WHA Central Plateau Conservation Area (CPCA).

One of our key concerns in the extension of the TWWHA was that it would be used as a mechanism to exclude hunters from traditional hunting areas in the north east of the Property. It is our view, and we have not seen any good evidence to the contrary, that where the boundary has been moved to include what was classified as State Forest and where deer hunting has been allowed before, this should also be classified as part of the hunting overlay.

In a similar context, the extension of the TWWHA to private property boundaries has created a zone that raises serious issues with the management of browsing animals, as they will now be subject to reduced control pressure than previously and will represent a serious economic risk to many small business people. Consequently, we have requested that hunting both for deer and demonstrated native pest species should be permitted to continue in these broader areas adjacent to boundaries to meet other criteria in the plan relating to neighbours.

Commercial Opportunities for the use of Wild Population Stocks

A survey conducted in 1990 of over 3,200 licenses on the economic value of deer hunting concluded that, at that time, they contributed from \$2.2 to \$2.6 million to the economy. This figure did not include License sales or property payments (*Murphy B. Fallow deer Project 1993-1997*).

In Victoria, a study in 2013 by the Department of Primary Industry found game hunting licence holders generated an annual economic impact (direct and indirect impacts of game and pest hunting) of \$439 million in Victoria. The deer component was estimated at \$138 million.

This study has been done under different circumstances but it is clear that hunting is an important economic activity to some regional communities and this should not be discounted in evaluating wild deer populations in Tasmania.

For the past 20 years, the Tasmanian Government has committed to and promoted a collaborative wildlife management program in relation to deer management. This program has combined Property Based Wildlife Management Plans, Quality Deer Management and wildlife damage management. Currently the Department has over 135 such plans implemented specifically for deer management on private property. The Department also has similar plans for public land.

Recreational deer hunters were strongly opposed to a proposal to allow commercial use of wild harvested deer and raised the following concerns:

- that commercial harvesting would lead to a decline in deer numbers that would impact the quality of hunting and potentially compromise Property Based Wildlife Management and Quality Deer Management.
- There was a view that commercial use of wild deer was opposed to the fundamentals of game management, namely sustainable management. Hunters felt that moving towards commercial use of this species would be a paradigm shift toward damage management which would move away from the culture, tradition and heritage of recreational hunting.
- Allowing commercial use of deer would lead to increased game theft and trespass. (Past history of periods less regulation supports this view)
- Concerns were raised over the financial viability of commercial harvesting and the variable quality of the harvest which would lead to further pressure to favor the access of just a few to the resource.
- Concerns were raised over the ability of the Department to administer and enforce our current deer management requirements, without introducing additional complications such as commercial harvesting of deer.
- Fallow deer are already a commercial commodity for landowners in Tasmania. Some examples of their current value, payable directly to landowners are listed below:
 - A small number of landowners currently charge up to \$700 as a trophy management fee, payable for every buck taken on a property.
 - Property hunting access fees range from \$160 to \$1,000 per hunter.
 - In kind, property work involving the management of browsing wildlife, weed control, fence maintenance, and house and shack improvements.
 - One hunting lodge is charging \$1000 for a buck and \$550 for an antlerless deer.
 - Guided hunts valued between \$1500 and \$3000 for a 4 day hunting trip.
- The agricultural industry has established a number of commercial deer farms. Allowing the use of wild sourced product would create direct competition between deer farmers and any potential commercial wild

harvest operation. Deer farmers are subject to high establishment costs and financial overheads that would place them at a financial disadvantage to harvesters of wild deer.

Summary

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this response and I am available to meet with the committee if required.

Fallow deer have a long history of management and benefit to Tasmania and Tasmanian's. The TDAC would urge that the Committee ensure that the views of the hunting community are considered and that purist views about introduced animals, or agricultural issues exacerbated by dry conditions are not overstated in recommendations on future management options.

Yours sincerely

Matthew Allen
Chairman
Tasmanian Deer Advisory Committee

Allison Waddington

From: mal18259@bigpond.net.au
Sent: Tuesday, 28 June 2016 9:08 PM
To: DEER
Subject: Wild Fallow Deer Inquiry
Attachments: Legislative Council Inquiry into Wild Fallow Deer TDAC.doc

Ms Jenny Mannering
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Tasmanian Deer Advisory Committee (TDAC) submission attached.
Thanks
Matthew Allen
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Tasmanian Deer Advisory Committee