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Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association

Submission to the: Wild Fallow Deer Population in Tasmania Inquiry

Legislative Council

June, 2016



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Tasmanian Farmers & Graziers Association (TFGA) is the leading representative body for Tasmanian primary producers. TFGA members are responsible for generating approximately 80% of the value created by the Tasmanian agricultural sector.

Agriculture is one of the key pillars of the economy and, with the current level of support from government, are well positioned to further capitalise on the stature of Tasmania agriculture.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimates that Tasmania's Gross State Product for 2014-15 was \$25.42 billion. Agriculture, forestry and fishing in 2014-15 was Tasmania's largest industry representing 9.6% (\$2.29B) of Tasmania's total gross value added.¹

TFGA understand that many farmers consider feral fallow deer hunting to be part of their normal farming income streams and they manage their properties and farming businesses accordingly. However, not all farmers are of this view and those who do not wish to be involved in hunting activities should not be expected to manage, feed and house feral fallow deer populations that are negatively impacting on their income and potentially increasing the risk of transfer of disease and pests.

Deer are not managed like other feral animals, such as rabbits, which are subject to the *Vermin Control Act* and therefore the full range of pest management controls. Fallow deer control is subject to a licensing (permit) system for seasonal harvesting of males and does, tagging, reporting of number harvested and, differentiating between recreational and crop protection management programs.

Through a recent survey undertaken by TFGA the results showed that a large percentage of those surveyed want a state policy control framework for control of feral fallow deer that should be more flexible and include the capacity for farmers to cull deer throughout the whole year.

The TFGA is of the view that any variation to control and reduction should be undertaken in conjunction with a risk assessment of feral fallow deer. This would essentially mean increased investigation and provide clarity in quantitative and qualitative terms of the negative economic, environmental and social impacts of feral fallow deer population. It would provide an informed foundation for the regulatory impact statement underpinning legislative changes such as "eradication" in legislative regulations enabling fallow deer regulation. A risk assessment would fully address the scope and evaluate the benefits to farmers and private land tenants of economic, social and environmental costs and resources required to undertake 'eradication'.

TFGA Deer Management Position:

- Maintain the recreational deer season
- Access to all year round crop protection permit (CPP) for farmers (same as is the case for wallaby and possums)
- Educate farmers on crop protection permit system
- Economic benefit is available for farmer to utilise ie. hunters pay to come on farm to shoot deer
- Government to undertake risk assessment of feral fallow deer to consider eradication as a choice for farmers

¹ Tasmanian Government, State Accounts (ABS Cat No 5220.0).

BACKGROUND

Historical records show, twelve European fallow deer (*Dama dama*) of mixed genders were first imported into Tasmania in 1836. In recent years this fauna resource originating from the European fallow deer introduced in the 19th Century have been managed as a hunting resource while minimising their negative impacts and significant threats on agricultural crops, forestry, farmed livestock and natural botanical resources.

Regional feral fallow deer populations and stock densities vary throughout Tasmania but the total population appears to have steadily increased in size and dispersal across the State.

Fallow deer have a gestation period of two months and commence giving birth in about May. They do much of their feeding in open, grassy areas but require tree cover and undergrowth for shelter and winter food. Deciduous or mixed woodlands on gently rolling terrain are best. Food availability appears to determine whether fallow deer in an area are predominantly grazers or browsers.

Since 1994, many properties have managed wild deer according to the principles of quality deer management (QDM). QDM aims to set regulations that reduce the abundance of deer (eg by encouraging harvest of females rather than males), thus increasing the body condition and trophy characteristics of males in the population because there is more food available per capita. Apart from transplanting the QDM concept from North America, it has been noted that the research does not seem to underpin current management in Tasmania.²

Fallow deer are a partly protected species under the state regulation *Wildlife (General) Regulations 2010*. Annual seasons of specified duration are proclaimed and licence permits issued for a fee of \$67.95 or concessional fee of \$54.36 for the taking of male and antlerless deer.

Outside of the proclaimed annual seasons, fallow deer may be taken under Crop Protection Permits (available by contacting the Game Management Unit and the Wildlife Management Branch) issued to landowners who are suffering browsing damage from deer.

IMPACT ON PRIVATE LAND

Fallow deer pose a threat to agriculture, in the following ways: damage and competition for livestock grazing pasture, damage to crops, a potential disease vector for domestic livestock, damage to native vegetation through browsing, and impacts to native animal species through disturbance of breeding sites. Fallow deer tend to have greatest impacts on improved pastures due to their numbers and preference for grazing improved pasture compared with other deer species.

Fallow deer are also a biosecurity risk spreading weeds and diseases. They can transmit diseases to domestic livestock because they are biologically similar to domesticated hooved mammals. They can carry diseases such as Leptospirosis, Johne's disease, brucellosis, bovine tuberculosis, rabies, and foot-and-mouth disease. Most of these diseases are exotic, which Tasmania/Australia are fortunate not to have, however Johne's disease does occur within our livestock. Farmers can control Johne's but this can be made more challenging when a species like fallow deer can roam from farm to farm spreading the disease.

A key question in the TFGA Deer Management Survey asked for annual damage incurred by deer towards fencing, crops and pastures. On average, deer are conservatively causing \$13,500 damage per annum per property across the areas being effected by deer.

² McLeod S (2008), Proceedings of National Feral Deer Management Workshop, Canberra, Nov 2005, Invasive Animal Cop Research Centre, Canberra

There are 3,703 properties (ABS, 2014/15) in Tasmania with the range affecting a good proportional of the State (Map 1 below). If we estimate 50% of properties are being affected, the total cost to the agriculture sector is approximately \$25 million per year.

Map 1: Distribution of fallow deer in Tasmania³



Improved pastures and water supply have provided ideal conditions for increasing populations of native and introduced species. The biggest difference between deer and other species is the size and distance that deer can cover.

Assuming, the annual feed requirements of fallow mature and yearling does are 1.6 Dry Sheep Equivalents (DSEs), yearling bucks 1.9 DSEs, weaner does and bucks and does 1.1 DSEs, and a mature bucks is 2.1 DSEs with the current state feral fallow deer population at an estimated 30,000 head this would equate to a potential livestock carrying capacity loss of about 60,000 DSE's or equivalent to 60,000 ewes at 45kgs.

Based on the Australian Wool Production Forecast Report (April 2016) estimated that the total Tasmanian sheep flock is 2.4 million head, with a state farm gross product of \$127 million in 2014-15

³ DPIPW, (2011). Statement of current management practices for Tas. wild fallow deer.

from wool and meat. It can be conservatively projected, that a potential state livestock grazing capacity of 2.5% per annum is being lost and a conservative opportunity cost of more than \$3.17M is foregone in food and fibre production solely, just through the potential grazing loss which would support an increased state stock carrying capacity.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

Fallow deer can impact the environment through overgrazing, eating branches (browsing), trampling, ring-barking, rubbing their antlers against trees and spreading weeds.

Tasmania has over 50% of the State under reserves, be it crown land, national parks, World Heritage Areas or private land covenants. Some of this land has had livestock removed from this area because it has been classed highly sensitive and particularly susceptible to livestock movement. On this basis there is a need for the state government to remove fallow deer from these areas also.

PARTLY PROTECTED STATUS

The Wildlife (General) Regulations 2010 contain provisions for the regulations of hunting including the obligation of bag limits and restrictions on methods to be used in taking deer.

A recreational deer licence authorises the holder to take either one adult male deer and two antlerless deer or three antlerless deer during the open seasons on land for which they have the owner or manager's permission to hunt.

The TFGA is supportive of the current recreational fallow deer season, including the use of tags. We believe tagging shot deer provides a chain of custody to protect the tag permit holder and shooter, and gives the law enforcers the ability to know the deer has been shot legally – not poached.

Currently, outside the proclaimed annual seasons, fallow deer may be taken under crop protection permits issued to landowners, through the Wildlife Management Branch, who are suffering browsing damage from deer.

TFGA want to see this extended and included in the new crop protection permit (CPP) for possum and wallabies, whereby the landowner can get a five year CPP to manage deer on their property at their discretion. This will provide a flexible system for landholders that is responsive based.

Fallow deer estimate population is approximately 30,000. The government needs to undertake a review to get a better understanding of the population and if the population of fallow deer's is sustainable across private and public land.

This would also include increased investigation and provide clarity in quantitative and qualitative terms of the economic, environmental and social impacts of feral fallow deer. It would provide an informed foundation for the regulatory impact statement underpinning legislative changes, such as private landholders having the ability to control as they see fit, in legislative regulations.

COMMERICAL OPPORTUNITIES

The TFGA is having discussions around the use of field shot game and landowners being able to sell the meat to the public.

We are cognisant that there are a number of commercial deer farms that will be affected by such a move. As such, there needs to be further investigation into the permissible use of being able to sell field shot game and the effects of having this meat competing with commercially farmed venison.

The TFGA is supportive of utilising such a valuable resource that will benefit the landowner, but not if this will dramatically affect those who are already commercial deer farmers.

TFGA know of farmers who charge shooters the opportunity to hunt fallow deer on their properties. This is part of their normal farming income streams and they manage their properties and farming businesses accordingly.

Allison Waddington

From: Nick Steel <nick.steel@tfga.com.au>
Sent: Wednesday, 29 June 2016 12:30 PM
To: DEER
Subject: TFGA Submission
Attachments: TFGA Submission_LegCo Wild Fallow Deer Inquiry_June2016.pdf

To Mrs Mannering

Please find attached the Tasmanian Farmers & Graziers Association submission to the Legislative Council inquiry into the wild fallow deer population in Tasmania.

Regards
Nick



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