

ASHTON PTY LTD SALMON PASTORAL

A JOINT SUBMISSION TO THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL INQUIRY IN THE WILD FALLOW DEER POPULATION IN TASMANIA

20-6-16

Ms Jenny Mannering
Inquiry Secretary
Legislative Council
Parliament House
HOBART, Tasmania, 7000

To the Members of the Legislative Council Inquiry into Wild Fallow Deer.

In response your Advertisement in The Mercury in April 2016, we respectfully make the following submission.

Summary

1. This is a joint submission from Salmon Pastoral and Ashton Pty Ltd
2. The Tasmanian wild fallow deer herd has increased in range and population very significantly in the last 20-30 years.
3. This leads to very significant economic and environmental losses at an individual property level as well as in the overall environment and economy of the State.
4. At "Ashton" at Ouse, this loss is quantified at \$250,000 over the last two years from direct losses. Including all indirect losses as well, this figure is estimated to be around \$500,000 over the last two years.
5. There are other commercial opportunities for economic and social benefit from a sustained large deer population with highly regulated and costly management regimes – BUT - these opportunities are small and generally insignificant compared to the negative impacts of a large, highly regulated deer population. There is no case for all landowners having to 'run' deer for the benefit of others.
6. Deer are an introduced, feral species and have no legitimate place in our landscape.
7. Regulation of deer management should cease and there should be an open season for deer with the objective of severely reducing the wild fallow deer population in Tasmania. Any management of deer required by landowners for their own purposes should be their responsibility.

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Background

This is a joint submission from Tom Salmon of Salmon Pastoral, which is based at "Norton Mandeville" at Gretna in the Derwent Valley. Apart from "Norton" which is owned and operated by Salmon Pastoral, Salmon Pastoral also leases and operates other properties in various regions in Tasmania.

These are: "Ashton" at Ouse, "Sendace" at Hamilton, "Mt Morrison" at Ross and "Mt Baynes" at Colebrook.

Scott Ashton-Jones of Ashton Pty Ltd also makes this submission. Ashton Pty Ltd owns "Ashton" at Ouse and this property is leased to Salmon Pastoral. Deer predation has an overall detrimental effect on the pastoral and natural environment at "Ashton" and, to a greater or lesser extent, the other properties.

This submission only makes detailed reference to the deer management issues as they affect "Ashton". The effect of deer on the other properties is also significant – particularly at "Mt Morrison", where deer predation and the cost to commercial operations is significantly greater than at "Ashton".

"Ashton" is approximately 4,000 ha in size and produces prime lamb, wool and beef together with fodder and cereal crop production.

Environmental Impacts

Wild fallow deer range over large areas and travel large distances over multiple properties on a daily and seasonal basis – they are not constrained by livestock fencing erected for the control of cattle and sheep.

The overall range of fallow deer in the State has grown from the more 'traditional' areas of deer ranging including the Northern Midlands, the Western Tiers, the upper Macquarie and part of the Central Highlands to a current range over most of the pastoral and cropping areas of Tasmania as well as ranging over huge areas of both private and public lands in the less closely settled areas of forest and wilderness.

"Ashton" lies on the western bank of the Ouse River. Thirty years ago, no wild fallow deer ran west of the river – they now range all over "Ashton" and the whole upper Derwent district and, to our certain knowledge, west of the River Derwent. Anecdotally, deer predate on paddocks on the immediate boundary of New Norfolk and on the edges of other urban areas.

Such a rapid expansion of the deer 'range' reflects an overall explosion in wild fallow deer numbers in a period of about thirty years.

In areas of public land and forest regions, it is difficult to establish the impact on the fauna and overall environment – but an impact there must be.

On "Ashton", typical of most larger-scale grazing properties, deer move to the areas carrying most feed. On "Ashton" and in the drier regions of Tasmania large amounts of funds, both private and Government subsidised, have been spent on fencing off vulnerable areas - usually north facing slopes, remnant bush and other degraded areas. Sometimes the purpose of this fencing is to totally exclude livestock and sometimes merely to control the grazing on these areas by 'seasonal' saving and rejuvenation.

Invariably, when such areas are shut up for rejuvenation, deer will be found grazing on them – heavily in bad seasons. The rejuvenation process is immediately undone and the country continues to degrade.

This is an obvious negative impact on the natural values of the land and degradation of the land continues in these instances, over very large areas – all as a result of the uncontrolled growth in the range and population of the wild fallow deer herd.

Impact on Commercial Activity

As described above, the overall deer population and range has expanded dramatically over recent years. The commercial impact on operations and profitability has been increasing on a steady negative trend line.

In the last two years, operations at "Ashton" have been severely affected by the increase in the deer population grazing on the property.

In 2001 a total of 9 deer were shot on at "Ashton" – these were limited to stags being shot in the stag season. In 2015 the number shot was in excess of 150 head and to date in 2016, are in excess of 150 head have been shot and there is 6 months to go. This culling has been done under the auspices of licenced doe culls as well as stag shooting.

During normal farming operations it is a regular occurrence to see over a hundred deer grazing on pastures - invariably in areas where the sheep and cattle are being shut out at the time in order to save feed and rejuvenate the land.

As the deer can roam freely, they obviously choose the best! Consequently, in the last two years, we have lost two fodder crops and two cereal/fodder crops in addition to normal pasture saving.

The cost of this, on these four crops alone, over the last two years is over \$250,000. This cost is derived from the actual cropping cost, the loss of production from the crop and increased costs directly related to not having these crops – such as having to purchase feed on a large scale as a substitute. There is also a loss factor in lower per head production from the livestock. This cost is not included in this estimate.

\$250,000 is a quantifiable cost associated with the loss of the four crops over two years. It does not include the cost of the deer grazing on the rest of the property consuming the permanent and native pastures.

In summary, the direct cost of losing 100% of production from four fodder crops in the last two years is calculated to be \$250,000. When adding the cost of deer grazing other pasture areas, loss of per head productivity from livestock and damage to fencing the estimated total loss is about \$500,000 over two years.

Consequently, the decision has been made not to grow any crops for fodder or cereal production as the risk of loss is high with the current population of deer. This risk will remain high until the deer population can be reduced. This task is generally beyond the scope of individual landowners for longer than a seasonal impact due to the ability for deer to 'range' over very large distances.

The consequent economic loss from deer predation at "Ashton" alone is beyond the scope and expertise of this submission to quantify but as owners and operators of "Ashton" we have lower profitability which inhibits employment, development and returns to the community through the tax system.

If these are the losses we can quantify at "Ashton", it is clear that overall effect on the state's economy is considerable.

Protection Status

The management of the wild fallow deer population is heavily regulated by the Wildlife Regulations under the relevant State legislation.

Wild fallow deer are introduced feral animals and have as much claim to legitimacy in our environment and our economy as rabbits.

We note that the permitting authorities have made it easier to obtain permits to cull larger numbers of deer in recent years.

The overall impact of the deer population explosion on the economy of many regions in the State is very significant. They damage the environment, cause significant and real economic loss to individual farming businesses and have a negative impact on the State's economy.

Perhaps the largest single factor that has caused the explosion in the deer population is the overall legislative environment whereby the authorities have seen fit to severely limit deer culling and overall deer take - especially in the earlier years of the 1980's and 1990's. It is during this time that the deer 'range' expanded so significantly.

Control over the shooting of deer through licences and permits ought to be removed. For the foreseeable future there should be complete open season on deer. The objective of this regime should be to ensure that the deer population is severely reduced to nil or close to it.

As landowners and farmers with long-term commitments to sustainable and profitable agriculture and who actually like the animal itself, we see it as a very important economic and environmental objective to severely reduce the deer population.

Other Commercial Opportunities

There will likely be submissions that assert that there are commercial opportunities available from good management of the deer herd.

Some of these opportunities are real and include:

- The opportunity for deer shooting/tourism enterprises and the real success that a small number of landowners and guides have achieved.
- Other business opportunities that relate to commercial harvesting of deer products.

We acknowledge these opportunities but we ask:

- Is it right or fair that all landowners and their land and their profitability should have to bear the risk? If a landowner sees an opportunity from a deer enterprise then that landowner should take steps to run the deer on his own land with adequate enclosure and other management controls. It is possible to retain one's own deer resource by simply ensuring feed always exists for them on one's own land.
- Do deer have a legitimate place in our environment? It is evident from this submission that the deer population causes economic and environmental damage. In addition they damage fencing and spread disease such as foot rot. Deer are introduced and feral.
- Does the deer industry make any significant contribution to the economy? The commercial farming of fallow deer in Tasmania has been tried over a long period and as never gained a serious place in the agricultural enterprise mix. The harvesting of deer products from the wild population also makes a very modest contribution. The sporting shooting season creates economic activity and is a socially relevant part of life in Tasmania. An open season on deer would enhance this social benefit, at least for the foreseeable future, as shooting activity increases, pending an overall fall in the numbers and an overall reduction in deer shooting in the long run.

We submit that each of these, individually or collectively, do not make any contribution to even partially outweigh the overall negative economic and environmental impact of an ever increasing deer herd.

Conclusion

We commend this submission to your committee.

We would be happy to discuss the problem further, if required.

Scott Ashton-Jones

Tom Salmon and G Scott Ashton-Jones

Allison Waddington

From: Scott Ashton-Jones <scott@wha.net.au>
Sent: Thursday, 30 June 2016 3:33 PM
To: DEER
Subject: Wild Fallow Deer Inquiry
Attachments: Deer Submission - Leg Co, June 16.doc

Dear Jenny,

Please find attached a submission in relation to the above inquiry.

I am pretty sure it is self-explanatory.

However, where i am today, I am having difficulty putting a proper signature on it. So, I am sending it by the due time in any case. Please advise if the submission or your process would benefit from a proper signature at a later time and we can work out a way to do it. I did call your office today to seek advice but you are not in today.

Otherwise, I will look fwd with interest to the committee's deliberations.

Many thanks,

G Scott Ashton-Jones

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