

Ms.Jenny Mannering
Inquiry Secretary
Legislative Council
Parliament House
Hobart Tas. 7000

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL INQUIRY INTO THE WILD FALLOW DEER HERD
POPULATION

SUBMISSION FROM: John Bignell. Deer farmer -Bothwell

PERSONAL BACKGROUND/QUALIFICATIONS

I am a full-time farmer at Bothwell, and in addition to traditional enterprises such as sheep and cropping, I have been farming Fallow Deer for venison for about 40 years and as such was a pioneer of the industry both here and internationally.

During this time I have obviously had considerable dealings with all local parties interested in deer management, including; Parks and Wildlife, Ag.Dept., hunting groups and my fellow farmers. I was responsible for the the concept and facilitation of the "Property-based Game Management Plans", and was a member of the State Government's "Wildlife Advisory Committee" for a number of years.

In 1982 I spent 6months as a Nuffield Scholar investigating venison production and marketing in Europe. I have also presented papers on game farming at international conferences in the U.S. and Canada.

At the moment I am farming about 250 fallow deer and sell live animals to Doo Town Venison.

Previously I did process and market my own venison through a licenced on-farm abattoir.

SUMMARY OF MY POSITION

As a matter of principle I have long held the view that as an exotic species, fallow deer should not be classified as "partly protected wildlife" and so taking-up considerable resources of Parks and Wildlife and Police.

Similarly, farmers should be totally free to eliminate every feral deer on their farm if they so choose, or manage them to produce some sort of income.

REALITY

Unfortunately the many conflicting interests and considerations ensure the situation is not so straightforward.

As a licenced deer farmer and experienced venison marketer, I am strongly opposed to the idea of allowing wild-shot venison to be sold for human consumption in Tasmania.

WHAT IS THE CAUSE OF THE DEER PLAGUE?

While escapes from deer farms and hobby herds are undoubtedly responsible for the introduction of small numbers of wild deer into the North West and South East of the state, by far the the greatest responsibility lies squarely with Parks and Wildlife.

For the last 40 years that I am familiar with, Parks and Wildlife had the legislated role of "managing the wild deer for the purposes of recreational hunting".

We have had the absurd situation where individual rangers made an arbitrary decision on just how many wild deer could be shot on any farm under a "crop protection permit"

Equally absurd and wrong was the principle that farmers were required to maintain a wild deer population - as is the case (and rightly so) with native wildlife.

The result after decades of enforcing this policy is a plague of deer that has spread from a core herd in the Midlands right through to the East Coast and Western Lakes.

Thirty years ago there were basically no deer West of the Lake Highway.

If Parks and Wildlife legislation didn't protect deer through hunting seasons etc, then the locals would have soon eliminated (at no cost!) those new introductions of deer into the

non-feral range, such as the N.W. and S.E. coasts.

WILL WILD VENISON HARVEST AND SALE SOLVE THE PROBLEM?

Given the existing Government policy of protecting wild deer for hunting, the answer is NO

I understand Parks and Wildlife have finally accepted the reality of the problem they have created and implemented a one-year trial to basically allow unlimited culling of wild deer under crop protection permits. This trial needs time to be assessed and made permanent if successful.

Meat quality issues discussed below will ensure a very small and short-term market for wild venison.

Deer hunting is very popular and divisive in Tasmania and commercial harvesting might well result in range warefare.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM WITH SELLING WILD-SHOT VENISON

Licensed deer farmers, and equally, existing licensed venison processors will be WIPED-OUT if the market is suddenly flooded with cheap, unhealthy, poor quality meat from wild-shot deer.

Venison is a far more difficult meat to produce to a consistently high eating quality than traditional farmed meats because of the very distinct seasonality of the males and Summer-fawning of the does.

There are very strict quality assurance requirements (Meat Standards Australia) in place to ensure the quality of beef and lamb processed through abattoirs.

Likewise, on the farm, meat animals are very carefully managed throughout their life to ensure a high quality product.

Wild deer harvested without any of these controls and considerations will basically be little better than "dog tucker" in many cases, and suitable only for sausages and pies - or the dogs.

Unfortunately though, much of it will initially be delivered to our top-end restaurants, which are so important to our tourism brand. Once caught-out, chefs and diners never forgive or forget a bad eating experience.

The large and well-established industry harvesting wild deer in New Zealand and Scotland is essentially based on exports to Germany where there is a specific historical niche for wild-shot venison and it mostly goes into goulashes and smallgoods at a low price. The N.Z.farmed venison is exported into premium markets in the U.S. and Asia at about three times the price of beef and lamb.

Tasmania has no export-licenced facility willing or able to process either farmed or wild-shot venison.

Having destroyed the investment of existing Tasmanian deer farmers and processors, the wild-shot industry will quickly decline to little more than a "dodgy, low value, backyard enterprise"

Existing farmed venison processors have long struggled against poached venison supplies and more recently against cheap imports of legal, but poor quality, wild-shot venison from South Australia

WHAT TO DO

1. Farmers should be permitted to manage wild deer on their land with no restriction on numbers by Parks and Wildlife.
2. Parks and Wildlife should not have the legislated role of "managing deer for recreational hunting", which includes a restricted season on taking of antlered males.
3. Hunters must expect to pay farmers (possibly "in kind", as per the "property based game management plans) for the privilege of hunting deer on their land. This situation is the norm overseas and rapidly evolving in Tasmania and may well solve the surplus deer problem.
4. Management options should recognise animal welfare issues (such as the presence of suckling fawns over Summer) and any impacts on neighbouring farmers.

5. Culling of wild deer should still be managed through a system of permits and tags to manage the issues discussed in 2 and as such it may be sensible to retain the "partially protected" status.

6. Wild-shot venison should definitely NOT be sold for human consumption.

Thank you

John Bignell

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Allison Waddington

From: John <john@thorpefarm.com>
Sent: Thursday, 30 June 2016 4:55 PM
To: DEER
Subject: Fallow Deer submission
Attachments: Document.pdf

Hello Jenny,

Attached is my submission.

Regards

John