National Feral Deer Action Plan

NEWSLETTER

October 2022

We want to hear from you!

Community feral deer management (CFDM) can be an effective method to reduce feral deer impacts at landscape scales. CFDM is the coordinated management of feral deer by community, usually governed by local groups or agencies and focused on private property control. Many groups are currently involved in or initiating CFDM; however, there is little research on best approach nor evidence-based information to guide CFDM development in Australia.

To support the development of effective, long-term, and feasible CFDM across Australia, the National Feral Deer Action Plan (NFDAP) project is collecting information to inform the development and implementation of CFDM.

The NFDAP project aims to identify common approaches that community programs in Australia have used in CFDM, and common barriers encountered. This information will inform a guide for future development of CFDM in Australia. This approach mimics research produced by Cornell University to support CFDM in America (DeerGuide.pdf (cornell.edu)).

If you have, or are part of, a community program, you can help by filling out this questionnaire (Community-program-questionnaire.docx (live.com)).

National Feral Deer Action Plan

What is NFDAP up to?

Cute but Costing us Deerly campaign

Many Australians do not know that we have a growing problem with feral deer.

The NFDAP project is trialling a media campaign to build general public awareness of the impacts of feral deer.

The campaign trial (by Rivergum Communications) is using social media, together with targeted newspaper ads, flyers and billboards, in four regions (around South Gippsland, Hunter Valley, Launceston and Limestone Coast) to stimulate discussion among community members who do not already have a strong viewpoint about feral deer. The campaign will encourage people to report sightings of feral deer to Feral Scan, so land management agencies or groups can plan or better target their control programs.

The campaign messaging seeks to acknowledge that deer are attractive to look at, but they have impacts that we need to address. While the look and feel of the campaign is a national one, the strategy behind the products used in each trial location has been tailored to the local needs of control programs, community understanding and issues.

The aim is to build a "media pack" that can be used by regions across Australia in their respective awareness campaigns.

The campaign will run from mid-September to late October, and several metrics are being measured to assess what worked or could be improved. This trial will guide more awareness projects across Australia in the near future.

National Feral Deer Action Plan

Thermal Assisted Aerial Training in WA

Building capacity to control feral deer in Western Australia

While feral deer populations are growing rapidly in the eastern seaboard of Australia, Tasmania, and South Australia, there are also small, isolated patches of fallow, red and rusa feral deer in the southwest of Western Australia.

In June, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development in WA delivered a week-long course to train aerial marksmen in the use of thermal assisted aerial control (TAAC). The course sought to build agency capacity (in 3 states) to remove feral deer populations in vegetated areas, where traditional aerial control may be limited.

Thermal cameras have been used to count feral deer from helicopters for a number of years, but now thermal cameras can also assist aerial culls in real time.

TAAC is a modified method of aerial culling of vertebrate pests, designed specifically for cryptic species in densely vegetated areas, and for eradicating low density populations. A camera operator and marksman sit side by side facing out the left side of the helicopter, where they can both view a high-resolution thermal video on a screen. This enables the marksman to reference their own smaller thermal scope against the footage of the more powerful video camera.

The course covered firearm safety, marksmanship skills using thermal equipment, animal welfare, TAAC protocols, and leanings from TAAC operations in other states. The course was the first of its kind for TAAC in Australia, and provides a great framework for other agencies or organisations looking to upskill their marksmen.

A short video on TAAC can be found here: Not so hidden - YouTube

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SPOTLIGHT
Gold Coast Community Program

Have you thought about engaging community through citizen science?

A new citizen science program in Gold Coast has been initiated by Watergum Inc. as a way to monitor deer in the region, raise community awareness and increase community engagement in deer management.

The citizen science program has three components:

1. Deer Scan reports

During events and on social media, Watergum encourage and educate people on reporting feral deer sightings to Deer Scan.

2. Deer Walks

To increase monitoring of more areas for deer activity people are encouraged to record sightings of deer or their damage while on regular walks around their properties or in their local area.
The walk can be tracked using AllTrails and the files can be sent securely to Watergum. Using these files, Watergum can see which parts of the Gold Coast are being monitored for deer activity and can start to build a map of deer spread.

3. Reviewing footage

Watergum has motion sensor cameras scattered around the Gold Coast. They are currently setting up a project to allow their community to participate in reviewing the footage.
While there are existing platforms for citizen science footage reviewing such as DigiVol, having this centralised platform within Watergum may help further build a community.

Why citizen science?

Citizen science can be simply defined as the active involvement of citizens in gathering and/or generating new knowledge and understanding. However, the benefits of citizen science extend beyond that of increased knowledge and understanding.

By involving people in the project, they will be more engaged, maintain interest for longer, have increased understanding in the issue at hand and are more likely to defend the issue and educate their community.

It is a method that can allow for long-term community awareness and engagement that will have significant benefits to deer management programs, whether at the local or landscape level.

feralSCAN

DEER SCAN

Report Deer Sightings

Go on 'Deer Walks'

Review our Footage

To learn more - contact us at coordinator@feraldeerplan.org.au

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ECONOMIC ANALYSIS - VICTORIA

An independent report from Frontier Economics warns that not controlling the impacts of feral deer in Victoria could cost the community between $1.5 billion and $2.2 billion over the next 30 years.

The Victorian feral deer population and distribution have rapidly increased, with analysis by the Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning estimating that the population of deer could be between "several hundred thousand up to one million wild animals or more".

Even with conservative assumptions around the detrimental impacts of feral deer, key findings include:

- $245 million to $350 million to farmers due to avoided grazing on farming land by feral deer and $106 million to $144 million due to avoided time spent on managing feral deer
- $269 million to $365 million to forest industries due to avoided losses in forestry production
- $576 million to $825 million from all feral-deer-related vehicle accidents being avoided
- $308 million to $474 million to account for avoided reductions in the recreation and use values of national parks and state parks in Victoria.

The report, commissioned by the Invasive Species Council, points out this figure only considers the economic costs of feral deer caused through lost agricultural and forestry production, vehicle accidents and reductions to the recreational values of national and state parks.

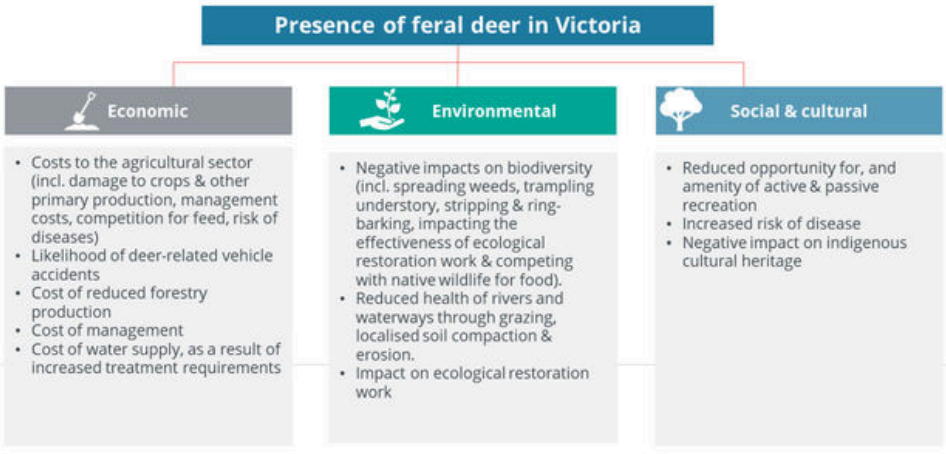
Peter Jacobs, Invasive Species Council deer project officer, said '*The impacts on biodiversity, Indigenous cultural values and ecosystem services such as water purification would also likely impose enormous costs to the community, but are difficult to accurately put a dollar value to. What we do know is the real cost will be much higher than $2.2 billion.*'

The Victorian Government is investing $18.25 million over 4 years for feral deer control. Land managers, groups, and agencies can all work together to better manage feral deer to minimise the future costs of their impacts.

Read the full report here

Quotes pulled from The Invasive Species Council

Figure 6: Overview of the economic, social, cultural and environmental costs of feral deer in Victoria



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ECONOMIC ANALYSIS - SOUTH AUSTRALIA

An economic analysis from the Department of Primary Industries and Regions SA has revealed that South Australia's feral deer population could explode from 40,000 to 200,000 in the next decade, costing primary producers up to $242 million if further control is not taken.

A key objective of this study was to determine the net benefit of investing in an 11-year area-wide feral deer control program, aimed at eradication of feral deer in South Australia with the intention of achieving effective eradication. This option was compared against an ongoing business-as-usual scenario based on historical levels of investment in feral deer population control methods.

Under a "business as usual" approach it is projected that by 2031

- The feral deer population would increase from the current estimation of about 40,000 across the state to 208,000, almost a 500% explosion in population.
- Production losses attributed to feral deer would increase from an estimated $36 million in the 2020/21 financial year to $242 million, through deer damaging, contamination or eating crops and pastures, or through competition with livestock
- The cost of vehicle accidents caused by feral deer would increase from an estimated $156,000 in 2020/21 to $815,000

Conversely, the economic analysis indicates that if greater investments are made and eradication of feral deer in South Australia is achieved, it could generate a total net benefit to the community of $518 million over the period to 2031.

If eradication approach is taken, by 2031, it is projected:

- Feral deer populations would decrease to less than 1,000 feral deer in South Australia, or less than 2% of current estimated population
- The direct impact on the value of primary productivity in South Australia by feral deer would decrease by 97%, to less than $1 million per year
- Costs of vehicle accidents caused by feral deer would decrease from $156,000 in 2020/21 to $3000
- Through the corresponding increase in agricultural productivity, up to 425 full-time jobs would be created and an additional $216 million would be added to Gross State Product

In response to the findings in the economic analysis, at least $4.3 million will be spent on feral deer control programs in South Australia over the next four years. The Government of South Australia is providing $2 million, with the Australian Government committing $2.3 million.

The Feral Deer Control Economic Analysis report was prepared by economic research and consultancy firm BDO Econsearch, and was commissioned by the Department of Primary Industries and Regions (PIRSA) with landscape boards and Livestock SA.

To read the full report on economic analysis follow this link.

National Feral Deer Action Plan

What's happening in our States?

SOUTH AUSTRALIA

In September-October 2022, over two weeks, 1019 deer were culled in 60 hours of flight time in the Fleurieu Peninsula, SA, and 611 deer were culled in 26 hours of flight time in the Limestone Coast.

A new role for South Australia has been announced and is under way. Myall Tarran has taken on the role of Feral Deer Control Coordinator. He is coordinating the ambitious SA feral deer eradication program being run by the Department of Primary Industries and Regions in South Australia (PIRSA).
Myall came to the role with experience working as a planning officer on the Kangaroo Island feral pig eradication program, which is now close to completion.

The Commonwealth and South Australian Governments and Landscape Boards have funded the SA feral deer eradication program for $4M over the first four years, of the total 10 year proposed project timeline. The initial years of the project will be focused on achieving rapid knockdown of the SA feral deer population. There is an estimated 40,000 deer in SA, and modelling suggests that about 65% of thepopulation needs to be culled each year for the next two years of the project in order to achieve eradication in the 10 year timeframe.This means coordinating a significant number of aerial culls over the next two years.

Myall has just completed coordinating three weeks of thermal assisted aerial culls in September- October 2022, with two weeks on the Fleurieu Peninsula where 1019 deer were culled in 60 hours of flight time, and the Limestone Coast where 611 deer were culled in 26 hours of flighttime. About 15 weeks of aerial culling of feral deer are planned in SA for 2023.

SA is in a fortunate position where the low numbers of deer can give rise to the feasibility of eradication. Not all states are this fortunate.

However, there will be much to learn from this project that can be applied to other states. For example, Myall and the team are spearheading new approaches to aerial control that are producing promising results (as seen).

The SA Feral Deer Eradication program is occurring in partnership with Landscapes SA, the SA National Parks and Wildlife Service, the SA Department for Environment and Water, the National Feral Deer Action Plan, and the federal Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. The program is funded by the Government of South Australia, the Australian Government and Landscape Boards.

National Feral Deer Action Plan

"Around the world"
CASE STUDY - USA

Managing Deer Impacts on Staten Island

In 2016 New York City launched a 6-year plan to reduce the negative impacts of Staten Island's (US) growing white-tailed deer population, using sterilisation. White-tailed deer are a native species in the US, unlike Australia where all deer are introduced. The management of Staten Island's deer is not transferable to the Australian context, but it is interesting to keep up to date with control methods and projects across the globe.

The goal of the Staten Island population control study was to investigate the effectiveness of male deer sterilization on controlling population growth. The project found a 21% decrease in the total deer population and a 60% drop in the number of fawn births.

At the end of Year 5, 98% of estimated antlered males were sterilized (treatment rates were estimates and change yearly). Improved project design increased the number of young male deer that could be captured. This was said to be due to fawn birth, young male fawns aging, and deer dying.

Ongoing treatment is required for the overall deer population to continue declining. There is considerable controversy around the program with some calling it a "waste of money".

The program's costs were $4.1 million by the third year for contractors to tranquilise, sterilise, and ear-tag bucks. The mass vasectomies have cost $2,385 per buck. The city's parks department extended the program in September 2019 with an additional $2.5 million.

"Field work is done every project year. Captures take place on a nightly basis once the sterilization period begins. Male white-tailed deer that are over 6 months old are tranquilized. Then they are immobilized and anesthetized. A vasectomy is then performed on them by a NYS-licensed veterinarian. They are also fitted with ear tags for identification."

Sterilisation methods used on Staten Island are not a viable option for population scale feral deer control in Australia. Future registration of sterilisation products in Australia may support small-scale sterilisation efforts, where removal (e.g. culling) of deer is not permitted. Culling (ground, aerial, or via trapping) is considered the most effective method for reducing impacts of feral deer populations in Australia, particularly in areas where populations have thousands to hundreds of thousands of feral deer.

Learn more here: Managing Deer Impacts on Staten Island (arcgis.com)

Metric	Project Year 1	Project Year 2	Project Year 3	Project Year 4	Project Year 5
Estimated Population	1,917–2,189 (Mean, 2,053)	1,793–1,975 (Mean, 2,053)	1,737	1,555	1,616
% Change, from Project Start	—	8%	15%	24%	21%

National Feral Deer Action Plan

MORE INFORMATION

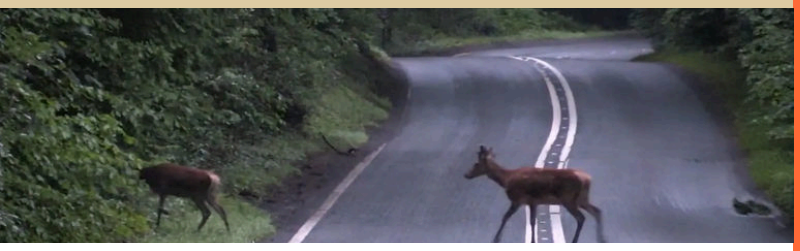
Commercial harvesting of wild caught deer - webinar

The Victorian Deer Control Community Network (VDCCN) recently held a webinar focused on how professional deer harvesters may assist landowners with control of feral deer on their properties and carcass management.

There was a range of speakers from the commercial harvesting industry and it included the experience of landowners.. PrimeSafe is the authority responsible for regulating the industry and the strict standards that apply and will present what landowners need to know.

To watch the full webinar, become a member of the VDCCN by going to Members Area - Registration - Victorian Deer Control Community Network (vdccn.org.au)

If you would like to learn more about the VDCCN please contact Johannes Wenzel on Johannes Wenzel <johanneswenzel45@gmail.com> or 0418 346 895.



UK Road Accidents

In the UK, in 2022, you are twice as likely to hit a deer than in 1997. That risk has gone up fourfold since 1980. The government-funded deer Initiative estimates there could be up to 74,000 road accidents involving deer each year. News correspondent Deborah Hadfield finds out what the government is doing about it.

For the full story, visit: A car hits a deer every seven minutes in England

Reporting to Feral Scan

Cape Liptrap, VIC, community are calling for residents to report deer sightings to Feral Scan. Click on the link to learn more!

or visit our YouTube Channel: National Feral Deer Action Plan

In the media

Growing concerns about spread of feral deer across northern New South Wales (msn.com)

Using lasers and a long-term experiment to investigate how deer change a forest canopy - Verve times

Fall means more deer on the road: 4 ways time of day, month and year raise your risk of crashes (theconversation.com)

Feral deer costing millions - The Border Watch (Limestone Coast, SA)

Growing concerns about spread of feral deer across northern New South Wales

Contact us at
coordinator@feraldeerplan.org.au

Read more about feral deer by clicking on www.feraldeerplan.com.au or by scanning the QR code