



National  
Feral Deer  
Action Plan



*Photo of chital deer pushing under fence, by Luke Woodford, provided by Centre for Invasive Species Solutions*

# SUMMARY **National Feral Deer Action Plan**

2022-27

**DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION**

# Executive summary

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**Australia's feral deer problem is increasing. In just 30 years, land managers in both rural and urban areas have seen feral deer go from being a novelty to being widespread in many parts of the country. Feral deer can be so damaging that many land managers believe they are emerging as 'Australia's next rabbit plague'. Feral deer impact our agricultural production, environmental and cultural assets, and pose risks to biosecurity and community safety.**

States and territories have different policies for managing feral deer – most states treat feral deer as pests, while some treat them as wildlife or hunting resources (with some provisions for land managers to control them if they choose). These differences have added extra challenges to controlling feral deer across the country.

This plan addresses the need for a coordinated and strategic approach to managing Australia's feral deer problem, including priority areas for the protection of threatened species, ecological communities and nationally significant conservation assets.

The plan focuses on improving tools, strategies, capacity, awareness and efficiencies to reduce impacts of feral deer over landscape scales, to manageable levels, where local communities, regions or jurisdictions wish to do so, and to eradicate them where it is feasible.

It is not within the scope of this plan to set objectives for managing deer as a hunting resource (for trophies, meat or recreation). This is because the approaches to sustain or improve hunting experiences are different from the best practice approaches to reduce or minimise the impacts of feral deer.

## Goals

The plan takes a multifaceted approach to reduce the impacts of feral deer, by focusing on three goals:

1. Stop the spread of large feral deer populations and reduce their impact.
2. Control (drive down densities as far as possible) or eradicate small, isolated populations before they spread.
3. Protect significant sites from impacts from feral deer (threatened species, ecological communities and places of national and international cultural or environmental significance).

The goals of this plan will be achieved by nine priority actions (Figure 1) and other actions in Table 1.

## Expected outcomes

The goals and approach of this plan will guide consistent and effective control actions across Australia, to achieve six short-term outcomes by 2027:

- Land managers will be more aware of feral deer impacts, and can access more tools and options to control feral deer more quickly and effectively.
- Priority assets in the current large distributions of feral deer will be less impacted.
- The spread of feral deer beyond the containment buffer zone will stop.
- The spread of feral deer into peri-urban areas will stop or slow.
- Significant places of conservation or cultural value will be better protected from feral deer.
- Habitats recovering from bushfires will be better protected from feral deer.

Within 10 years (by 2032), three long-term outcomes will be achieved:

- Community groups will use best practice control methods to reduce impacts of feral deer.
- Large populations of feral deer will reduce in density around valued assets.
- Outlying populations of feral deer will be eradicated or contained, and new populations will be responded to rapidly.

There is an imperative to contain distributions to prevent feral deer becoming another widespread invasive pest like rabbits, pigs and foxes. The next five years will be important to establish actions and generate momentum for strategic, collaborative control in the future.

# Plan at a Glance

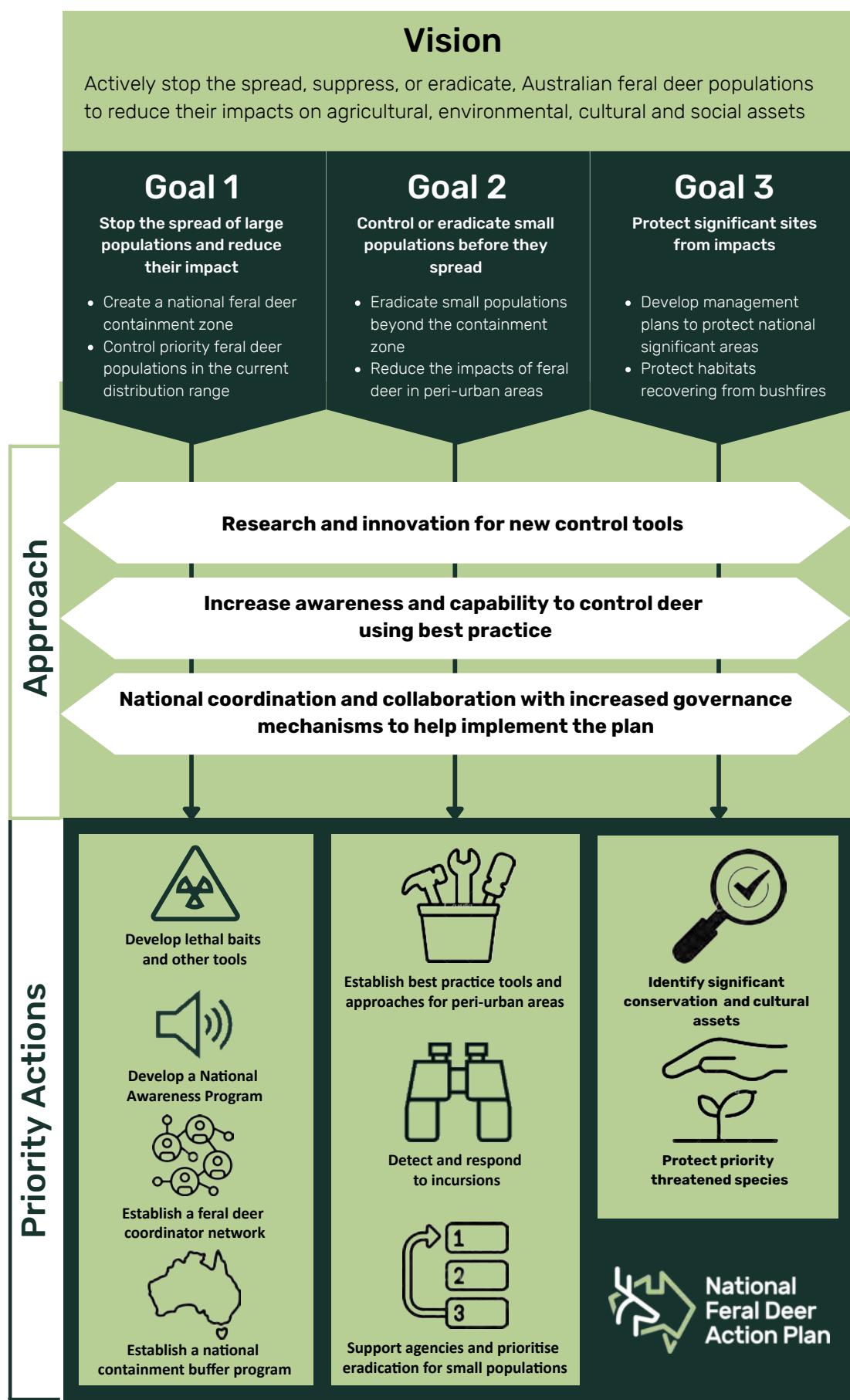


Figure 1. A summary of the Plan's vision, goals, approach and priority actions

# Actions for 2022-27

Actions were developed by the Working Group, to achieve the goals of this plan (Table 1). Priority actions are shown in **bold**.

Table 1. Approach and actions to reduce, suppress and eradicate the impacts of feral deer.

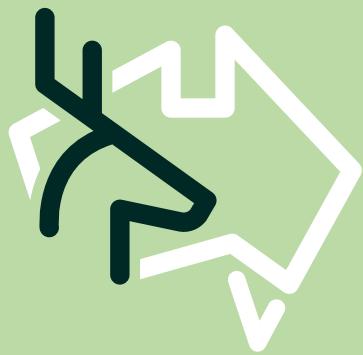
Support for each action: NFDAPIC (National Feral Deer Action Plan Implementation Committee), NDMC (National Deer Management Coordinator), SG (stakeholder groups including agencies) and (RDC) regional feral deer coordinators. Performance measures will be collated by the NDMC.

ACTION	OUTCOME	PERFORMANCE MEASURE BY 2027 (OR EARLIER)
<b>GOAL 1: Stop the spread of large feral deer populations and reduce their impact.</b>		
<b>APPROACH: Research and innovate new controls</b>		
<b>1.1 Develop and trial one or more lethal baits and delivery mechanisms for the control of feral deer, and seek registration of bait through APVMA.</b> <b>Lead:</b> SG, <b>Support:</b> NDMC	Agencies and land managers have additional cost-effective options to control feral deer.	<b>1.</b> One or more lethal baits are registered nationally for control of feral deer, for use under strict directions to protect humans, domestic animals, wildlife, and the welfare of target species, and where other control methods are not effective.
<b>APPROACH: Increase awareness and capability</b>		
<b>1.2 Develop a national awareness program (starting with a pilot) that identifies target audiences for tailored messages on feral deer management to the general public.</b> <b>Lead:</b> NFDAPIC, <b>Support:</b> NDMC	Consistent messages are promoted to target audiences to help them understand the nature of the threat and to build and maintain social license to manage the impacts of feral deer.	<b>1.</b> More than 65 per cent of landholders in deer-affected areas, understand the need to manage feral deer (via surveys). <b>2.</b> Social media awareness campaigns are implemented by NDMC and local groups. <b>3.</b> Ratio of reporters to records of deer sightings via FeralScan and other reporting platforms increases (via annual reports).
<b>1.3 Develop and disseminate targeted extension information (via Pestsmart or the Action Plan website and local networks) on the impacts of feral deer, the national plan objectives and options to manage them effectively.</b> <b>Lead:</b> NDMC, <b>Support:</b> SG, RDC	Social license is built and maintained to manage the impacts of feral deer in cost effective, humane and timely ways to meet management goals.	<b>1.</b> Landholders, groups and agencies seeking to manage feral deer are satisfied with the availability and content of extension materials (via local coordinator reports).
<b>1.4 Develop up-to-date maps of feral deer distributions, densities and impacts to communicate the extent, and trend of the feral deer problem.</b> <b>Lead:</b> SG, <b>Support:</b> NDMC, RDC	Communities and land management agencies are informed to prioritise areas for feral deer management.	<b>1.</b> At least one national (ABARES, 2023) and two state distribution maps updated (on websites). <b>2.</b> Trends in pest abundance, distribution and impact at state/territory scale (reported by annual state questionnaire).

ACTION	OUTCOME	PERFORMANCE MEASURE BY 2027 (OR EARLIER)
<b>1.5</b> Ensure current best practice tools and approaches for managing large feral deer populations, and those in peri-urban environments, are consistent and updated in COPs, SOPs, manuals, planning guides and cost-benefit summaries, and that best practice considers animal welfare and impacts on both feral deer and non-target wildlife.  <b>Lead:</b> NDMC, <b>Support:</b> SG, RDC	Agencies and land managers can access best practice information to plan and implement effective and humane feral deer management programs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Updated COPs, SOPs by 2024.</li> <li>2. A review of information on state and national websites about feral deer management show best practice approaches are consistent (review by NDCM).</li> </ul>
<b>1.6</b> Promote regulated use of firearm suppressors /sound moderators for feral deer control programs (accessibility differs under state laws).  <b>Lead:</b> NDMC/SG, <b>Support:</b> SG	Best practice tools are available to maximise efficiencies of control programs and animal welfare.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. All state agencies wishing to improve access to regulated use of firearm suppressors /sound moderators for coordinated feral deer control programs, are taking steps to seek access (as advised by state contacts).</li> </ul>
<b>1.7</b> Identify research, development and extension (R,D&E) and training opportunities to improve best practice for feral deer management.  <b>Lead:</b> NDMC, <b>Support:</b> SG, RDC	New tools and strategies are made available to improve deer surveillance and control.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Collaborative RD&amp;E projects are funded.</li> <li>2. Training events are delivered by NDMC and agencies (reported by annual state questionnaire).</li> </ul>
<b>1.8</b> Identify options for accreditation of volunteer shooters (including landholders) or professional shooters in coordinated programs.  <b>Lead:</b> SG, <b>Support:</b> NDMC	Recognised standards enable pools of accredited volunteer or professional shooters applying best practice control.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. At least one best practice course is developed and/or promoted to coordinated feral deer control programs to enable participating shooters to be accredited (via training providers).</li> </ul>
<b>APPROACH: National coordination and collaboration</b>		
<b>1.9</b> Establish a network of feral deer coordinators and practitioners in priority areas (including bushfire impacted conservation areas), to promote national consistency in cross-tenure best practice control, and shared responsibility.  <b>Lead:</b> NDMC, <b>Support:</b> SG, RDC	Management of feral deer is coordinated at the local and regional level, and across jurisdictional borders and stakeholder groups.  Feral deer management is consistent with the NFDAP, and is integrated into other pest animal management programs where efficient.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. State and local feral deer coordinators and community group deer programs are listed on the NFDAP website (by NDCM).</li> <li>2. At least three states have active deer control networks that host regular forums.</li> </ul>
<b>1.10</b> Establish and support a priority cross-regional (national) containment program to prevent the current distribution of feral deer on the eastern seaboard, northern Tasmania and south-eastern South Australia from expanding and spreading.  <b>Lead:</b> NFDAPIC, <b>Support:</b> NDMC, SG, RDC	The current large feral deer distributions are contained, and communities outside of these areas are protected.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A national containment zone plan is co-developed by participating regions, groups and states, including boundaries, activities, and databases to record incursions (2023).</li> <li>2. Containment zone plan activities are delivered as per plan schedule (reported by annual plan progress report).</li> <li>3. Funding is sought for implementing the first phase of the containment buffer zone plan.</li> </ul>
<b>1.11</b> Facilitate processes to seek shared objectives for management of impacts of feral deer populations that cross state (or regional) borders.  <b>Lead:</b> NFDAPIC, <b>Support:</b> NDMC, SG, RDC	The management of negative impacts of feral deer within cross-border populations (irrespective of state/territory/region) is consistent and effective.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. At least three annual meetings are held with land management groups and agencies, and the NDMC, to facilitate coordinated management of cross-border feral deer populations (SA-VIC border, VIC-NSW border and NSW-QLD border).</li> </ul>

ACTION	OUTCOME	PERFORMANCE MEASURE BY 2027 (OR EARLIER)
<b>GOAL 2: Control or eradicate small populations before they spread.</b>		
<b>APPROACH: Research and innovate new controls</b>		
<b>2.1 Establish best practice tools and approaches to prevent, eradicate or contain small feral deer populations in peri-urban areas.</b>  Lead: NDMC, Support: SG, RDC	Agencies and land managers can access best practice information to plan and implement effective feral deer prevention, eradication or containment programs in peri-urban areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A best practice guide is developed to manage feral deer in peri-urban areas.</li> <li>2. Workshops are held on managing feral deer in peri-urban areas (via local coordinator reports).</li> <li>3. The successes and outcomes of the Victorian Peri-Urban Deer Control Plan is promoted to other regions (via meetings and newsletters).</li> </ul>
<b>2.2 Trial and promote effective use and benefits of thermal-assisted aerial control to knock down impacts of feral deer populations, particularly those in densely vegetated areas.</b>  Lead: SG, Support: NDMC, RDC	Agencies and land managers are effective users of new thermal technologies to quickly locate and control populations of feral deer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. At least three trials of thermal-assisted aerial control are implemented by state agencies, and promoted to other regions (via state questionnaire, and newsletters).</li> <li>2. Training courses are delivered by states to build capacity for thermal-assisted aerial control (reported by annual state questionnaire).</li> </ul>
<b>APPROACH: Increase awareness and capability</b>		
<b>2.3 Support agencies and groups to access current best practice tools, approaches, early response plans, reporting processes and engagement strategies to detect, suppress, eradicate or prevent new incursions.</b>  Lead: NDMC, Support: SG, RDC	<p>Agencies and land managers can access best practice information to plan, detect and eradicate new incursions of feral deer</p> <p>Communities are aware of potential impacts of feral deer, are vigilant, report new incursions (e.g. via DeerScan, Atlas of Living Australia, Victorian Biodiversity Atlas or iNaturalist) and are prepared to participate in whole-community efforts to eradicate new incursions of feral deer.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. All states have a central database for new incursion reports of feral deer.</li> <li>2. Extension materials and operational templates relating to control of new incursions are available on Pestsmart or NFDAP websites.</li> <li>3. Workshops are delivered by NDMC or states, on preventing, detecting or responding to early incursions of feral deer.</li> <li>4. At least three regional campaigns completed or underway to prevent, detect, report and respond to early incursions of feral deer (via local coordinator reports)</li> </ul>
<b>2.4 Prioritise eradication programs for small isolated populations of feral deer that pose a threat to priority agricultural or environmental assets.</b>  Lead: SG (state/local agencies) Support: NDMC	<p>Small isolated populations are eradicated.</p> <p>(Note local eradication programs are underway in South Australia, western New South Wales and Western Australia)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. At least three (state or regional) eradication plans developed, funded or underway in the small isolated population zone, and promote outcomes to other regions (via newsletters and meetings).</li> </ul>
<b>APPROACH: National coordination and collaboration</b>		
<b>2.5 Investigate options to include farmed deer on the National Livestock Identification System (requiring that locations and movements of farmed deer are recorded). Note, including farmed deer on NLIS is dependent on support from the farmed deer industry.</b>  Lead: NFDAPIC Support: NDMC	Pending industry support for NLIS, escapes from farms can be better managed to prevent new populations from establishing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Industry have been engaged (via meetings and a discussion paper) on options to include farmed deer on the NLIS (2024).</li> </ul>

ACTION	OUTCOME	PERFORMANCE MEASURE BY 2027 (OR EARLIER)
<b>GOAL 3: Protect significant sites from impacts (threatened species, ecological communities, and cultural assets).</b>		
<b>APPROACH: Increase awareness and capability</b>		
<b>3.1 Assess existing site management plans for priority national and internationally significant places of high conservation or cultural value (listed in Appendix 4) to identify and address gaps in effective feral deer control planning.</b> <b>Lead:</b> NFDAPIC, <b>Support:</b> SG, NDMC	Agencies proactively protect high value assets from the future impacts of feral deer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A review by NDMC of existing management plans for the protection of priority places, provides recommendations on future amendments to plans (2024).</li> </ul>
<b>3.2 Support feral deer control programs to protect priority threatened species and ecological communities (listed in Appendix 5), and threatened plant hotspots (to be determined during 2024)</b> <b>Lead:</b> SG, <b>Support:</b> NDMC, RDC	Impacts of feral deer on threatened species and ecosystems are recognised, and management of feral deer is integrated into conservation plans to reduce impact.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A map has been developed to prioritise threatened species, ecological communities and hotspot areas for protection from impacts of feral deer (by 2024).</li> <li>2. Agencies have considered the need for additional control activities and have sought investment for priority activities.</li> <li>3. The impact of deer is reduced in priority areas where deer control programs are funded, measured by the recovery of threatened species or ecological communities in the area.</li> </ul>
<b>APPROACH: National coordination and collaboration</b>		
<b>3.3 Collate information on the environmental impacts of feral deer to underpin inclusion of feral deer management in conservation planning.</b> <b>Lead:</b> SG, <b>Support:</b> NDMC	Impacts of feral deer are well understood and accessible, and inform conservation planning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Reports on environmental impacts of feral deer are available on the Pestsmart or NFDAP websites.</li> </ul>
<b>ALL GOALS</b>		
<b>APPROACH: National coordination and collaboration</b>		
<b>4.1 Adopt and maintain a clear governance structure to support coordination and delivery of actions in the Plan.</b> <b>Lead:</b> NFDAPIC, <b>Support:</b> NDMC, SG, NDMC	The Plan's actions are driven and promoted to ensure actions are adopted.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. An Implementation Committee is established with a Terms of Reference (2023), annual work plans, and a progress review (2025).</li> <li>2. A monitoring, evaluation, reporting and improvement plan is developed (2023).</li> <li>3. Investment is secured for activities that are led by the Committee, by 2023</li> </ul>
<b>4.2 Promote sharing and reporting of feral deer management outcomes, using consistent measures, at national, state and local scales.</b> <b>Lead:</b> NDMC, <b>Support:</b> SG, RDC	<p>Feral deer programs collect cost-effective and appropriate data to evaluate and improve control activities and effectiveness.</p> <p>Data relevant to the evaluation of the Plan will be reported using consistent templates.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. An annual report by NDMC on the trends in state, regional and local management actions (including awareness, participation, adoption of best practice) and outcomes of actions (including spread, population growth and impacts), and progress of the plan towards the performance measures (in this column) provided to state agencies, commonwealth and NFDAPIC.</li> </ul>



# National Feral Deer Action Plan

Draft National Feral Deer Action Plan 2022-2027

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