

24 June 2021

**Chair - Dr Deborah Peterson**  
Wildlife Act 1975 Review Panel  
Department Environment Land Water Planning

## **WILDLIFE ACT 1975 REVIEW SUBMISSION**

Dear Dr Peterson

Thank-you for inviting comment on the review of the Wildlife Act 1975 Review. I hope that the outcome of the revisions and subsequent implementation by government agencies matches the calibre of the review panel.

It is my view that the Wildlife Act 1975 fails to secure Victorian wildlife populations. It does not prevent wildlife taxa from becoming extinct. Rather it appears to be heavily biased towards the 'sustainable use of wildlife'. A revised Act needs to be logical and set the ethic for the State agencies to act on.

I find it bizarre that several deer species along with birds such as partridges and pheasants *were introduced into Australia specifically for hunting purposes* and are included within the definition of 'wildlife' under the Wildlife Act. These species are 'managed' by the State with a focus on ensuring a sustainable harvest hunting resource. The Wildlife Act even sets out the terms for an agency tasked with managing this 'resource' that issues the 'rules of engagement' to reduce the efficacy of hunting terming it 'sporting', i.e. hunting at night using spotlight or other vision aids and set limits in terms of when, where and how these species can be hunted recreationally. While the Australian Deer Association have placed a plaque at Tooradin that celebrates the 'benign' habit of Sambar deer, this species has approaching plague status in many areas and are expanding their distribution. There is growing awareness and understanding about the ecological, agricultural and social impacts of all deer species – there are a growing number of case studies in the scientific literature along with 'popular press' and citizen science tools such as FeralScan. The State is now spending considerable funds paying for aerial and ground shooting operations for some of these species, recognising that Sambar as an example, are anything but benign. The costs associated with these pest control operations is wholly the result of the failure to invest in effective control operations when the distribution of these species were more contained.

We regularly have Sambar in our house yard in Warrandyte that browse the garden within 10 m of the house. While this damage they cause is essentially cosmetic and of nuisance value, the damage these animals cause to native vegetation and creation of soil disturbance along the Yarra River corridor is obvious. Sambar are moving down the Yarra and will presumably turn up in the Melbourne CBD before long. (Newsbreak.... a Sambar was killed in Fitzroy on 5 June 2021. Another was photographed in Clifton Hill on 21 June, 2021). Back in Warrandyte, our property sizes effectively preclude the use of any lethal control other than road traffic collision or erection of tall fences that are a) interfere with movement of other wildlife such as wombats and kangaroos and b) would be at significant cost to build and maintain. Deer are classified as pests in NSW, South Australia, Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia. Parks Victoria staff who are employed to protect land for biodiversity conservation have had to ask for permits to kill deer in the land that they steward. The situation in Victoria has to change. It is worth noting that the hunting lobby provides very little land for it's participants in the State preferring instead to host their hobby in national parks and other land managed for biodiversity conservation. I suggest that State Wildlife Reserves that are managed specifically for hunting invasive species should be named a Hunting Place rather than the delusional current name.

OFFICIAL

If we were to consider other invasive species, the Red fox, European Rabbit and Hares *were also introduced into Australia specifically for hunting purposes*. However, presumably due to their ecological, agricultural and social impacts, populations of these species are classified as pests in Victoria under the Catchment and Land Protection Act. In fact, the State continues to run a bounty scheme for canid pests that seeks to financially reward people from engaging in hunting / control work while 'game' hunters are required to purchase a licence to hunt deer and some bird species.

Populations of feral pigs are still introduced into new sites *specifically for hunting*. These populations are declared and managed as pests due to their ecological, agricultural and social impacts. Pig hunters are likely to spend considerable amounts of money in the pursuit of their hobby in terms of vehicles, travel and hunting equipment – probably similar to deer hunters. Yet the State does not reward these hunters with a bounty, nor charge them a licence to hunt and may even attempt to remove the feral pig populations and prosecute the vandals that seeded the population.

While the above paragraphs all sound a bit confused, they demonstrate the mixed messaging accorded to exotic species in the State. I'm trying to argue for a situation where the State adopts a consistent approach to the classification of exotic species with known impacts – noting that this should include bird and fish species too. Either list them all as Wildlife or list them as Pests. My preference is to see the revised Wildlife Act *afford no protections for exotic species where they exist in the wild*. I'd like to see the CaLP Act provide a new home for these so called 'game' species. This would do nothing to arrest the impact of invasive species but would set the scene for state agencies to redirect their priorities towards native wildlife species.

#### Wildlife Crimes

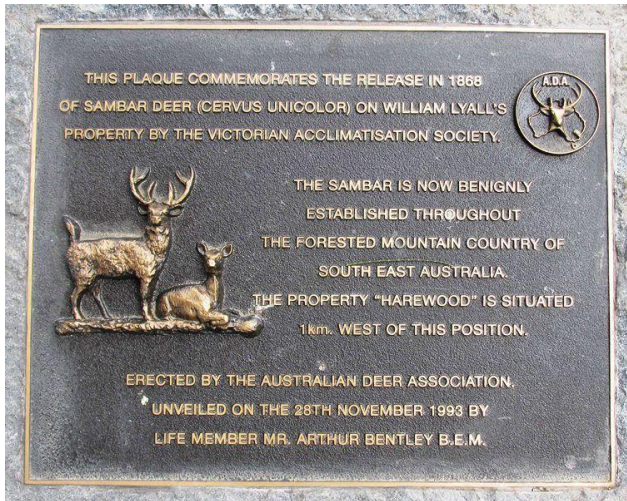
The penalties for wildlife crime need serious review to reflect the seriousness of the incidents to biodiversity. High profile examples of wedge-tailed eagle poisoning & trapping as well as the wombat shooting that triggered the removal of the Unprotection Order and the Mildura man that ran over multiple emus all appear to fall well short of community expectations. I have not heard whether the men associated with shooting of Powerful Owl and parrot in Dixons Creek have been identified and charged. On the 14<sup>th</sup> of June, 2021, a man was observed to release brush-tail possums on French Island – an island that has no endemic populations of possums and struggles to feed the koalas that were taken there in the 1890s. While this man was detained and interviewed by Police, there now has to be an effort to a) prosecute him for this and likely previous incidents and b) more importantly invest considerable time and money to remove those possums so that the population does not establish.

Wildlife crimes should be on at least a similar penalty scheme as those accorded to domestic animals – all animals are sentient, right? It could be argued that the penalties for wildlife crimes should be harsher than for domestic animals, particularly in situations where threatened species are involved.

Enabling legislation that can be used to support the efforts of Local Government, Community and State Government agencies to protect wildlife and wildlife habitats is critical.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Wildlife Act 1975 Review.





The Plaque and the Plague.



Sambar in the Vegie Patch – Warrandyte.



Sambar heading for the apples.