



**Independent Review of the *Wildlife Act 1975*
Submission from the Para Park Co-Operative Game Reserve Ltd.**

Introduction

The Para Park Co-Operative Game Reserve (Para Park) was established in 1965 through the purchase of Sunday Island, a former grazing property in Victoria, with the objective: *“To manage the natural attributes of Sunday Island for the production of game species, the major focus being the hog deer, in such a manner as to be in harmony with conservation of the other fauna and flora of the region”*

The Co-Operative consists of up to two hundred share-holding “members” who also pay quarterly management fees and complete work commitments to ensure the maintenance of the Island’s facilities and large wildlife management area.

Whilst Para Park has a good number of members who do not hunt hog deer, the deer management program remains the central driver and motivator of management activities.

Sunday Island

Sunday Island is a barrier island on the southern coast of Victoria in Corner Inlet.

Para Park owns and manages the freehold of Sunday Island which is approximately 16km² of private land within the Nooramunga Marine and Coastal Park.

Flora

As far as it is practicable, wildlife on Sunday Island is managed to a level which is sustainable, which allows for animal health and which protects environmental values.

Sunday Island contains a diversity of habitat types. The centre of the island consists of coastal and heathy woodland ridges running east-west. In low-lying areas, towards the coast there is a band of estuarine scrub. Between the scrub and the high tide mark there are typically extensive areas of estuarine flat grassland. The grassland blends into coastal saltmarsh and below the high tide mark there are extensive stands of mangrove shrubland.

Prior to coming into the ownership of Para Park, Sunday Island was subjected to heavy grazing pressure for around a century, which undoubtedly affected the type and distribution of flora.

Fauna

The hog deer (*Axis porcinus*) on Sunday Island are managed according to the Para Park Wildlife Management Plan which is updated at regular intervals.

Along with hog deer, Sunday Island is home to a range of other browsing wildlife, notably a small population of eastern grey kangaroos (*Macropus giganteus*), a large population of swamp wallabies (*Wallabia bicolor*), and a small population of fallow deer (*Dama dama*). Feral cats (*Felis catus*) were eradicated from the Island, there are no foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*) on the Island and rabbits (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) appear to have been successfully eradicated.

Notable wildlife species to benefit from the control of introduced predators and the exclusion of livestock grazing are the eastern pygmy possum (*Cercartetus nanus*) and the swamp antechinus (*Antechinus minimus maritimus*).

Research

Wildlife research has been a core focus of Para Park since the beginning. The first project being supporting Dr Peter Taylor in his research on hog deer which commenced in 1966 and concluded with the completion of his PhD thesis in 1971.

Research has been ongoing ever since with Sunday Island offering a unique controlled environment for the study of both game and non-game species of wildlife.

Para Park and the Wildlife Act

Hog deer are managed during the April open season through the tag system for game licence holders and outside of the open season on a management permit issued by the Game Management Authority of Victoria (GMA). Para Park operates an approved checking station for hog deer, reporting to GMA for deer taken in the April open season and maintaining independent data for all hog deer taken on the Island since 1972.

Macropods are managed through the Authority to Control Wildlife (ATCW) System under the control of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP). Access to ATCW's can vary greatly from time to time, making it difficult to manage macropods to an appropriate level over the long term.

Whilst the management of grazers under varying regulatory and bureaucratic regimes is manageable by Para Park, the "ideal" state would be an agreed long term grazing wildlife management permit which would allow Para Park to better manage the grazing wildlife strategically and sustainably.

Hog deer as a game animal

The management of wild hog deer as a game animal underpins the management of all other fauna and flora on Sunday Island as it ensures a sufficient supply of both capital and labour through the ongoing active membership of co-operative shareholders.

If game management of hog deer were not to continue, the property would likely revert to grazing livestock in order to remain economically viable. Such an outcome would invariably result in negative impacts on the wide array of flora and fauna on the Island.

Game status for wild deer does not impact their effective management and a change to appease the ideological wants of a vocal minority would likely result in unforeseen negative impacts.

Recommendations

Changes should be made to the Wildlife Act to allow for private land managers to manage wildlife populations holistically under an agreed wildlife management permit.

The game status of wild deer should be retained.