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25 June 2021

Submission to the Independent Review of Victoria's Wildlife Act 1975

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning

Dear reviewers,

My name is [REDACTED] and I have lived in Victoria all my life. I love Victoria for its beautiful wild spaces and have always felt a deep personal connection to the native plants and animals I see when I'm out and about. I am an avid gardener, a member and supporter of many environment groups. I volunteer at my local park, and I have been a regular volunteer at the Dandenong Ranges Botanic Gardens for many years. I have connected with the native biodiversity across Victoria throughout my life. I have also personally seen the damage that feral deer can do when left to wreak havoc in our natural spaces.

At Dandenong Ranges Botanic Gardens, at Olinda (formerly the National Rhododendron Gardens), where I have spent a lot of time, feral deer have been particularly damaging. They [eat and trample the vegetation](#) and then [spread out into the bush where the destruction they cause is significant enough that the understory can't regrow](#). The rhododendrons are fairly rare and are confined to high elevation areas like the Gardens, so when deer come through, they damage what is already limited habitat for these plants. I am also particularly fond of the lyrebirds that make their home around the gardens. They are usually shy but often when I have volunteered at the gardens, a curious female has come to scratch around in the dirt nearby me. The deer trample the mounds and nests used by the lyrebirds and as a result I have had fewer sightings of these lovely birds in recent years. Further afield they stir up mud in our beautiful wetlands, affecting water quality and destroying habitat for frogs, insects and birds (*Review key issue 3.1, 3.3*).

Deer and people do not mix, and it is unsafe for the gardens, a busy tourist attraction, to have deer. When the deer go near roads they can cause dangerous road accidents. They also break into agricultural land and eat crops, which is especially devastating to farmers who were affected by the fires last year and have been hit again with the recent storms.

It is estimated that there are 1 million feral deer in Victoria ([Invasive Species Council](#)), and their populations are growing exponentially ([Hone, Duncan and Forsyth, 2010](#)). Evidence from the federal Senate inquiry into ['The impact of feral deer, pigs and goats in Australia' \(2019\)](#) showed that deer colonise new ranges in patterns known as 'ungulate irruption' where they enter a new range, the population booms, they browse everything available to them, the population crashes, and then their population fluctuates seasonally within the new range. Deer populations are spreading further and further into pristine natural spaces and encroaching on our towns and cities. Victoria's native wildlife won't be able to recover if the deer crisis is allowed to continue, and every bit of damage and maintenance costs taxpayer dollars.

Sambar deer are listed as a Potentially Threatening Process in the 2007 Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act (*Review key issue 2.1*) because they drive the reduction of native vegetation biodiversity

across Victoria. The above mentioned Senate inquiry has called on all states to register deer as a pest species, and they fit the Victorian criteria under the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994 due to the extent of the environmental damage they cause. There is no question that deer are harmful to Victoria's natural heritage and, in the case of Sambar deer, they've been recognized as a harmful invasive animal in Victorian primary legislation for 27 years.

While all this is happening, the Wildlife Act classifies all Victorian deer as protected game species. Although the [Victorian Deer Management Strategy \(2020\)](#) removed some of the red tape preventing control of deer populations, actions to unprotect deer are overdue and are crucial as part of the current Wildlife Act reform. The Wildlife Act is simply not doing its job protecting native wildlife and needs to be updated to match the current evidence and attitudes (*Review key issue 1.1*) towards non-native species.

**In your recommendations to the Environment Minister, I urge you to recommend the reform of the Wildlife Act with the following suggestions:**

- Protections for exotic invasive species like feral deer need to be removed. A Senate inquiry has called on all states to register deer as a pest species. It is definitely time to unprotect deer in Victoria. Deer cause significant environmental damage and should be listed as a pest species under the Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994.
- The Wildlife Act 1975 should be titled the Native Wildlife Act and should properly protect all native vertebrate fauna.
- The Authority to Control Wildlife system needs to be reformed so that clear principles are followed, threatened species are properly considered, and so that there is far greater transparency and monitoring.

Thank you for your time and efforts in this review of the Wildlife Act, especially for your consideration of my submission.

Sincerely,

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