



LANDCARE VICTORIA Inc. (LVI)

29 June 2021

Dr Deborah Peterson
Chairperson
Independent Review of Victoria's Wildlife Act 1975

Via Engage Victoria website

Dear Dr Peterson

Submission into the Review of the *Wildlife Act 1975*

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the Review of the Victorian *Wildlife Act 1975*. While acknowledging the wide scope of the Act and your review, this submission focuses on the particular issue of the status of introduced deer under the Act.

Landcare Victoria Inc. is the peak body for around 600 landcare group members, which in turn have in excess of 17,000 members who volunteer to protect and enhance the natural environment and to promote and support sustainable agriculture. This submission reflects the widespread concern of the landcare community about the rapidly increasing threat created by feral deer.

Deer harm native vegetation by browsing, trampling and antler rubbing; they damage wetlands by wallowing; and they are a threat to landcare revegetation projects. Deer compete with livestock for pasture, they are a potential reservoir for serious livestock diseases; they damage fences and may attack livestock. They are a risk on our roads and are beginning to appear in towns where they damage gardens and other community assets. Their populations are rapidly increasing.

The impacts of deer on landcare objectives are well-illustrated in an article in the most recent issue of the *Landcare and Catchment Management Magazine*: <https://www.landcarevic.org.au/landcare-magazine/winter-2021/managing-deer-in-the-mitta-valley/>. The excellent leadership of the regional landcare community in addressing the threat of deer should be applauded, but it is important to recognise that this is a cost to the community, diverting effort from more productive activity.

During the colonial era, acclimatisation societies introduced numerous exotic species to Australia, often to provide a resource for recreational hunting. Many of these introduced species, most notably rabbits and foxes, have inflicted huge damage on Australian ecosystems and agriculture and we deplore the short-sightedness of the people who introduced them. The various species of introduced deer are causing harm to the environment and agriculture in much the same way. Deer populations have rapidly expanded in recent decades. If they ever were in need of legislative protection, that need has passed.

That the time for legislative protection of feral animals as wildlife has passed is made clear in the recommendations of the Australian Senate *Inquiry into the Impacts of Feral Deer Pigs and Goats in Australia*. In particular, recommendation 8:

The committee recommends that all Australian jurisdictions make any necessary changes to their existing legislative and regulatory frameworks to:

- *ensure that wild deer are treated as an environmental pest;*
- *maximise the ability of landholders to control feral deer on their land; and*
- *maximise the ability of park managers to control feral deer in World Heritage Areas and National Parks.*

Removing the protected wildlife status presently applied to deer will remove impediments to control programs. Perhaps more importantly it will ensure that the Act reflects the values and priorities of modern Australia instead of those of the nineteenth century.

While deer, along with non-indigenous quail, pheasants, and partridges are explicitly defined as wildlife by the Act, the Act provides for the inclusion of other non-indigenous taxa as wildlife should the Governor-in-Council declare them to be. The Act should be amended to ensure that, should any similar provision be included in future amendments (and the need for this is questionable), a much clearer framework for any such declaration is included. The Governor-in-Council should be obliged to transparently consider the risks and consequences of declaring non-native species as wildlife.

Should you wish to discuss the matter, feel free to contact me on 0417 052 495, or andrew.maclean@lvi.org.au.

Yours sincerely



Andrew Maclean
Chief Executive Officer