



# Deer Management Fact Sheet Information for Landholders

## Feral Deer in your area

Deer are an introduced species in Australia. Six feral deer species have established wild populations in Australia, with the distribution and abundance of some species increasing in Victoria. The main feral deer species you're likely to encounter are Sambar, Fallow and Red deer.



**Sambar Stag**

Sambar are large (110-270kg) and live in family groups



**Sambar Hind**



**Red Deer Stag**

Red Deer are medium size (90-160kg), living in single sex groups



**Red Deer Hind**



**Fallow Deer Stag**

Fallow are smaller (35-90kg) usually found in herds



**Fallow Deer Hind**

Illustrations: Game Management Authority website

## Deer harbour

Deer are found in bushland and open forest where there is access to pasture that provides food, water and shelter. This is also found in urban fringe areas and along corridors of bush and creek lines. Deer will follow these corridors, adapting to living near people and their animals.

The outer eastern and northern fringes of Melbourne are part of the geographical range of Sambar, Fallow and Red deer.

## Deer Behaviour

Deer display territorial behaviour (actively protecting their patch), and have dominance hierarchies in their groups. They can exhibit aggressive behaviour particularly the larger deer to humans and livestock including horses. They have increased in both distribution and density across Victoria, especially since the mid-1990s.

In this area deer occur on land owned or managed by individuals, corporations and public authorities with the likelihood of a single deer being found across all of these land tenures in a single day.

Deer occupy large territories, but will be seen moving from their bedding areas into adjacent farmland when there is little feed available in the bushland areas.

## The Status of Deer

All deer in Victoria are managed under the *Wildlife Act 1975* by the Game Management Authority (GMA). The GMA is part of the Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions; it has responsibility for the management of game animals.

- Deer are unprotected on private land when they are proven to cause damage, and they can be controlled with a Permission to Destroy Deer on Private Property, signed by the landowner.
- Deer are game species on public land, and also subject to game hunting regulations.

## Damage caused by Deer

Deer cause damage to plants, fences and agriculture as well as increasingly coming into contact with people and vehicles on roads. They are large, heavy hooved animals, capable of covering large areas, with indiscriminate eating of vegetation, both native and planted. Deer are ruminants - even-toed ungulate (hoofed) mammals that chew the cud regurgitated from its rumen (first stomach), much like cows.

- Grazing of ground-storey (grasses, forbs and groundcovers) – reducing food for native animals, and leading to bare earth and erosion
- Browsing of mid-storey shrubs – changing forest structure and cover, and destroying plants that are food sources for important pollinators (bees, wasps etc)
- Rubbing with antlers – destroying fences and trees
- Destroying home gardens, vegetable patches, large scale crops and vineyards through eating and trampling
- Causing erosion and flattening of vegetation from wallowing
- Reduction in water quality through wallowing



## Control Options

### Fences

Due to their size, it is very difficult to exclude deer, however deer-proof fences of 1.8m high can be constructed, and modified to allow continued movement of native animals underneath.

Protection of threatened plants (e.g. orchids) is usually undertaken through construction of small (sometimes temporary) fences or cages over individual plants, or fencing out larger areas with deer-proof fencing.

Crops, pasture, orchards and vines can be protected through large deer-proof fences but they are cost-prohibitive for very large areas.

### Destruction

Shooting of deer is becoming more common as their numbers increase, however the long-term effectiveness of localised shooting programs is not yet fully understood.

Shooting is an easier option in open farmland areas, but can also be considered in peri-urban areas - but only where professional contractors are used, who possess appropriate firearms and silencer licences, and public place permits.

- Recreational hunting is prohibited at night-time, and the use of spotlights (including any source of artificial light, infrared device, night vision or heat detecting device) is also banned.
- Where deer are causing damage on Crown Land, an approved Authority to Control Wildlife (ATCW) permit from DELWP / GMA will allow destruction of a specified number of deer.
- In addition to hunting and shooting regulations, many areas of Nillumbik require a Public Place Permit. This is permission to use a firearm in a populous or built up area. The granting of this permit is determined and administered by Victoria Police. They are usually only issued to professional / commercial deer controllers.

Deer control on private land is not administered by the GMA where it is not for recreational purposes, however if the shooter is intercepted by a GMA officer or Victoria Police they must be able to show written approval from the land owner and a Public Place Permit if required.

Recreational hunters are not able to hunt on private properties in populous areas, even with permission of the landholder, as their Firearms Licence prohibits use in populous places, and they would not be able to obtain the approval of Victoria Police for the necessary public place permits.

## Current deer management actions available for private land

Action	Cost	Effectiveness
Accept deer as part of landscape	Low	N/A
Guard individual/groups of plants	Medium-High, maintenance required	High
Property Deer exclusion fence	High, with ongoing maintenance	High
Incorporate electric fence option	High	Medium - options poorly known.
Recreational hunting to manage deer numbers	Low-High, ongoing cost.	Medium - re-invasion can occur; Must be ongoing long term.
Culling program (with signed Permission form) to manage deer numbers	Medium-High, ongoing cost	Medium - re-invasion can occur; Must be ongoing long term.
Harvesting (with signed Permission form) to manage deer numbers	Medium-High, ongoing cost. Some cost may be recouped through the sale of deer meat.	Medium - re-invasion can occur; Must be ongoing long term.

## Private land deer management actions

- Survey your land for deer sign, damage and record; you can use the DeerScan app. Recording these sightings enables Councils to form a clearer picture of where deer are congregating and moving over the change of seasons, and how numbers are changing over time.
- Speak with your neighbours, to form or join a local deer action group or Landcare group;
- Consider deer exclusion fencing;
- Your Local Council, Landcare Group or Deer Action Group can help you find fencing contractors, professional deer controllers/harvesters and/or game meat processors;
- Make a private agreement to manage deer impact on your land by using a professional deer harvesting contractor on a regular basis, particularly during times where agricultural activities are requiring protection.
- Contact the Sporting Shooters Association of Australia (Victoria) about the Farmer Assist program, offering free pest animal control to large landholders through the use of their fully accredited and insured volunteers.
- The Vertebrate Pest Management Association Australia is another option for sourcing contact details for deer management contractors.

## Management: the difference between hunting, culling and harvesting feral deer

Hunting is a recreational activity that includes the elements of fair chase and the taking of 'trophy deer' and or removing meat for personal consumption.

A deer cull program aims to remove deer that are causing damage and loss on your land. Culling is done under controlled circumstances, overseen by the land manager.

Harvesting includes removal of the animals and delivering them (within certain restrictions) to a meat processing facility. Some knackeries are able to process deer for human consumption, pet food or render. Harvesting can be time-consuming with removal of culled animals from steep or heavily vegetated areas being a difficult process. This may reduce the number of deer culled per night.

Options to conduct a harvesting program on your land include:

- using the services of a professional deer control contractor;
- joining a community based scheme organised by local landholders / Landcare / Council sponsored environmental management program;
- employing the services of a commercial deer harvesting business selling the deer meat.



You should ask the deer controller to provide a property shooting plan.

This outlines their processes for obtaining permissions (e.g. Public Place Permit where required), safe humane destruction, carcass removal, neighbour notifications, and your written permission for them to harvest the feral deer.

## Council: Actions on deer concerns in the community

Councils are responding to community requests for help and direction to help manage problems of feral deer damaging property, community safety issues and environmental loss on public and private land.

The Council is being proactive, advocating to government for more effective deer management. Council is requesting that the State Government and Victoria Police:

- ensure that firearms use in the commercial deer harvesting industry is regulated;
- develop a peri-urban best practice firearms protocol and standards; and
- develop a Victorian deer control & firearms competency and accuracy accreditation (with a training organisation i.e. TAFE) for both contractors and volunteer shooters particularly in the peri-urban context
- Council also aims to help landholders better understand the issues in deer management and create opportunities for improved community-based responses to manage deer problems in our area.

## More Information

Game Management Authority: 136 186 (Zachary Powell)

Prime Safe: (03) 9685 7333 (Rick Partelli)

Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning, Deer Management: (03) 9637 9486 (Damien McMaster, Invasive Species, Biodiversity Division)

Sporting Shooters Association of Australia, Farmer Assist Program: (08) 7099 6431 (Matthew Godson)

## Resources

Controlling Deer on Private Property - [www.gma.vic.gov.au/research/deer/deer-on-private-property](http://www.gma.vic.gov.au/research/deer/deer-on-private-property)

Deer meat processing - [www.gma.vic.gov.au/hunting/deer/fact-sheets/deer-meat-processing](http://www.gma.vic.gov.au/hunting/deer/fact-sheets/deer-meat-processing)

Commercial Deer processing - [www.primesafe.vic.gov.au/licensing/meat/game-meat-processing/](http://www.primesafe.vic.gov.au/licensing/meat/game-meat-processing/)

Deer Recording Phone App - <https://www.feralscan.org.au/deerscan/>

Public Place Permit - <https://www.police.vic.gov.au/public-place-permits>

Farmer Assist Program - <https://farmerassist.com.au/>

Vertebrate Pest Management Association Australia (VPMAA) <https://vpmaa.org.au/>

## Council Information

[www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au](http://www.whittlesea.vic.gov.au)

[www.manningham.vic.gov.au](http://www.manningham.vic.gov.au)

[www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au](http://www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au)

[www.cardinia.vic.gov.au](http://www.cardinia.vic.gov.au)

[www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au](http://www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au)

This reference material has been prepared by the Yarra Catchment Deer Network.