FERAL DEER CONTROL

A Strategy for Tasmania

Planning for a new way ahead

August 2021

BOB BROWN FOUNDATION

invasive species council

This report was produced by the Invasive Species Council for the Bob Brown Foundation.

Document details

Feral Deer Control: A Strategy for Tasmania. Invasive Species Council. August 2021.

ISBN: 978-0-6488809-3-6

Bob Brown Foundation funded and commissioned the Invasive Species Council to prepare this Feral Deer Control Strategy for Tasmania to support a campaign for more effective control of feral deer in Tasmania.

- Principal author: Peter Jacobs, Deer Project Officer, Invasive Species Council
- Report design: John Sampson
- Mapping and GIS: Alpine Environmental Science

Acknowledgements

Many people and organisations in Tasmania with an interest in conservation, agriculture, forestry, ecological restoration, land and deer management and research kindly and willingly contributed to the preparation of this Feral Deer Control Strategy for Tasmania.

Bob Brown Foundation and Invasive Species Council acknowledge with deep respect the palawa (Tasmanian Aboriginal) people as the Traditional Owners of lutruwita (Tasmania). We value the involvement of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre and their concern for the impact of feral deer on their vast Aboriginal cultural landscape.

About Bob Brown Foundation

Bob Brown Foundation is a non-profit fund which will promote the protection and enhancement of, and the provision of information and education about, the wild and scenic beauty of Tasmania, the ecological integrity of Australia, Earth's wilderness and the happiness of humanity on Earth.

About the Invasive Species Council

The Invasive Species Council was formed in 2002 to advocate for stronger laws, policies and programs to keep Australian biodiversity safe from weeds, feral animals, exotic pathogens and other invaders. It is a not-for-profit charitable organisation funded predominantly by donations from supporters and philanthropic organisations.

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Cover photos: Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, Martin Hawes; feral deer, Faye Beswick; farming landscape, Peter Jacobs

Inquiries

Invasive Species Council

Address: PO Box 818, Katoomba NSW 2780, Australia

ABN: 27 101 522 829

Web: invasives.org.au

Email: contact@invasives.org.au

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Executive summary

Tasmania is a remarkable landscape of unique and outstanding natural and cultural values along with highly valued agriculture. Fallow deer were introduced to this landscape in 1836 to provide a hunting resource. By the 1970s the population had grown to between 7000 and 8000. In 2019, a survey of only part of the area occupied by feral deer identified around 54,000 feral deer. This was despite the reported removal of 30,000 feral deer that same year. While the exact numbers are uncertain, it is clear that, based on the reported 11.5% annual growth rate and despite take from hunting and crop protection, Tasmania's feral deer population now numbers well above 2019 estimates, occupying more than 2 million hectares or 27% of the state.

Feral deer impact on a wide range of environmental, economic and community values. They have invaded areas of outstanding natural values, including the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, national parks and other conservation reserves, where they cause significant damage to native vegetation and ecologically fragile areas and as such are an assault on the living Aboriginal cultural landscape of Tasmania. Feral deer are having a significant economic and psychological impact on farmers as many are fighting a losing battle against feral deer. They are having a major impact on the viability of tree planting for ecological restoration, forest plantations and carbon farming. Feral deer also invade urban amenity areas causing considerable damage to parks and gardens and are a threat to motorists.

Climate and habitat suitability modelling predicts that 56% of Tasmania could be inhabited by fallow deer and, based on a conservative annual growth rate of 10%, the population will be more than 1 million by 2050. If nothing is done, this situation presents a grave outlook.

The management of feral deer in Tasmania is conflicted. Fallow deer are recognised as a game resource and as such listed as 'partly protected wildlife' in Schedule 4 of Tasmania's Wildlife (General) Regulations 2010. The Tasmanian Government's Quality Deer Management policy is in essence about maintaining a quality herd of feral deer for hunting and trophies. This is a hangover from outdated eras that considered deer "wildlife" to be protected as game animals. This policy has hindered effective control of feral deer in Tasmania as the population has grown and spread. Feral deer have evolved from being a resource for the enjoyment of hunters to now being a serious pest.

It is clear current policies and approaches are far from adequate in dealing with the growing feral deer problem in Tasmania. There is now an urgent need for Tasmania to take a new, biosecurity-based approach to managing feral deer. This fundamentally requires removing the legally binding, "partly protected" status of deer from the Wildlife Regulations (2010), which currently hinders effective control, and instead manage feral deer as a pest under the Biosecurity Act (2019). The challenge will be to the hunting community and Game Services Tasmania who covet the hunting culture and protection of feral deer for quality game, to approach the issue from a different perspective. Recreational hunters would play a role in implementing this strategy, but their interests in quality feral deer herds and trophies will no longer dominate at the expense of nature, farming and people.

The vision of this strategy for control of feral deer in Tasmania is:

By 2032 feral deer in Tasmania are confined to a population of less than 10,000, occurring only in the Midlands Control and Containment Zone, where they are managed to fully protect high value natural, cultural, agricultural and forestry assets.

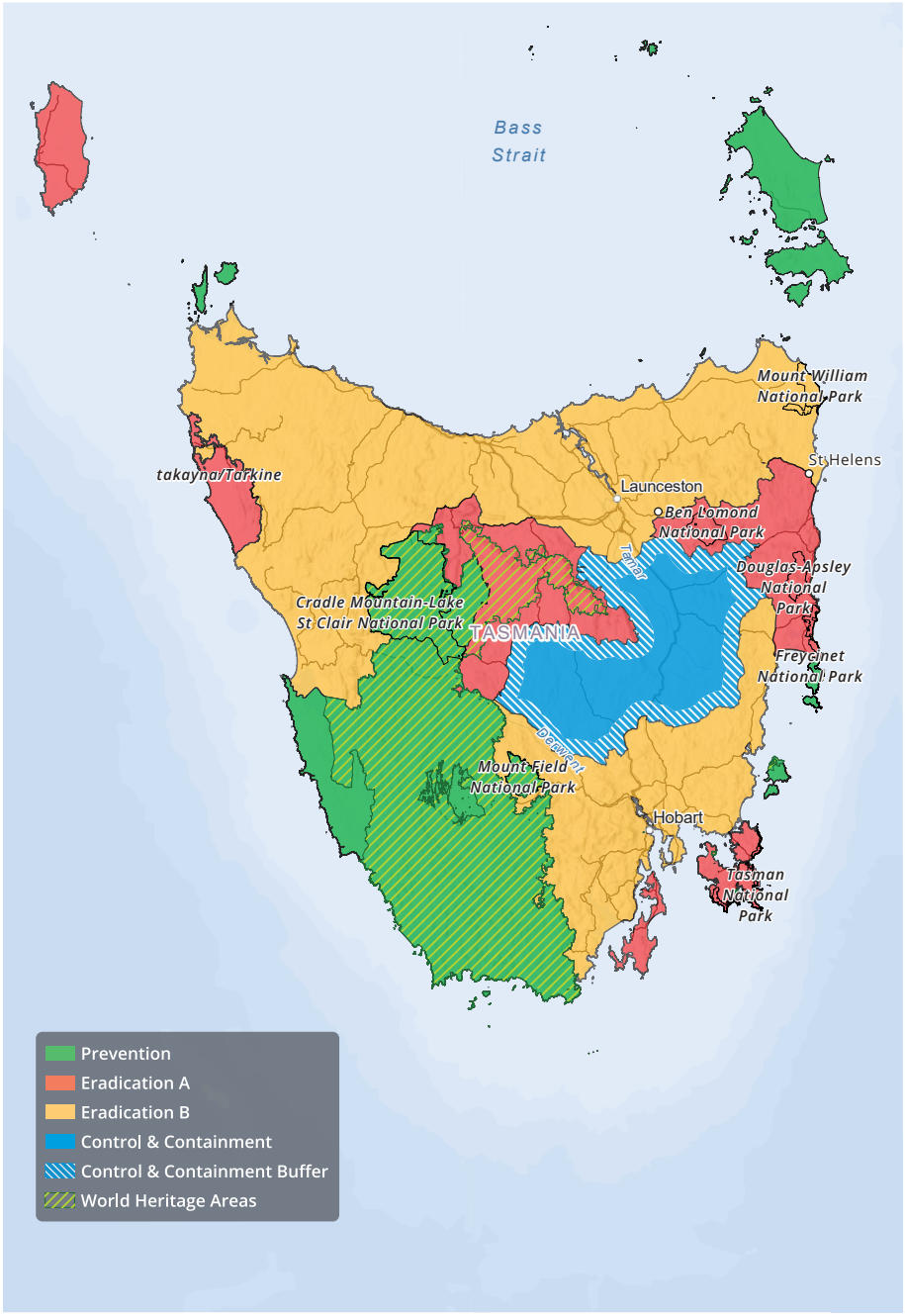
To achieve this, the strategy presents an approach that utilises biosecurity principles for managing invasive species by establishing area-based objectives. There are five feral deer biosecurity zones: Prevention, Eradication A, Eradication B, Control and Containment and Asset Protection. Each zone has a clear objective in regard to feral deer. Hindrances to land owners controlling deer will be removed and professional pest controllers using the most effective and humane methods will be utilised to control and eradicate feral deer.

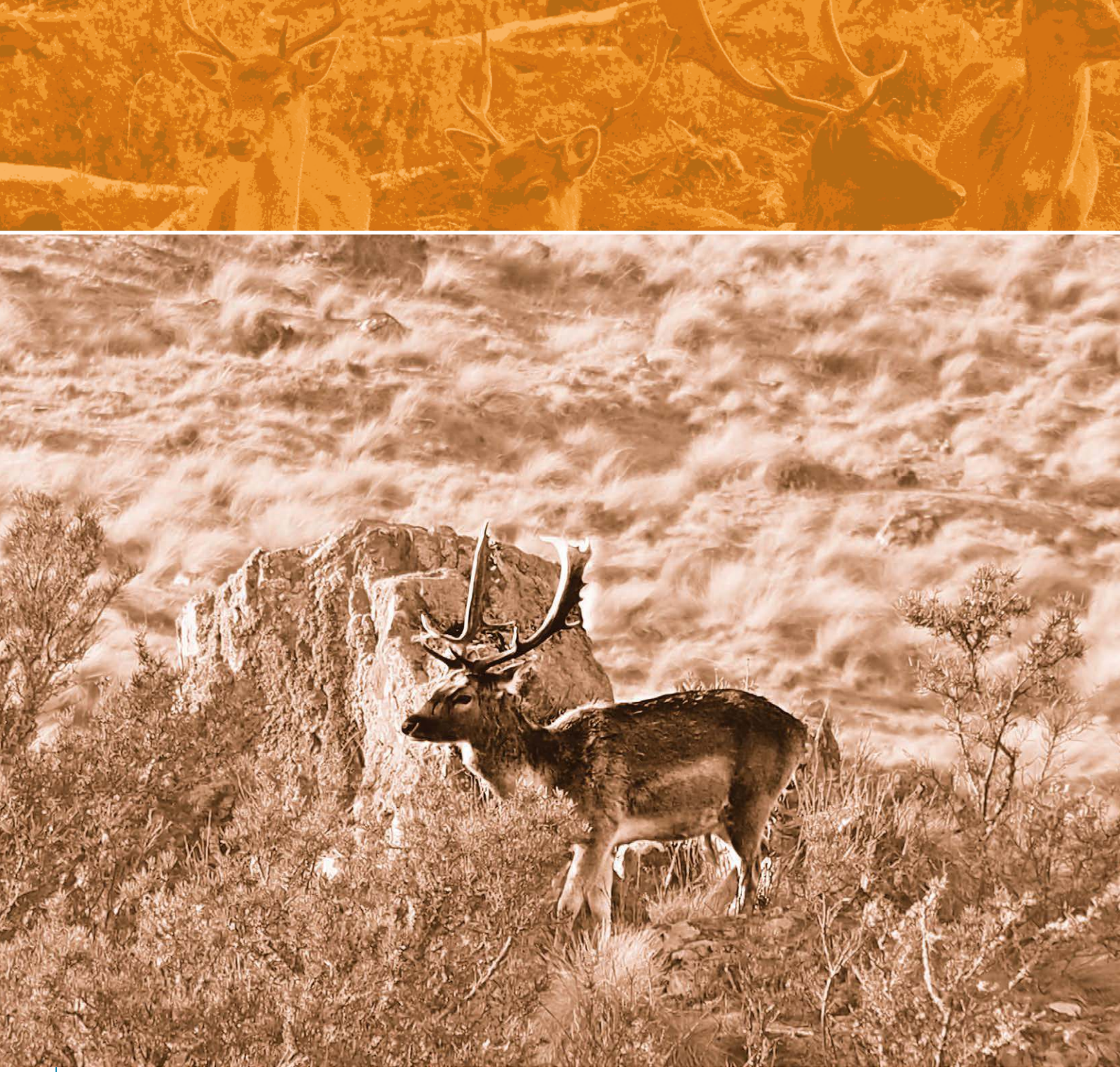
This strategy presents 28 key actions to support the implementation of the plan.

The substantial shift in approach to controlling feral deer in Tasmania requires strong leadership beyond the current hunting-based paradigm. This strategy calls for a multi-disciplinary Feral Deer Control Taskforce led by Biosecurity Tasmania to take leadership in planning and managing the implementation of this new biosecurity approach to controlling feral deer.

To build capacity, develop best practice and achieve change it will be vital for community groups, conservation organisations, the Tasmanian Aboriginal community, land owners, government and hunters to be working in collaboration.

It's time to remove the conflict and act to prevent the predicted substantial escalation of feral deer across Tasmania. The $1.8 million annual cost of implementing this feral deer strategy is in the order of only 2% of the $100 million a year likely annual cost of feral deer to the community and economy. Investing now in effective control is extremely prudent – it will save millions of dollars that will be needed if feral deer numbers are allowed to continue to escalate.





"We're sitting on a biological powder keg. These animals want to expand their range. They want to reproduce as fast they can."

– Professor David Bowman, UTAS

Part 1. Feral deer in Tasmania

Tasmania: A place of outstanding values

Tasmania is a remarkable landscape of unique and outstanding natural and cultural values along with highly valued agriculture. There are six world heritage sites, highlighted by the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA) that covers 27% of the state. These areas of outstanding biodiversity and Aboriginal cultural values are recognised globally and the international nature-based tourism trade is a cornerstone of Tasmania's economy. Being an island, Tasmania has been fortunate in having few feral pests compared to mainland Australia and this is to be valued and defended. For Tasmanian Aborigines, a healthy environment is crucial to the health of the cultural landscape of Tasmania.

Failure to control exploding numbers of feral deer across Tasmania could see them invade the world-renowned Cradle Mountain – Lake St Clair National Park. Photo: John Sampson

Feral deer: A threat to this special place

Population and distribution; growing rapidly

Fallow deer were introduced in to Tasmania from England in 1836 to provide a hunting resource. For the next 150 years or so, the Tasmanian population of fallow deer remained low, within about 60km of the initial release regions in the Midlands and eastern regions of Tasmania. Around that time there were said to be 600-800 fallow deer in the wild (Bentley 1978). The area occupied by deer subsequently grew to what became known as 'the deer range' – the area occupied by fallow deer – which centred around the Midlands.

By 1972, the population had grown significantly, with an estimated 7000-8000 feral deer occupying about 400,000 hectares in the central and eastern Midlands (Chapman 1980). This population surge and spread has continued. Since the 1970s the 'deer range' has expanded significantly as a consequence of a variety of factors including escapes and releases from deer farms and the natural expansion of the population (DPIPWE 2011). An aerial survey of the Midlands and Highlands areas in 2019 estimated the population in that area then to be around 54,000, despite the survey being late in the hunting and crop protection culling season, which reportedly removed 30,000 deer that year (Lethbridge et al. 2020). The survey was limited to the "deer range", suitable for aerial surveillance and excluded other areas where feral deer are known to be present. These factors indicate the total feral deer population in Tasmania during 2019 was likely to be well over that reported from the survey.

While the exact numbers today are uncertain, it is clear there are now well over 54,000 feral deer, occupying more than 2 million hectares (27% of Tasmania). Based on climate and habitat suitability modelling, it is predicted that 56% of Tasmania could be inhabited by fallow deer (Cunningham et al. 2021) and based

on a plausible annual growth rate of 10%, the population will be over 1 million by 2050.

During the period 1985-2019:

- **The feral deer population in Tasmania increased 40-fold growing at on average, 11.5% annually.**
- **The core area of feral deer presence increased 2.9-fold and now spans more than 27% of Tasmania's land area. (Cunningham et al. 2021)**

In addition, satellite populations have established outside "the deer range" as a result of deer farm escapes and deliberate releases. Satellite populations occur at a number of places including at Temma, Bruny Island and the north-east coast. Despite some efforts, no satellite herds have been eradicated (DPIPWE 2011) and no active local eradication programs are presently occurring.

The growth and spread of feral deer in Tasmania are sustained and uncontained despite hunting and culling for crop protection. Fallow deer is now the ecologically predominant large wild herbivore in Tasmanian ecosystems, with no natural predator (Johnson 2020). This situation presents a grave outlook for impacts of feral deer on the environment, economy and the community.

The impacts of feral deer

Fallow deer are versatile feeders, capable of either grazing or browsing, and can occupy cleared or open grassy areas, open woodlands, forests and scattered timber farmland. They may be seen in montane and alpine areas through to cleared open farmland. Fallow deer can form large herds and their total grazing pressure can be significant.

Global plea for help

The Invasive Species Council and former Greens leader Christine Milne wrote to World Heritage governing body UNESCO in 2020 to plea for international help to address the 'urgent and increasing threat' feral deer now pose to the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.

Natural areas

Feral deer have invaded areas of outstanding natural values, including the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, national parks and other conservation reserves. There is a large presence of feral deer in the Tasmanian Midlands Biodiversity Hotspot.

Feral fallow deer cause significant damage to native vegetation and ecologically fragile areas by overgrazing, browsing on branches, trampling, ring-barking, thrashing and rubbing their antlers against trees, spreading weeds, creating trails, concentrating nutrients, causing erosion and, consequently, degrading water quality in creeks and rivers.

The grazing pressure of feral deer can result in the loss of density and diversity of vegetation in peatlands, heathlands, grasslands and the forest understorey, which can in turn reduce habitat quality for indigenous wildlife (Forsyth et al. 2010). Grazing and browsing also effects natural regeneration following fire and other disturbances.

A number of Tasmanian native animals, listed threatened plants, invertebrates and vegetation communities are susceptible to feral deer impacts. They remove food sources that would normally be available to native animals. Ground dwelling or nesting birds may be threatened by trampling of eggs and/or nests by fallow deer, and ground dwelling marsupials may be threatened by competition for food or trampling of habitat by deer (Jensz & Finley 2013).

The community values the native animals of Tasmania and the naturalness of the Tasmanian landscape. Its wilderness areas are an international drawcard. To frequently see an exotic animal in national parks and other natural areas is an anathema to the Tasmanian nature experience. Not only do feral deer damage the natural environment, they offend the perception of being in a wild natural place of native plants and animals interacting and coexisting. Feral deer do not belong in Tasmania's wild places.

"I can no longer deal with the massive impact of feral deer on my property under the current rule of one size fits all. We need a tactical approach across Tasmania that recognises feral deer will need to be managed differently from one area to another."

– Roderic O'Connor, Midlands Farmer

Aboriginal cultural values

Tasmanian Aboriginal cultural heritage is an unbroken, living culture that is inseparable from the landscape, seascape and skyscape (DPIPWE 2016). The demonstrable impact of feral deer on the condition of biodiversity and the landscape is, in essence, an assault on the living Aboriginal cultural landscape of Tasmania.

"Tasmania is a vast cultural landscape for Tasmanian Aborigines. Impacts on the environment such as from feral deer are a destruction of our cultural values and heritage."

– Nala Mansell, Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre

Tree planting: Restoration, plantations and carbon farming

The damage to plantings from browsing tree seedlings, ringbarking stems and smashing the branches of saplings, requires very expensive mitigation measures. This impact is hindering the restoration of grassy woodlands in the Midlands National Biodiversity Hotspot and impacting tree planting for plantations, carbon farming and environmental offsets. The economic impact on forest plantations is significant. Forestry companies need to invest heavily in professional deer control in and around plantations to protect plantings.

"Trees on farms can improve farm productivity and in turn increase the wealth of farmers. The cost of managing feral deer impacts in revegetation projects is making Tasmanians farms unattractive for tree planting funding. The green carbon economy, including funding for planting trees is expected to 'boom' over the next decade, so Tasmania risks missing out on substantial funding and jobs, as well as the benefits that trees provide to farmers."

– Elisa Raulings, Greening Australia

Agriculture

The high density of feral deer on and adjacent to farmlands is having a significant economic and psychological impact on farmers as many are fighting a losing battle against feral deer. Feral deer compete with stock for food and unless effectively controlled will displace much sheep production. Feral deer graze improved pastures and a range of high value crops. They impact on biodiversity on farms and damage fences. As farmers have improved pasture and crops and increased irrigation and fertilisation to lift production, they have simultaneously provided quality browsing and grazing for feral deer, which has contributed to increased feral deer populations. The cost to farmers is significant in lost production and forced them to put in place mitigation measures such as expensive fences and other plant protection measures. They also have to contract professional shooters or manage hunters. Surveys of farmers indicate that feral deer are costing Tasmanian farmers $10 million to $80 million a year (Donaghy 2020).

> *"Feral deer have a huge impact on our farm both economically and for bushland restoration. To our family, they have gone from enjoyment and a novelty to now being overwhelming."*
>
> – Julian von Bibra, Midlands farmer

Farmers are frustrated by government regulation that hinders their ability to control feral deer on their own properties. This includes the requirement for Game Services Tasmania approval through regulated Crop Protection Permits (CPPs), the encouragement to develop Property-based Game Management Plans (PBGMPs) as part of the Quality Deer Management Program (QDM) and the time consuming work in managing recreational hunters. Five-year CPPs for antlerless deer limit the effectiveness of control by generally not allowing their control in the lactation period between mid-November and mid-March each year. The number of male antlered deer allowed to be taken through CPPs is determined case by case to ensure the viability of wild fallow deer as a recreational hunting resource. They also require annual reporting of the number of deer removed.

> *"I can no longer deal with the massive impact of feral deer on my property under the current rule of one size fits all. We need a tactical approach across Tasmania that recognises feral deer will need to be managed differently from one area to another. Private land owners need more flexibility and support and less hindrance to control feral deer not just on their properties, but to contributing to eliminating feral deer from neighbouring areas such as the World Heritage Area and national parks. We need some decisions and we need action urgently to give private land owners some confidence that this issue is being addressed and not just sit by as the population explodes."*
>
> – Roderic O'Connor, Midlands Farmer

> *"I have spent more than 10 years struggling to deal with the impact of feral deer. I have been pilloried by thankless hunters and ignored by those with the authority to make change while the problem gets worse. I just want to control deer on my property to the extent I consider necessary so that I can get on with growing good wool and looking after the land the way it needs to be cared for."*
>
> – Simon Cameron, Midlands Farmer

Feral deer also carry and spread livestock diseases that can impact on farm productivity and incur management costs as they are biologically similar to domesticated hoofed mammals. Five diseases have been assessed as having a high risk of transmission from feral deer to Australian livestock, including bovine tuberculosis and foot and mouth disease (Locke 2007).

Safety and amenity

Feral deer are a high risk to motorists. Over the past eight years, 65 motor vehicle incidents involving feral deer have been recorded across Tasmania by the Department of State Growth (DSG 2021), many serious with associated human and physical costs. Many more would be unrecorded.

> *"There is increasing evidence of motor accidents caused by or involving wild fallow deer on road within Meander Valley."*
>
> – Meander Valley Council, Australian Senate 2020

Feral deer also invade urban amenity areas causing considerable damage to parks and gardens and unease with people recreating in these areas. Bucks can be aggressive and dangerous when rutting. The presence of deer in peri-urban areas may lead to the unsafe use of firearms, with potentially serious consequences.

Map 1a: Current estimate of the distribution of feral deer (Cunningham et al. 2021).

Map 1b: Potential occupation of fallow deer in Tasmania based on suitable climate and habitat (Cunningham et al. 2021).

The consequences of doing nothing

The population science

Fallow deer can occupy a wide variety of habitats from forests to open grasslands and including scrublands, sub-alpine vegetation and arable lands. In most of Tasmania the climate is suitable for fallow deer and they could live almost anywhere apart from the densest and wettest forests.

Feral deer currently occupy 27% of Tasmania. Based on a combination of climate and habitat suitability, it is predicted that 56% of Tasmania is currently suitable for them (Cunningham et al. 2021).

Under ideal conditions and uncontrolled, fallow deer may be able to increase their population numbers by up to 45% annually (Hone et. al 2020). The natural population growth rate of fallow deer in Tasmania is estimated to be about 27% per annum (Lethbridge et al. 2020). The current annual growth rate with some control through hunting and culling from crop protection permits is estimated at 5.4-11.5% (Lethbridge 2020 et al. Cunningham et.al. 2021).

The lowest estimate of annual growth of 5.4% (Lethbridge et al. 2020), will see the population double in about 14 years and there will be more than 250,000 feral deer in Tasmania by 2050. The more recently reported annual rate of increase of 11.5% is based on analysis of longer-term data back to 1985 (Cunningham et al. 2021). This translates to a population doubling-time of six years. This is despite the current level of removal through hunting and crop protection permits. At a plausible 10% annual growth it can be expected there will be 1 million feral deer in Tasmania by 2050.

> *The feral deer population in Tasmania could exceed one million individuals this century if they remain at current population growth levels.*
>
> – Potts et al. 2015

Maximum carrying capacities of fallow deer documented elsewhere in the world have ranged from 26-150/km^2 in high-quality habitat (Potts et. al 2015). Currently the density of fallow deer in their core range in Tasmania averages 2.7/km^2 (Lethbridge et al. 2020).

Tasmania faces a dire situation for feral deer population explosion due to:

- **The area of Tasmania suitable for further occupation by feral deer is double the area currently occupied, covering over half the state.**
- **The carrying capacity has scope to increase tenfold or more from current levels.**
- **The potential for an annual growth rate can increase four-fold, up to 45%.**

This population increase will spread feral deer into areas where now few or no deer are found. Some of these areas are highly sensitive to environmental impacts from deer, especially the central highlands of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, which has a high density of bogs that could be trampled (Potts et. al 2015. UTAS 2014).

This scenario is already underway with large population increases recorded and feral deer have now spread into the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, the Douglas-Apsley, Ben Lomond and Freycinet national parks, the Central Plateau and Arthur-Pieman conservation areas, as well as through large areas of agricultural land and even into the outskirts of Hobart and Launceston.

Feral deer have now been recorded on Tassie Deer Spotter in the Walls of Jerusalem National Park. Their unencumbered spread west of the Central Plateau is now evident.

While the exact numbers and rates of population growth are uncertain, the trends of accelerated population growth are unambiguous. It is thus clear that the current policies and approaches in Tasmania will be far from adequate to deal with the growing feral deer problem.

"I think it's safe to say feral deer are spreading in distribution and increasing in number in nearly all states. We have a window of opportunity to get on top of it before it spreads further."

– Annelise Wiebkin, National Deer Management Co-ordinator

Response to fire

Large bushfires in Tasmania are becoming more frequent and intense as climate change shapes the fire environment. As fire opens up the landscape, new and rapid incursions of feral deer into areas not previously occupied is likely, as has been shown on the mainland. To exacerbate that, feral deer then graze and browse on post-fire regeneration.

"We could get the replacement of some sensitive vegetation communities, particularly in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage area, as a result of deer preventing their re-establishment following wildfire."

– Chris Johnson, UTAS

"Following the fires on Five Rivers Reserve we observed an increase in feral deer numbers as they came in to graze fresh regrowth. We were particularly concerned to see them selectively browsing the endemic cider gums as they were regenerating, which are only found in the central highlands of Tasmania. To date we've spent over $100,000 on feral deer exclusion fencing to ensure that cider gums successfully regenerate after the fires."

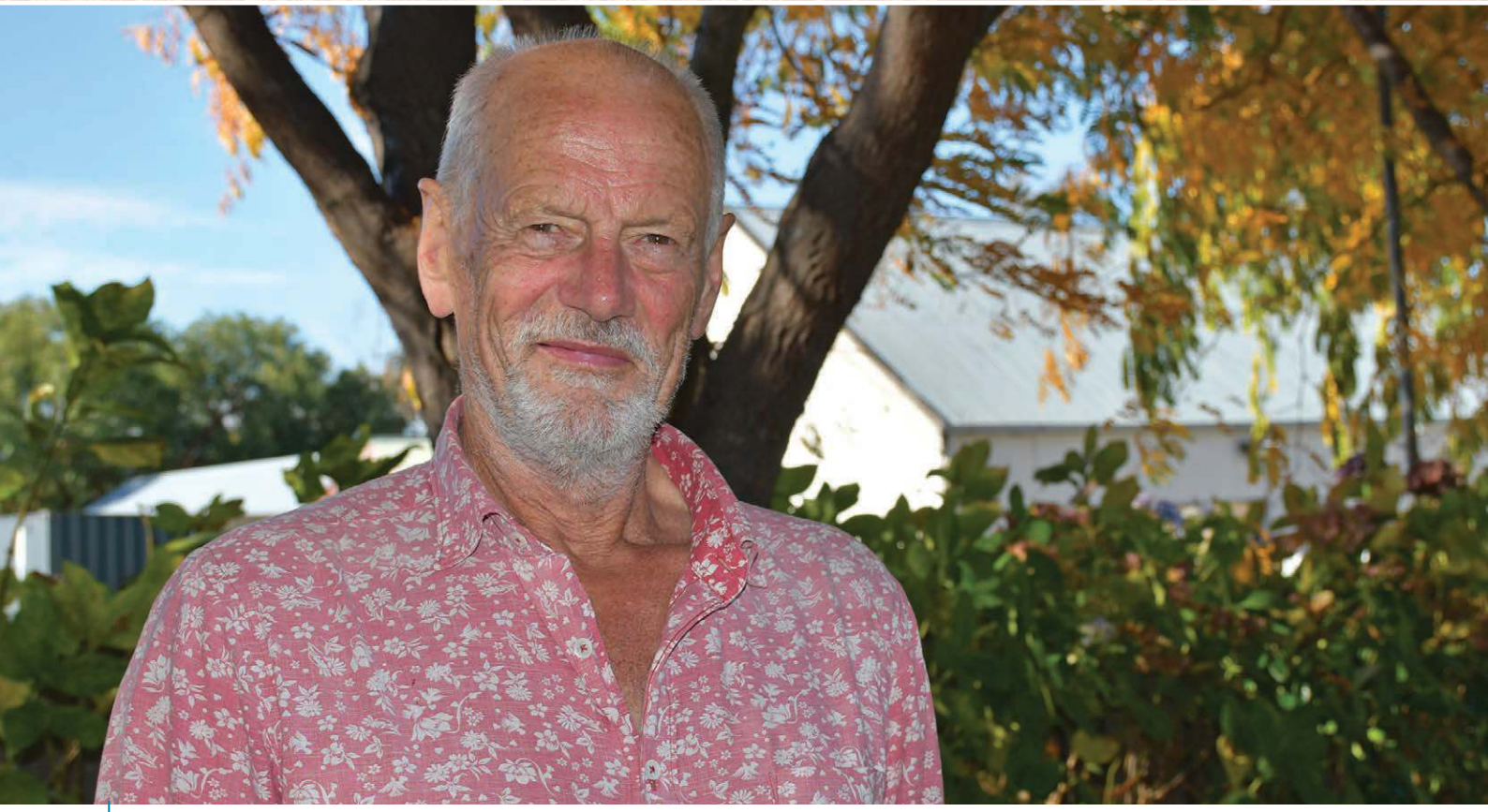
– James Hattam, Tasmanian Land Conservancy

The growth of the economic cost to the community

The annual cost to the community from the impacts of feral deer in Tasmania could be as high as $100 million and will continue to escalate as the population continues on its current upwards trajectory.

Estimates of the annual cost to agriculture alone is between $10-80 million as reported from surveys of farmers (Donaghy 2020). In addition, there are substantial costs associated with impacts on tree planting associated with forest plantations, biodiversity restoration and carbon farming. In 2019, there were 17 motor vehicle accidents formally reported as being attributable to deer (DSG 2021) and no doubt many unreported. There is also the hidden cost of the risk to international and national reputation if feral deer are allowed to continue to be present and impact on high value natural areas such as the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.

The cost to the Tasmanian community of doing nothing about feral deer in Tasmania is up to $100 million annually and growing.



> "Other environmental impacts arise from the government's wildlife officers and conservation budgets being diverted from nature conservation priorities to protecting deer and monitoring deer hunting compliance instead."
>
> – Nick Mooney, Conservation Biologist

Challenges and opportunities

Feral deer: protected or a pest

The management of feral deer in Tasmania is conflicted and has long been contentious among land owners, hunters and other interest groups (DPIPWE 2011). Fallow deer are recognised as a game resource and are as such listed as 'partly protected wildlife' in Schedule 4 of Tasmania's Wildlife (General) Regulations 2010, established under the Nature Conservation Act 2002. Yet to many, they are a serious pest because of their risk to the environment, economy and community. The goals of recreational hunting and biosecurity are different. Hunters aim to maintain sustainable populations of game species they wish to utilise while biosecurity is about avoiding or minimising the impact of invasive pest species.

Deer control policy in Tasmania is strongly hunter orientated and is delivered through:

- Quality Deer Management (QDM), an approach influenced by North American hunting practices where deer are native species and have natural predators. The objective of QDM is to provide an ample supply of prized hunting targets and trophies (Tasmanian Government 2019).
- Property-based game management (PBGM). Land owners use access to land for deer hunting as a means

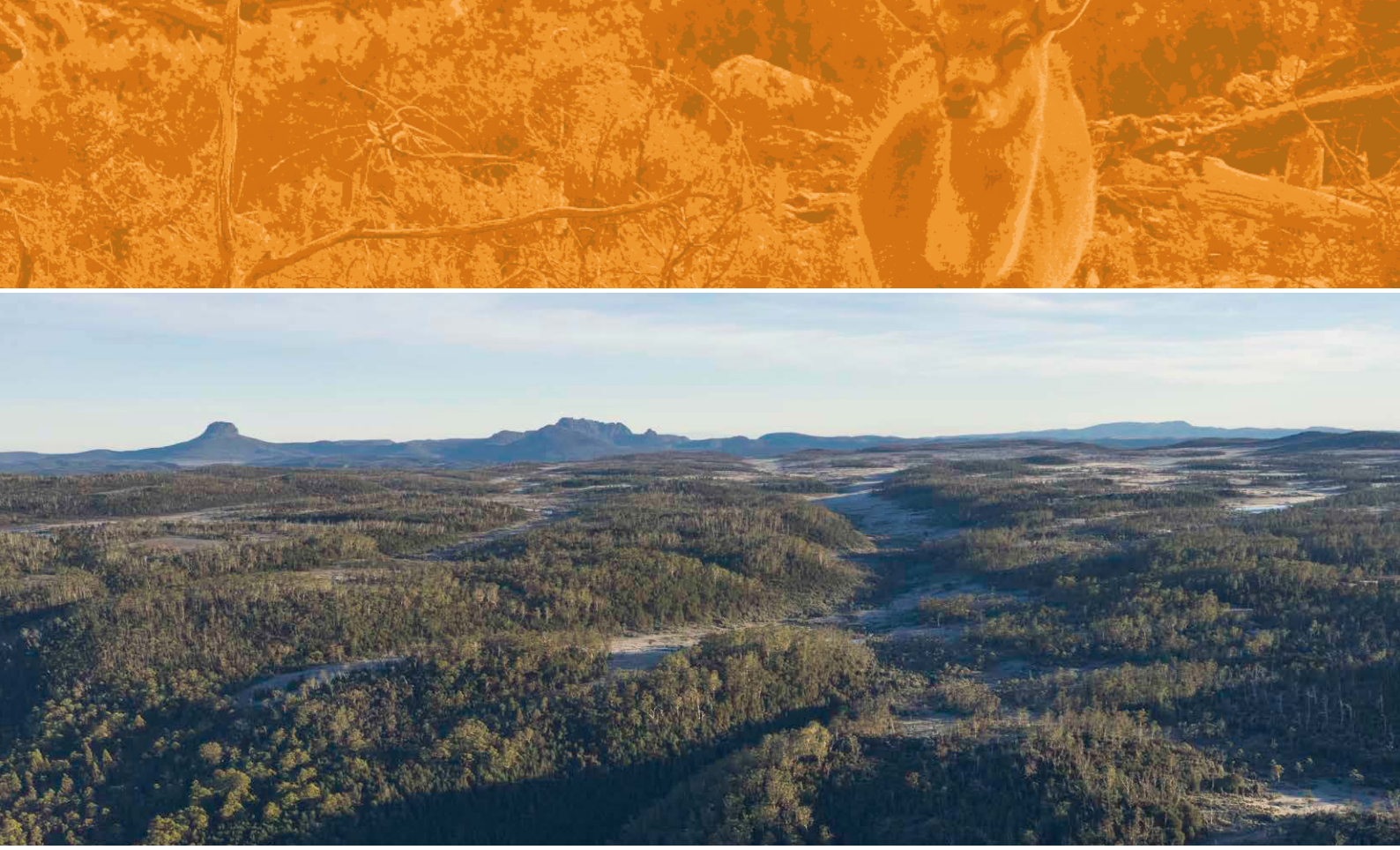
The Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, home to fragile cushion plants and peatlands, is no place for feral deer. Photo: Rob Blakers

of attracting hunters who are then required to pay a fee and carry out works on their properties in exchange for deer hunting rights in the deer season. PBGM agreements may also specify how many deer a property should aim to carry and what restrictions will be placed on the harvest of young male deer to facilitate an increase in the trophy quality of deer on a property (DPIPWE 2011).

PBGM and QDM Management approaches have been combined and promoted, resulting in the approach to deer control being primarily about maintaining the quality of the feral deer herd for hunting.

The objectives and regulation around QDM and PBGM policies have hindered the ability of land owners to effectively reduce the impact of feral deer and under this regime feral deer numbers have grown substantially in size and distribution. This approach does not consider the full range of impacts of feral deer or the effect of spreading deer populations. Regulations that limit effective feral deer control include:

- Hunting is only permitted during a limited gazetted recreational hunting season, generally from March to November for antlerless deer and around March for bucks.



A potential pathway for feral deer into Cradle Mountain – Lake St Clair National Park. Photo: Martin Hawes

- To manage feral deer on their own land, land owners need to put a case to Game Services Tasmania to obtain a Crop Protection Permit (CPP). Crop Protection Permits are highly regulated, issued at the discretion of the Wildlife Management Officer, and are influenced by upholding the principles of QDM and PBGM. Crop Protection Permits are only available to protect commercial crops and five year CPPs are only available to cull antlerless (female) feral deer and only in the non-lactating period March to November.
- Since the initiation of PBGM and QDM, the issue of Crop Protection Permits for males have been limited within the 'traditional deer range' because uncontrolled taking of male deer has the potential to work against the aims of Property-based Game Management agreements and associated Quality Deer Management strategies (DPIPWE 2011).

The administration and management of protecting deer through hunting policy by Game Services Tasmania is a substantial cost to the Tasmanian Government, with consequences on funding the public land estate. It creates burdensome administration for land owners and prevents or limits year-round feral deer control efforts using accepted control techniques routinely applied in other parts of Australia.

The challenge

The challenge will be to the hunting community and Game Services Tasmania, who covet the hunting culture and protection of feral deer for quality game. Their challenge will be to approach the issue from a different perspective. Taking a considered biosecurity approach as opposed to the current policies that promote a healthy feral deer herd, can save Tasmania from the catastrophic impact of a rapidly expanding feral deer population, while still having a contained population for hunting purposes.

The opportunity to act is now

There is an opportunity now for Tasmania to take a new approach to managing feral deer and their impacts if it is to avoid the current trend, which will inevitably lead to an escalation of feral deer numbers and their distribution across the state. Investing now in effective control is extremely prudent – it will save millions of dollars that will be needed if feral deer numbers are allowed to continue to escalate. Once deer are entrenched in new areas they will become more costly or impractical to remove. The biosecurity approach, prioritising prevention and early action, will be the most effective and feasible approach.

Part 2. A strategy for the future

Goals

- The impact of feral deer on environmental, social, cultural and economic values is substantially reduced.
- A collaboration of community and government is working together effectively to reduce the impact of feral deer.
- There are no feral deer in areas of high conservation significance.
- There is a high level of awareness in the Tasmanian community of the threat feral deer pose to biosecurity, the economy and community safety, and the need to undertake control.

Objectives

- A biosecurity-based strategic approach is instituted for managing feral deer across Tasmania.
- There are no feral deer in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, takayna/Tarkine and other national parks[1], and they are prevented from re-establishing.
- The feral deer population is contained and reduced to a maximum of 10,000 animals.
- Hindrances to effective control are removed by using Tasmania's legal framework to have feral deer reclassified from being partly protected under the Wildlife Regulations to being recognised as a pest animal and to improve regulation of deer farming.
- A governance model is in place that takes leadership in planning and managing the implementation of a new biosecurity approach to controlling feral deer.
- Sufficient funding is secured to effectively control feral deer in Tasmania.
- A multi-level partnership of government and community is in place to collaborate, build knowledge and capacity and work together on feral deer control.
- Land owners and land managers are provided with best practice and cost-effective strategies and methods for reducing environmental, social, cultural and economic impacts of feral deer.
- Hunters are contributing to targeted volunteer feral deer control programs.
- The community has a high level of community awareness of the issues associated with feral deer and are involved in reporting sightings.
- Tasmania's Aboriginal people are involved in feral deer management and the non-indigenous communities' understanding of feral deer impacts on Indigenous people's values is improved.
- Feral deer control is supported through state and national research into feral deer impacts, their potential spread and effective control methods.
- A quality surveillance and reporting program is in place to improve understanding of feral deer presence and the need to act.
- A monitoring and evaluation strategy is in place to track achievements.

Vision

By 2032 feral deer in Tasmania are confined to a population of less than 10,000, occurring only in the Midlands Control and Containment Zone, where they are managed to fully protect high value natural, cultural, agricultural and forestry assets.

A fresh approach: Biosecurity and biodiversity

1. Being strategic

The generalised Invasion Curve is an internationally recognised biosecurity approach to managing invasive species. It models the relationship between population density and economic return on investment from

1 National Parks outside the TWWHA or Tarkine: Ben Lomond, Freycinet, Mt William, Douglas-Apsley, Tasman.

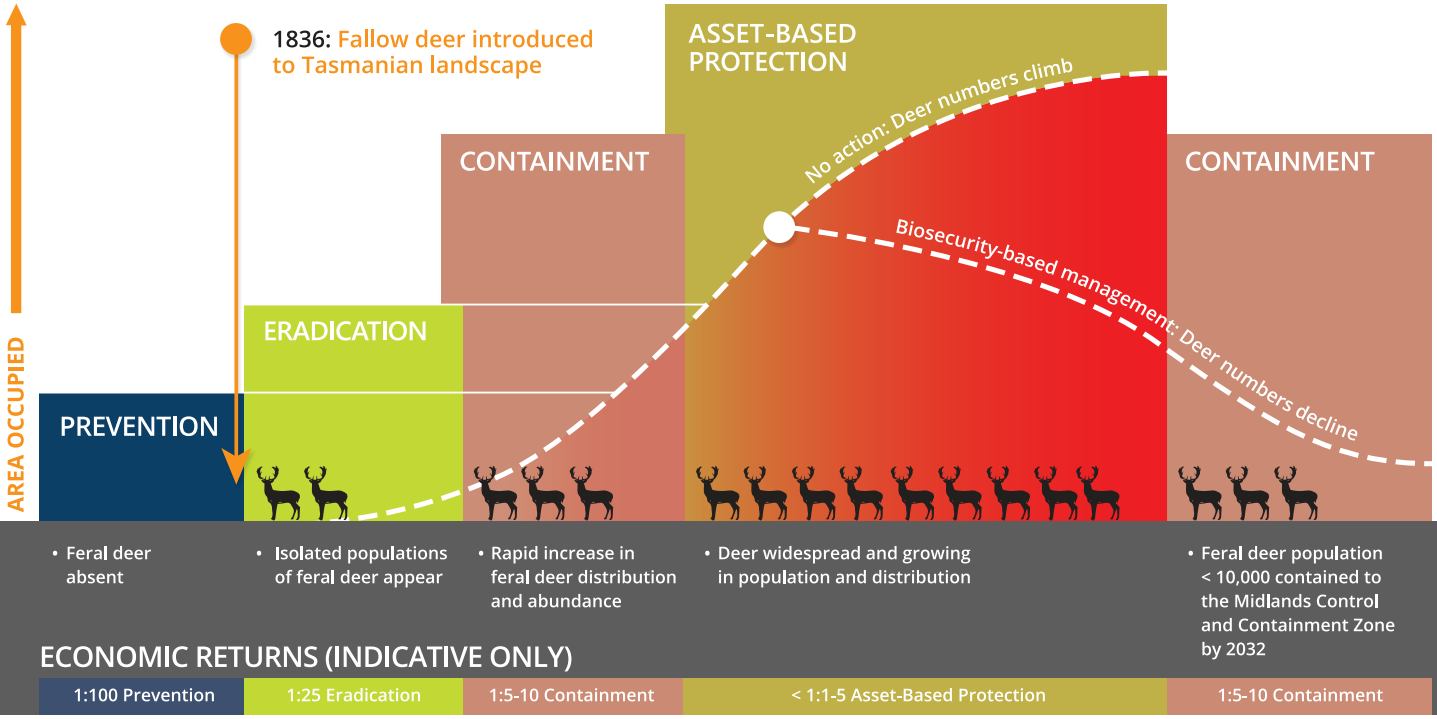


Figure 1: Generalised Invasion Curve. Source (based on DPI 2010)

control programs. The principle is that as the population of a pest grows and spreads out so too does the cost of managing their impacts. The curve shows the importance of tackling pests while the population is not yet present or low. Prevention has clearly the highest return on investment.

This biosecurity approach will underpin the development of a control strategy for the feral deer population in Tasmania.

"We need a long-term vision, good policy, action and persistence to eliminate feral deer from new areas that have been occupied in the north-east over the last 10-15 years while also working towards significantly reducing numbers elsewhere in the region."

– Todd Dudley, North East Bioregional Network

2. Feral Deer Biosecurity Zones

Control of feral deer in Tasmania will be managed in accordance with area-based objectives aligned with the biosecurity principles for managing invasive species. This will be achieved by identifying five feral deer biosecurity zones covering all of Tasmania.

Five feral deer biosecurity zones are outlined below, indicating the key objective and outcome.

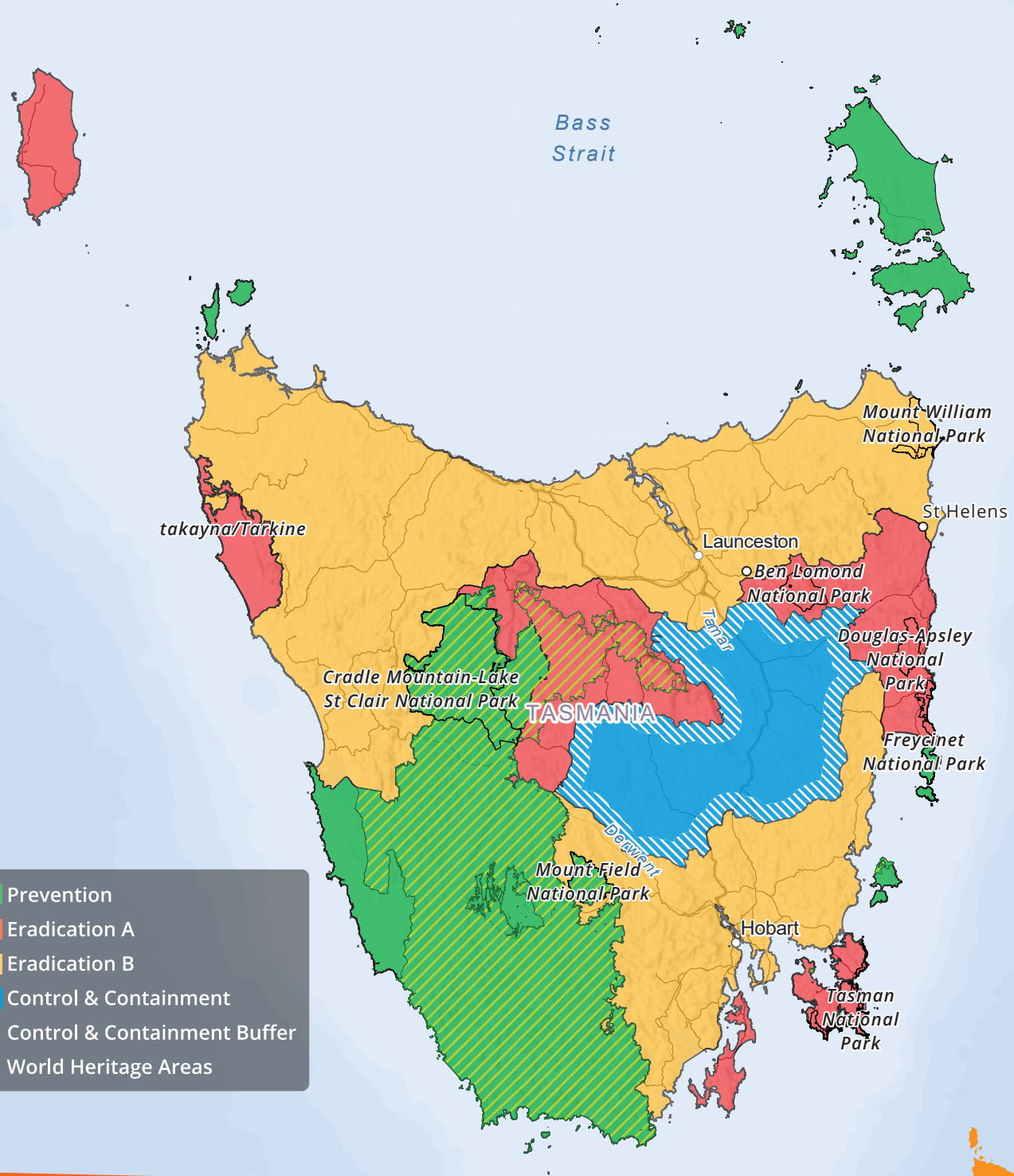
The zones are presented on page 18 and detailed in Appendix 1.

"Eliminating deer that occur outside their traditional range in the Midlands and containing deer to that area would be considered acceptable to most hunters."

- Anonymous deer hunter and conservationist

Reducing and containing the population of feral deer to the Midlands Control and Containment Zone to 10,000 returns the population to that of the late 1970s and early 1980s and will reduce the area occupied by feral deer from currently 27% to 12% of Tasmania. This will continue to provide ample opportunities for recreational hunting while significantly reducing the impact of feral deer on agriculture, the natural environment and the community.

FERAL DEER BIOSECURITY ZONES IN TASMANIA



Under this strategy the control of feral deer would be managed in accordance with area-based objectives aligned with the biosecurity principles for managing invasive species. This would be achieved by identifying five feral deer biosecurity zones covering all of Tasmania.

Image credit: Rob Blakers

PREVENTION

- To prevent feral deer from establishing in the area.
- Feral deer are not known to occupy this area. Any feral deer detected are to be quickly removed.
- Areas within the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area that are currently feral deer free, and the South West Conservation Area and Flinders Island, are key priorities for prevention.

Image credit: Faye Beswick

ERADICATION A

- To remove all feral deer from the area and prevent re-colonisation.
- No feral deer are occupying this area by 2027 and any feral deer detected are removed.
- The Central Plateau and Great Western Tiers conservation areas in and adjacent to the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area and satellite populations are a priority for eradication.

ERADICATION B

- To remove all feral deer from the area and prevent re-colonisation.
- No feral deer are occupying this area by 2032 and any feral deer detected are removed.
- These areas have more sparse and widespread occurrences of feral deer.

CONTROL & CONTAINMENT

- To contain feral deer to the defined area boundaries while also substantially reducing impacts within the area.
- Land owners have effectively controlled feral deer and the population is below 10,000 by 2032.
- 10,000 returns the population to levels four decades ago.
- Control and Containment Buffer: To keep the population of feral deer very low to mitigate the likelihood feral deer will enter the eradication zones.

Image credit: Dr Matt Appleby / Bush Heritage Australia

ASSET PROTECTION

- To protect areas of high value within the Control and Containment Zone to protect assets.
- High value assets within the Control and Containment Zone are not impacted by feral deer by 2032.
- Asset Protection zones will identify areas of high values in the Control and Containment Zone that require special protection.

Making it happen

A number of key actions are fundamental to having in place an effective deer control strategy for Tasmania. These are outlined below and summarised on page 28.

1. Status of feral deer

The partly protected status of feral deer in Tasmania's Wildlife (General) Regulations 2010 is to be rescinded to enable land owners and public land managers to have unconstrained control of feral deer on the land they own or manage.

> *"It is recommended 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."*
>
> – Australian Senate Report on the Impact of Feral Deer, Pigs and Goats, 2021

2. Establishing feral deer biosecurity zones

The provisions of the Biosecurity Act 2019 and subsequent regulations will be used to:

- Establish Prevention and Eradication A & B Zones as Biosecurity or Control Zones and classify feral deer as a pest animal in those zones.
- Establish a control order for the Prevention Zone directing that the area is to be monitored and feral deer be removed within six months of being detected.
- Establish a control order for the Eradication A & B Zones directing feral deer will be eradicated by 2027 and 2032 respectively and after that the zones are to be monitored and feral deer be removed within six months of being detected.

The unclassified status of feral deer in Control and Containment and Asset Protection zones will enable land owners to act aggressively to remove feral deer impacts where needed to protect assets.

3. The numbers: The annual population reduction needed

The precise population of feral deer in Tasmania is uncertain, but based on the population estimate of 54,000 feral deer in the Midlands "deer range" area in 2019 (Lethbridge et al. 2020) and applying an 11.5% annual increase despite hunting pressure and crop protection culling, (Cunningham et.al. 2021), it can be expected there is a minimum of 75,000 feral deer in that area alone in 2021/22. This is not accounting for feral deer in other areas of Tasmania.

To reduce that number in the Control and Containment Zone to 10,000 over 10 years it is estimated that it will be necessary to remove at least 30% of the population each year until 2032. This will initially be in the order of 15-20,000 a year, reducing to below 5000 a year in the last few years.

These figures are based on simple estimates. Thorough population modelling is required and the removal rates will need to be monitored and adjusted as population data and dynamics become more informed. Once 10,000 is reached in the Control and Containment zone, it is expected an annual removal of around 3000 feral deer would be required to maintain this population level.

4. Capacity and capability

Drivers of change

Feral deer are currently a contentious and political issue in Tasmania. The overt and uncompromising focus by the Tasmanian Government on managing feral deer primarily as a hunting resource has alienated many within the community and allowed the problem to worsen.

The drivers of change will come from those in the community that understand the growth trajectory that feral deer are on and the consequences of doing nothing. They want to see this divisive and ineffective approach to feral deer replaced with an evidence-based approach and community collaboration established through effective relationships. This will be an essential ingredient for this new approach to controlling the impacts of feral deer in Tasmania.

> *"We're spending about $50,000 a year managing recreational hunters on our land. I think it's unfair that landholders end up having the burden of managing the regulation. It would be great to see more of a whole-of-landscape approach, government and landholders coming together to manage this population*

collectively and collaboratively. Hunting alone isn't going to work. We need more tools in the tool kit to control deer."

– James Hattam, Tasmanian Land Conservancy

Governance: Feral Deer Control Taskforce

The Tasmanian Government is to establish a Feral Deer Control Taskforce that is led by DPIPWE Biosecurity Tasmania. The taskforce will (among a range of roles) oversee the implementation of the Biosecurity Act 2019 pest control order for feral deer. To achieve this the taskforce will, working with land owners and public land managers, design and implement formal and cross tenure integrated feral deer removal programs to:

1. Ensure that feral deer do not establish in the Prevention Zone.
2. Ensure that feral deer are removed from the Eradication A Zone by 2027.
3. Ensure that feral deer are removed from the Eradication B Zone by 2032.
4. Ensure ongoing surveillance and monitoring is carried out to respond quickly if new occurrences appear.
5. Prepare a Midlands Feral Deer Action Plan for the Control and Containment Zone for reducing and sustaining the feral deer population to below 10,000 and providing intensive reduction in the Control and Containment Buffer Zone. Identify high value assets within the external boundary of the Control and Containment Zone that require special protection from feral deer and for inclusion in the Asset Protection Zone.
6. Develop strategies to support land managers and land owners to protect their assets in the Asset Protection Zone.

The Feral Deer Control Taskforce will be a multi-disciplinary team led by DPIPWE Biosecurity Tasmania that will also draw on the skills and knowledge of Aboriginal Tasmanians, farmers and graziers, DPIPWE Parks and Wildlife and Game Services Tasmania, NRM organisations, Local Government, conservation organisations, Sustainable Forests Tasmania, commercial forestry organisations, Hydro Tasmania and hunters.

Working with community

A key role and challenge for the Feral Deer Control Taskforce will be to seek to diminish the divisiveness that currently embodies the feral deer issue in Tasmania and bring the community together to support the Feral Deer Strategy. To achieve this the Feral Deer Control Taskforce will:

1. Establish community deer control groups to facilitate land owners and land managers working collaboratively and learning off each other at a district level.
2. Ensure public land managers are actively removing feral deer from their respective estates.
3. Draw on the skills and knowledge of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community and develop an appreciation of the impact of feral deer on the Aboriginal cultural landscape.
4. Provide advice on feral deer impact control methods.
5. Work with property owners and hunting groups to prepare property-based deer control plans to replace property-based game management plans.
6. Prepare protocols for when the Tasmanian Government should provide financial and practical support to private land owners to have feral deer removed from their properties.
7. Encourage hunters, visitors and land owners to register feral deer sightings on Deer Scan or Tassie Deer Spotter or report to Biosecurity Tasmania. Biosecurity Tasmania will monitor records to inform priorities for the feral deer control program.
8. Run community awareness programs to inform the community of the threats and impacts of feral deer and how they can support action to control feral deer.

Methods

An integrated approach to pest management draws on a range of methods depending on the situation and provides the best outcome for pest control. Feral deer control will be carried out by utilising and integrating methods as presented in Table 1 below.

A code of practice for feral deer control is being developed as part of the planned national deer control strategy. In the meantime, the Pest Smart Standard Operating Procedure:

Ground Shooting of Feral Deer DEE001 should be used as a guide for all shooting operations, professional or voluntary.

Ground shooting: Professional pest controllers or hunters

Pest animal management programs must be carefully planned and coordinated to have a desired and lasting effect.

Most recreational hunting is done on an ad-hoc basis with no defined objective for pest animal control (RSPCA 2021). Recreational hunters may remove substantial numbers of feral deer but their contribution to overall feral deer population control in most circumstances is demonstratively ineffective and fraught with issues including variable skill levels, competing motivations and interests, as well as risks to the environment, animal welfare, and human welfare (ISC 2009). This is evident in Tasmania where the feral deer population has soared despite hunting. Many hunters proudly aim to maintain sustainable populations of game species that they wish to utilise (Green 2009).

Professional pest controllers are clearly the most efficient method for culling feral deer as part of eradication programs that have clear objectives and they will be essential to achieving the goals of this strategy. They are required to be highly skilled, dependable, focused on a prescribed outcome and have access to equipment and methods generally not available to general hunters, such as semi-automatic rifles, night scopes, suppressors and they can be approved to hunt with spotlights.

Nevertheless, skilled recreational shooters will have an important ongoing role in controlling feral deer numbers in the following areas:

- General hunting activity working with land owners in the Control and Containment Zone.
- Accredited volunteer programs engaged in specific ground-shooting culling programs where their skills and experience are valuable to supplement the work of professional pest controllers and arranged and overseen by land managers.

In the Prevention and Eradication Zones professional pest controllers will be primarily engaged to achieve objectives.

Accredited recreational hunters may support the work of professional controllers in Eradication Zones where they can provide supplementary control under direction and supervision.

Accreditation programs will be established to enable volunteer hunters to take part in controlled and targeted feral deer control programs organised and approved by land managers, to supplement the work of professional pest controllers.

Aerial shooting

Aerial shooting has been successfully used to control and eliminate feral deer in New Zealand and many of the mainland states are currently employing this method as it is considered a cost-effective method in many occurrences. Aerial shooting is particularly appropriate in remote and inaccessible areas where access for ground shooting is difficult and large areas can be surveyed quickly, but it may be limited in areas of dense forest crown cover.

Aerial shooting carried out by professional pest controllers will be the primary method employed to monitor for feral deer occurrences and act if needed in the Prevention Zone and to cull feral deer from remote and rugged areas of the Elimination Zones. In most cases, this will need to be supplemented by other control measures.

5. Investment

The cost benefit of effective control

Investing now in effective control is extremely prudent as this will save millions of dollars that will be needed to protect assets if feral deer numbers are allowed to continue to escalate.

The cost of implementing this Feral Deer Control Strategy is estimated to be in the order of $1.8 million a year in the first few years then may decline as less numbers are needed to be culled and pressure is reduced on Eradication A and Prevention Zone. By year 10 the investment needed should be reduced if the strategy is implemented in full, however removing a few isolated populations could be costly.

The $1.8 million investment in year one will fund:

- Establishing the Feral Deer Control Taskforce with a dedicated

Manager, Project Officer with planning and operating expenses.

- Support for property-based deer control plans and educational programs.
- Developing a volunteer shooter accreditation program to support deer removal programs.
- Professional aerial surveillance and culling programs in the Prevention and Eradication zones.
- Professional ground-shooting culling programs for all zones where needed.
- A reporting and monitoring program to record control efforts and deer occurrence, the success of outreach activities and a statewide population census every five years.
- Financial assistance to land managers and land owners for critical asset protection.
- Support to research and investigate priorities.

The $1.8 million annual cost of implementing this feral deer strategy is in the order of 2% of the $100 million a year it is likely feral deer already cost the community and economy annually. This includes a contribution from the Australian Government of $150,000 to monitor and remove feral deer from the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. If this investment is not made and the feral deer population continues to expand at the current rate, the costs to the economy and the environment will grow to be exorbitant.

Tasmanian Government: Biosecurity budget

The Tasmanian Government will develop an implementation plan to deliver the Feral Deer Control Strategy and will, as a priority, allocate sufficient funds over the next 10 years, from the state's biosecurity budget, to support the Feral Deer Biosecurity Taskforce to implement this strategy. This will be an initial allocation of $1.65 million annually from 2022 to 2025 and then adjusted annually as required to implement the strategy over 10 years.

Commonwealth Government: World Heritage

The Commonwealth Government will allocate at least $150,000 annually to remove feral deer from the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area and provide ongoing funding for surveillance and removal of feral deer.

Local government

Local government will be encouraged to carry out surveys of land owners, particularly in the prevention and eradication zones, to build a knowledge base on feral deer presence and impacts for advice to Biosecurity Tasmania. In addition, local government will be encouraged to monitor and record motor vehicle accidents involving feral deer and likely hot spots as part of a road safety strategy. Local governments will be encouraged to jointly fund partnership programs with land owners to assist with feral deer control.

Funding mechanisms

The Tasmanian Government will explore mechanisms for funding feral deer control such as ensuring revenue collected from hunting fees are directed into feral deer control programs in the Control and Containment Zones.

Table 1. Feral Deer Control Methods and Application

Control method	Application and advantages	Constraints	Zone suitability
Ground shooting using hunters.	Licensed hunters removing feral deer.	Hunting is generally aimed at maintaining a quality feral deer herd, not at reducing impacts. Hunter skills and behaviour may not be optimal.	Control & Containment.
Ground shooting using professional pest controllers, including agency staff.	Controlled and targeted programs to achieve specific objectives. Not influenced by maintaining a quality feral deer herd. High level of shooter skills and behaviour and access to methods and equipment not available to recreational hunters, including drone technology to effectively detect feral deer.	High cost involved in contracting expert pest controllers. Less suitable for more remote and rugged areas.	Elimination A & B & Asset protection (accessible areas) Prevention (if isolated feral deer are detected in accessible areas).
Ground shooting by land owners	Land owner managed to suit conditions and reduction of impact where the land owner needs it.	Land owner may not have the capacity or skill to remove large numbers without assistance.	Control & Containment. Asset Protection.
Ground shooting by accredited volunteers	Reduces feral deer numbers by involving hunters in targeted programs with clear objectives. High skills and behaviour standards are a pre-requisite. Land owners may be more comfortable using accredited volunteer hunters with clear objectives.	High cost of accrediting and managing volunteers. Volunteers not as effective or efficient as professional pest controllers.	Elimination A & B (accessible areas). Control & Containment.
Aerial shooting by professional pest controllers	Access to remote and rugged areas where ground shooting is impractical. Visual identification is superior to ground observations. Can cover large areas for surveillance quickly.	High cost of helicopter time and shooters. Not suitable around populated areas. Areas of public land to be closed during operations.	Prevention Elimination A & B (remote & rugged areas).

Control method	Application and advantages	Constraints	Zone suitability
Exclusion fencing	Prevents feral deer from accessing high value assets.	High capital and maintenance cost. Doesn't reduce the feral deer population.	Asset Protection (small areas).
Trapping	Captures larger numbers of feral deer where they have become wary due to shooting activity.	High cost of erecting and monitoring yards. Seldom used and little demonstrated outcomes yet but trials underway. Requires access.	Control & Containment Elimination A & B.
Repellents and deterrent activity	Non-lethal approach for situations where shooting is not suitable (e.g. peri urban areas, roads). For high value assets as an alternative to exclusion fencing.	Doesn't reduce the feral deer population and may transfer the problem to another area. Little demonstrated success yet but trials underway.	Asset Protection.
Baiting	Control of feral deer populations where animals have dispersed and made wary by shooting or isolated small populations. Small populations in remote areas.	Baiting for feral deer is not an approved method. Trials of deer aggregators to attract deer while excluding non-target species is underway on the mainland.	All zones (not available at this stage).

6. Deer farming

The number of deer farms increased significantly in the 1980s, but the rapid decline of commercial deer farming in the 1990s led to some farm deer herds being released or escaping, resulting in herds becoming established in new areas. Most of these have remained as satellite populations.

Under the Wildlife (Deer Farming) Regulations 2010, anyone farming fallow deer for commercial (meat and antler products) and non-commercial (hobby farms) purposes requires approval from Game Services Tasmania and regulations apply to their operation. However, the regulations are weak when it comes to regulating the operation of deer farms to prevent and respond to escapes.

The Wildlife (Deer Farming) Regulations 2010 are under review. The opportunity will be taken to amend the regulations to:

- Require tagging and recording farm deer to identify and trace the source of escaped deer.
- Provide for regular inspection by wildlife officers of approved fences.
- Develop stronger fencing standards to reduce the risk of deer escapes (can draw on South Australian deer farming protocols).
- Have conditions that provide for deer farms to be closed down if they pose an ongoing and unacceptable threat of deer escaping.
- Restrict the sale of live farmed deer only to other approved deer farms or abattoirs.
- In the event of a deer farm ceasing to operate and approved sales completed, the residual deer are to be slaughtered.
- Have severe and enforceable penalties in place for escaped deer.
- Have no new deer farms established outside the Control and Containment Zone.

7. Commercial use of wild caught deer

It is not permitted under Wildlife (General) Regulations 2010 to sell or trade venison from wild shot deer. Currently other wildlife species are allowed to be commercially harvested such as wallabies and possums. Venison is currently imported from the mainland for processing and commercial sale in Tasmania.

> *"The committee recommends that all Australian jurisdictions implement frameworks to support the commercial harvesting of feral deer as part of an overall deer management strategy."*
>
> – Australian Senate Report on the Impact of Feral Deer, Pigs and Goats, 2021

There is a view that leaving shot deer in situ is a waste that should be processed for human and/or pet consumption. There is a risk however that allowing a feral deer meat industry to establish may result in commercial use becoming the primary focus that needs a sustained feral deer herd rather than the objective of reduction of the deer population. Nevertheless, there are large numbers of deer to be removed from the Control and Containment Zone to reduce numbers and sustain that reduction for the foreseeable future. The Tasmanian Government has commissioned a study to determine the feasibility of a trial to use wild shot fallow deer carcasses for commercial use.

The Feral Deer Control Taskforce will:

- Consider the report to trial wild shot fallow deer carcasses for commercial use and the reported value and risks in allowing the commercial use of wild caught deer meat.
- If considered feasible and the risks are negligible, work with the industry to develop a policy for commercial use of wild caught deer meat, to be taken only from the Control and Containment Zone. This will ensure its commitment and financial sustainability is not dependent on maintaining a feral deer herd greater than 10,000 deer in the longer term and will integrate with hunter harvesting.

Monitoring, reporting and research

1. Surveillance

It will be critical to carry out observation and aerial surveillance of areas to ensure the zone objectives are being met. The priorities are:

- The Prevention Zone including Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, South West Conservation Area, Flinders island and Freycinet Peninsula south of Coles Bay.

- The Elimination A & B Zones after feral deer have been removed.

Hunters, visitors and land owners will be encouraged to register feral deer sightings on Deer Scan or Tassie Deer Spotter or report to Biosecurity Tasmania. Biosecurity Tasmania will monitor records and reports to respond to any incursions.

Tassie Deer Spotter is an App linked to iNaturalist where people can report sightings of feral deer and upload photos of deer, deer prints or scats as evidence of their presence. These sightings are fed into the national Atlas of Living Australia and the reports can be viewed and analysed by the public. These recordings are crucial to improving the knowledge about the presence and spread of deer in Tasmania.

2. Monitoring and reporting

The Feral Deer Control Task Force will monitor feral deer culling and provide annual reports to the community on progress in meeting feral deer zone objectives.

The condition of the Control and Containment Zone will be monitored to ensure the carrying capacity of under 10,000 animals is not exceeded once met and the general condition is acceptable with that number of feral deer.

The condition of the Asset Protection Zones will be monitored to ensure high values are adequately protected.

3. Research and investigations

There is little published research or investigative reports on the distribution, impacts and efficacy of control methods of feral deer in Tasmania although there are several projects underway across Australia through the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions, the NSW Environmental Trust and UTAS.

Research and investigation priorities aligned with implementation of this strategy include:

- The efficacy of a range of control methods as they apply in different areas of Tasmania.
- New and improved control tools.
- The location of vulnerable assets requiring high level protection in the Control and Containment Zone.
- The economic impact of feral deer on the environment, business and community safety.
- Minimum annual levels of culling needed to achieve zone objectives.

The future

The actions in this strategy provide a roadmap for control of feral deer in Tasmania where in 10 years:

- There are no feral deer in areas of high conservation value including the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.
- Feral deer are contained to the Midlands Control and Containment Zone with a maximum population of 10,000, to return the population of feral deer in this area to that of the late 1970s and early 1980s.
- Land owners have taken control of feral deer on their properties unimpeded by regulation and able to meet the objectives they have set in their Feral Deer Property Management Plans.
- District community deer control groups are in place, providing a co-operative approach and sharing information and capacity.
- Deer hunting opportunities occur in the Control and Containment Zone in close co-operation with land owners and land managers to help them meet their objectives.
- Deer hunters are accredited to support land managers and land owners to implement programs to achieve objectives for zones.
- The community remains vigilant for sightings of deer that may move beyond the Control and Containment Zone and when sighted, trigger a rapid eradication response.
- There are no new deer farms outside the Control and Containment Zone and deer farms are no longer responsible for the creation of new feral deer populations.
- The Feral Deer Control Taskforce has done its work and now with responsibilities delegated back to agencies and district community deer control groups it has an oversight and reporting role only.
- The period of conflict and anxiety over feral deer has passed.

Summary of actions

Goal 1: The impact of feral deer on environmental, social, cultural and economic values is substantially reduced.	
Objective	**Action**
Hindrances to effective control are removed by using Tasmania's legal framework to have feral deer reclassified from being partly protected under the Wildlife Regulations to being recognised as a pest animal and improve regulation of deer farming.	1. The partly protected status of feral deer in Tasmania's Wildlife (General) Regulations 2010 is to be rescinded to enable land owners and public land managers to have unconstrained control of feral deer on the land they own or manage. 2. The Wildlife (Deer Farming) Regulations 2010 are to be amended to provide strong laws to ensure deer farms are effectively containing deer, new deer farms are only permitted in the Control and Containment zone and escaped deer can be tracked. 3. Ensure deer farms are not responsible for new feral deer populations.
A biosecurity-based strategic approach is instituted for managing feral deer across Tasmania.	4. Five biosecurity zones are to be established: Prevention, Eradication A, Eradication B, Control and Containment and Asset Protection (refer Map 2 and Appendix). Each zone has a clear objective. 5. The provisions of the Biosecurity Act 2019 and subsequent regulations will be used to: a) Establish Prevention and Eradication A & B zones as biosecurity or control zones and classify feral deer as a pest animal in those zones. b) Establish a pest control order for the biosecurity or control zones directing that: I. Feral deer are to be prevented from entering the Prevention Zone. II. Feral deer are to be eradicated from the Eradication zones A & B by 2027 and 2032 respectively. III. The zones are to be monitored and feral deer removed within six months of being detected. For the Eradication A & B zones this will be after 2027 and 2032 respectively once feral deer are eradicated. 6. The unclassified status of feral deer in Control and Containment and Asset Protection zones will enable land owners to act aggressively and remove feral deer impacts where needed to protect assets.
A governance model is in place that takes leadership in planning and managing the implementation of a new biosecurity approach to controlling feral deer.	7. The Tasmanian Government is to establish a Feral Deer Control Taskforce led by DPIPWE Biosecurity Tasmania that will (among a range of roles) oversee the implementation of the Biosecurity Act 2019 pest control orders for feral deer. To achieve this the taskforce will, working with land owners and public land managers, design and implement formal and cross tenure integrated feral deer removal programs.

Goal 1: The impact of feral deer on environmental, social, cultural and economic values is substantially reduced.	
Objective	**Action**
Sufficient funding is secured to effectively control feral deer in Tasmania	8. The Feral Deer Control Taskforce will develop an implementation plan to deliver the Feral Deer Control Strategy and the Tasmanian Government will, as a priority, allocate sufficient funds over the next 10 years from the state's biosecurity budget to support the Feral Deer Biosecurity Taskforce to implement this strategy. This will be an initial allocation of as a minimum $1.65 million annually from 2022 to 2025 and then adjusted every year as required to implement the strategy over 10 years. 9. The Commonwealth Government will allocate at least $150,000 annually to remove feral deer from the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area and provide ongoing funding for surveillance and removal of feral deer. 10. Local government will be encouraged to carry out surveys of land owners, particularly in the prevention and eradication zones, to build a knowledge base on feral deer presence and impacts for advice to Biosecurity Tasmania. In addition, local government will be encouraged to monitor and record motor vehicle accidents involving feral deer and likely hot spots as part of a road safety strategy. Local governments will be encouraged to jointly fund partnership programs with land owners to assist with feral deer control.
The feral deer population is contained and reduced to a maximum of 10,000 animals.	12. The Feral Deer Control Taskforce will prepare a Midlands Feral Deer Action Plan for the Control and Containment Zone for reducing and sustaining the feral deer population to below 10,000. Identify high value assets within the external boundary of the Control and Containment Zone that require special protection from feral deer and for inclusion in the Asset Protection Zone. 13. Thorough population modelling will be carried out to determine annual removal rates required to reduce the population to 10,000 by 2032. The removal rates will be monitored and adjusted as population data and dynamics become more informed. 14. Feral deer control will be carried out to achieve biosecurity zone objectives by utilising and integrating control methods for the area where they may be most suitable. 15. An Investigation of the feasibility of commercial use of wild caught feral deer taken from the Control and Containment Zone will be carried out.
A quality surveillance and reporting program is in place to improve understanding of feral deer presence and the need to act.	16. The Feral Deer Control Taskforce will ensure observation and aerial surveillance of areas are carried out at sufficient intervals to ensure the zone objectives are being met. The priorities are: a) The Prevention Zone including Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, South West Conservation Area, Flinders island and Freycinet Peninsula south of Coles Bay. b) The Elimination A & B zones after feral deer have been removed.
A monitoring and evaluation strategy is in place to track achievements.	17. The condition of the Midland Control and Containment Zone will be monitored to ensure the carrying capacity of under 10,000 animals is not exceeded once met and the general condition is acceptable with that number of feral deer. 18. The condition of the asset protection zones will be monitored to ensure high values are adequately protected. 19. The Feral Deer Taskforce will monitor feral deer culling and provide annual reports on progress to meeting feral deer zone objectives.

Summary of actions

Goal 2: There are no feral deer in areas of high conservation significance.	
Objective	**Action**
There are no feral deer in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, takayna/Tarkine and other national parks and they are prevented from re-establishing.	20. The Feral Deer Control Taskforce will: a) Ensure that feral deer do not establish in the Prevention Zone. b) Ensure that feral deer are removed from the Eradication A Zone within five years. c) Ensure public land managers are actively removing feral deer from their respective estates.

Goal 3: A collaboration of community, interest groups, institutions, hunters and government is working together effectively to reduce the impacts of feral deer.	
Objective	**Action**
A multi-level partnership of government and community is in place to collaborate, build knowledge and capacity and work together on feral deer control.	21. The Feral Deer Control Taskforce will: a) Establish a community consultative group of Aboriginal, conservation, natural resource management and motoring organisations, land owners, community groups, hunters, state and local government, insurers and others. b) Establish community deer control groups to facilitate land owners and land managers working collaboratively and learning off each other at a district level. c) Prepare protocols for when the Tasmanian Government should provide financial and practical support to private land owners to have feral deer removed from their properties
Land owners and land managers are provided with best practice and cost-effective strategies and methods for reducing environmental, social, cultural and economic impacts of feral deer.	22. The Feral Deer Control Taskforce will: a) Develop strategies to support land managers and land owners to protect their assets in the Asset Protection Zone. b) Provide advice to land owners on appropriate and effective feral deer impact control methods. c) Work with property owners and hunting groups to prepare property-based deer control plans.
Feral deer control is supported through state and national research into feral deer impacts, their potential spread and effective control methods.	23. Research and investigation priorities aligned with implementation of this strategy include: a) The efficacy of a range of control methods as they apply in different areas of Tasmania. b) New and improved control tools. c) The location of vulnerable assets requiring high level protection in the Control and Containment Zone. d) The economic impact of feral deer on the environment, business and community safety. e) Minimum annual levels of culling needed to achieve zone objectives.
Tasmania's Aboriginal people are involved in feral deer management and the non-indigenous communities' understanding of feral deer impacts on Indigenous people's values is improved.	24. The Feral Deer Control Taskforce will draw on the skills and knowledge of Indigenous Tasmanians and develop an appreciation of the impact of feral deer on the indigenous cultural landscape.
Hunters are contributing to targeted volunteer feral deer control programs.	25. Accredited recreational hunters may support the work of professional controllers in Eradication Zones where they can provide supplementary control under direction and supervision. 26. Accreditation programs will be established to enable volunteer hunters to take part in controlled and targeted feral deer control programs organised and approved by land managers, to supplement the work of professional pest controllers.

Summary of actions

Goal 4: There is a high level of awareness in the Tasmanian community of the threat of feral deer to biosecurity and community safety and the need for control.	
Objective	**Action**
The community has a high level of community awareness of the issues associated with feral deer and is involved in reporting sightings.	27. Encourage hunters, visitors and land owners to register feral deer sightings on Deer Scan or Tassie Deer Spotter or report to Biosecurity Tasmania. Biosecurity Tasmania to monitor records and respond accordingly. 28. Run community awareness programs to inform the community of the threats and impacts of feral deer and how they can support action to control feral deer.

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APPENDIX

Feral deer biosecurity zones

Zone	Objective	Area Description	Current Situation
Prevention **1,858,822 ha.** **26.8% of Tasmania**	To prevent feral deer from establishing in the area.	The Prevention Zone includes high conservation and community values where feral deer are currently not recorded as being present. This includes most of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA), Southwest Conservation Area, the southern section of Freycinet National Park, and Flinders, Cape Barren and Maria islands.	There is no record of feral deer presence in these areas although they contain habitat that may be occupied by feral deer. In the TWWHA Prevention Zone there is no effective barrier to feral deer becoming established by migration and there may already be feral deer in the Walls of Jerusalem National Park. All Prevention Zones could be subject to deliberate release and ongoing occupation.

Zone	Objective	Area Description	Current Situation
Eradication A **1,064,475 ha.** **15.3% of Tasmania**	To remove every feral deer from the area in the next five years and prevent re-colonisation (i.e by 2027).	The Eradication A Zone identifies areas where: 1/ Feral deer are recorded as being adjacent to and likely to invade the prevention zone in the TWWHA. This includes the Central Plateau and Great Western Tiers Conservation Areas and the Skullbone Plains protected area, along with areas adjacent east and north of the TWWHA. 2/ Satellite and isolated populations occur where early eradication is most cost effective. This includes Bruny Island, King Island, St Helens area, takayna/ Tarkine, and Tasman Peninsula. 3/ High value biodiversity assets occur adjacent or close to the Control and Containment zone. This includes the Ben Lomond, Douglas Aspley and Freycinet National Park areas.	Feral deer are present but generally not in large numbers. Most Isolated populations have established as a result of uncontrolled domesticated deer escapes. No satellite herds have been eradicated. There is some regulated hunting in the Central Plateau and Great Western Tiers Conservation Area, Skullbone Plains Conservation Covenant and on private land in the Tasmanian highlands, otherwise there is little current control.

Management	Feral Deer Status	Actions
Keeping feral deer out of the Prevention Zone is the most cost-effective control action and the highest priority. This requires intense and consistent surveillance and monitoring to detect feral deer incursions and act quickly to eliminate them.	The partly protected status of feral deer in Tasmania's Wildlife (General) Regulations 2010 is to be rescinded. The provisions of the Biosecurity Act 2019 and subsequent regulations will be used to establish the Prevention Zone as biosecurity or control zones and enable feral deer to be classed as a pest in the zone and subject to a control order. The control order will direct that feral deer be removed within six months of being detected.	The Tasmanian Government to establish a feral deer control taskforce that will (among a range of roles) oversee the implementation of the Biosecurity Act 2019 pest control order and work cross tenure with land owners and public land managers to ensure feral deer do not establish in the Prevention Zone. The remote and rugged nature of most of this area requires regular and timely aerial surveillance. People visiting these areas and land owners are to be encouraged to register sightings on Deer Scan or Tassie Deer Spotter or report to Biosecurity Tasmania. Biosecurity Tasmania to monitor records and act accordingly with the feral deer control taskforce.

Management	Feral Deer Status	Actions
These areas are the highest priority for eradication due to the higher short-term risk of feral deer migrating from these areas into the Prevention Zone or the high value in removing these satellite and isolated populations. Feral deer removal programs must be designed and executed to provide rapid and professional removal of feral deer. These programs will utilise professional deer controllers, land owners and accredited volunteer hunters that are committed to removal of all feral deer as part of a planned program.	The partly protected status of feral deer in Tasmania's Wildlife (General) Regulations 2010 is to be rescinded. The provisions of the Biosecurity Act 2019 and subsequent regulations will be used to establish the Eradication A Zone as a biosecurity or control zone and enable feral deer to be classed as a pest in the zone and subject to a control order. The order will direct that feral deer be removed over the next five years (by 2027) and any feral deer observed after that period will be removed within six months.	The Tasmanian Government to establish a feral deer control taskforce that will (among a range of roles) oversee the implementation of the Biosecurity Act 2019 pest control order and work with land owners and public land managers to ensure that feral deer are removed from the Eradication A Zone within five years. The taskforce will design and implement formal and cross tenure integrated feral deer removal programs for the Eradication A Zone with the aim to have all feral deer removed within five years. Public land managers will actively remove feral deer from their estate. The Tasmanian Government to provide financial and practical support to private land owners to have feral deer removed from their properties. Once feral deer are removed, carry out ongoing surveillance and monitoring to respond quickly if new occurrences appear.

Feral deer biosecurity zones

Zone	Objective	Area Description	Current Situation
Eradication B **3,184,309 ha.** **45.9% of Tasmania**	To remove every feral deer from the area over the next ten years and prevent re-colonisation (i.e. by 2032).	The Eradication B Zone includes all areas outside the Control and Containment Zone that are not in the Prevention or Eradication A zones. This includes large areas of northern and south eastern Tasmania.	Feral deer are present at lower but steadily increasing densities, tending to occur in pockets as a result of dispersing from the original Midlands "deer range" or as a result of uncontrolled domesticated deer escapes. This zone contains a significant public road network and an extensive combination of public and private land. Feral deer are having significant impacts on assets such as forestry plantations and agriculture and are a high risk to motorists. The population of feral deer in this zone will continue to grow and spread if not eradicated. There are some pockets of more intensive control occurring, particularly around forestry plantations.

Management	Feral Deer Status	Actions
These areas are a high priority for eradication. Feral deer distribution modelling, based on climate and habitat, predicts that feral deer populations will continue to grow and spread throughout this zone. Feral deer removal programs must be designed and executed to provide rapid and professional removal of feral deer. These programs will utilise professional deer controllers, land owners and accredited volunteer hunters that are committed to removal of all feral deer as part of a planned program.	The partly protected status of feral deer in Tasmania's Wildlife (General) Regulations 2010 is to be rescinded. The provisions of the Biosecurity Act 2019 and subsequent regulations will be used to establish the Eradication B Zone as biosecurity or control zones and enable feral deer to be classed as a pest in those zones and subject to a control order. The control order will direct that feral deer be removed over the next ten years (by 2032) and any feral deer observed after that period will be removed within six months.	The Tasmanian Government to establish a feral deer control taskforce that will (among a range of roles) oversee the implementation of the Biosecurity Act 2019 pest control order and work with land owners and public land managers to ensure that feral deer are removed from the Eradication B Zone within ten years. The taskforce will design and implement formal and cross tenure integrated feral deer removal programs with the aim to have all feral deer removed within ten years. Public land managers will actively remove feral deer from their estate. The Tasmanian Government to provide financial and practical support and encouragement to private land owners to have feral deer removed from their properties. Once feral deer are removed, carry out ongoing surveillance and monitoring to respond quickly if new occurrences appear.

Feral deer biosecurity zones

Zone	Objective	Area Description	Current Situation
Control and Containment **831,576 ha.** **12% of Tasmania** **Control and Containment Buffer**	To contain all feral deer to inside the defined area boundary with a population of less than 10,000 within 10 years (i.e by 2032), while also substantially reducing impacts within the area. To keep the population of feral deer in the Control and Containment Buffer very low to mitigate the likelihood that feral deer will enter the Eradication Zone.	The Control and Containment Zone is mostly private property in the Midlands and describes the area where feral deer will be strictly contained to in Tasmania. The Midlands area is generally that referred to as the "deer range" where feral deer have been historically hunted prior to expanding to other areas.	The feral deer population in the Midlands has increased substantially in size and distribution. Estimates in the 1970s were 7000-8000. An aerial survey in 2019 estimated the population at 54,000. This was flown toward the end of the hunting and crop protection season that was reported to have removed 30,000 deer, indicating the population during 2019 was well over that reported from the survey. Management of feral deer in this area relies on regulated hunting by licensed hunters during a gazetted recreational hunting season and the issuing of crop protection permits, which allow farmers under certain conditions and at certain times to cull deer that are causing damage to crops or pasture. Farmers may initiate property-based game management plans. This is an agreement between recreational hunters and a land owner. A fee is paid to the land owner along with other works carried out by hunters in exchange for deer hunting rights. The focus of hunters is on management of the deer herd for quality rather than reducing impact. This approach to managing feral deer has seen the population increase significantly in size and distribution in the Midlands.

Management	Feral Deer Status	Actions
This area will remain as an area available for recreational hunting, however, the focus will shift to substantially reducing impacts of feral deer on private and public land. Regulatory constraints will be removed to enable land owners to control feral deer as they see fit. The population of feral deer in the Control and Containment zone will be reduced to and kept below 10,000 within 10 years. This reflects the population of feral deer in this area to that of the late 1970s and early 1980s. A 10km buffer inside the Control and Containment Zone boundary is in place where concentrated control will keep deer numbers very low to mitigate the likelihood that feral deer will enter the Eradication Zone. Land owners will be encouraged and supported to prepare property-based deer management plans that will prescribe population and density targets that must be met as well as methods and access agreements between hunters and land owners. Professional feral deer controllers may be utilised at the land owner's discretion. On private property in the Control and Containment Zone only, deer culling may be undertaken in association with accredited wild meat processors under strict regulation, if this option is found to be feasible and risks to be negligible by the taskforce.	The partly protected status of feral deer in Tasmania's Wildlife (General) Regulations 2010 is to be rescinded. Feral Deer are to be unclassified to enable land owners to take control of feral deer unconstrained by Wildlife Regulations.	The Tasmanian Government to remove all regulatory constraints to enable private land owners to control feral deer as they see fit. The Tasmanian Government to establish a Feral Deer Control Task Force. The role in the Midlands will be to: • Work with property owners and hunting groups to prepare property-based deer management plans. • Provide advice on deer impact control methods. • Prepare a Midlands feral deer action plan for reducing and sustaining the feral deer population to below 10,000, to identify and provide protection to high value assets (see asset protection zone below) and managing the Eradication Zone buffer. • Encourage the establishment of community deer control groups for land owners to work collaboratively and learn off each other at a district level. • If considered feasible and the risks are negligible, work with industry to develop protocols for commercial use of wild caught deer meat to ensure its commitment and financial sustainability is not dependent on maintaining a feral deer herd greater than 10,000 deer in the longer term and will integrate with hunter take.

Feral deer biosecurity zones

Zone	Objective	Area Description	Current Situation
Asset Protection	Protect areas of high value within the Control and Containment Zone.	The Midlands Control and Containment Zone contains significant values that will require ongoing protection from the presence of feral deer. The recognition of the Midlands as a National Biodiversity Hotspot is testament to biodiversity values. There are several Conservation Reserves and Conservation Covenants on private land. Other values include agricultural crops, plantations, revegetation and living amenity.	The biodiversity values of the Midlands are recognised and their protection is carried out and supported by several organisations. The area is also highly valued for agricultural production, with extensive areas of crops under irrigation. Many land owners are actively working to reduce the impact of feral deer on their assets, be they for biodiversity, revegetation, agricultural production or other values. However, there is no strategic or coordinated approach to protecting important values and assets from feral deer in the Midlands.

Management	Feral Deer Status	Actions
Intense management of feral deer impacts is required to protect high values assets at risk from feral deer. This may include intense culling, fencing, use of deterrents or general disruptive activities.	The partly protected status of feral deer in Tasmania's Wildlife (General) Regulations 2010 is to be rescinded. Biosecurity pest status may not be appropriate due to the small and scattered nature of assets across the Midlands, however, being unclassified allows land owners to act aggressively to remove feral deer impacts unconstrained by Wildlife Regulations.	The Tasmanian Government to establish a feral deer control taskforce. The taskforce will develop a Midlands feral deer action plan that identifies high value assets that require protection from feral deer, strategies to support land owners to protect their assets, and a strategy for containing the population to below 10,000 in the Control and Containment zone (see above). The Tasmanian Government is to provide assistance and support to land owners that manage high value assets at risk from feral deer.

CONTACT US

- web: invasives.org.au
- email: contact@invasives.org.au

@ISCAustralia

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invasivespeciescouncil