

A BUCK TOO FAR

Protecting feral deer is a bill Tasmania can't afford



Inset: Deer footprint in the Central Highlands. Image: Tom Guy

\$1.4 BILLION

The projected cost of feral deer to Tasmania over the next 30 years.

New economic analysis reveals the growing cost of inaction.

Feral deer are costing Tasmania millions. The bill is about to get much bigger.

Feral deer are rapidly becoming one of Tasmania's most costly invasive species.

They are trashing our bushland, polluting our waterways, damaging farms and causing more crashes on our roads – and the bill is growing fast.

New analysis by Frontier Economics for the Invasive Species Council estimates that **deer in the Midlands and eastern regions** alone are already costing Tasmania **more than \$53 million a year**.

Without stronger action, that cost could reach almost **\$1.4 billion over the next 30 years**.

And that's only part of the story. The modelling excludes many environmental, cultural and biosecurity impacts, meaning the **true cost of Tasmania's deer problem is likely much higher**.

The deer problem is growing fast

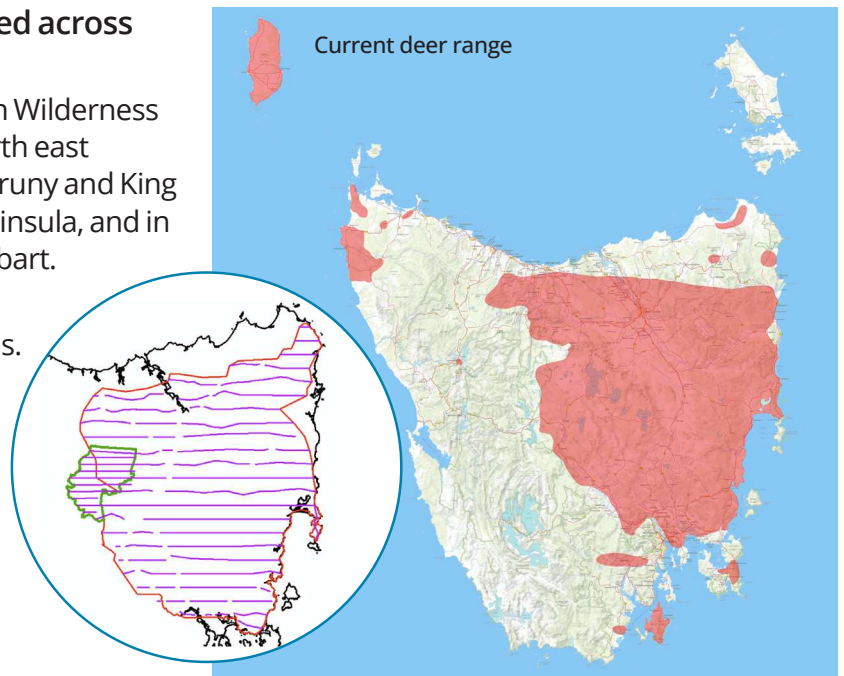
Feral deer populations have exploded across Tasmania.

They can now be found in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, up through the north east around St Helens, in the northwest, on Bruny and King Island, on the Tasman and Freycinet Peninsula, and in the suburbs around Launceston and Hobart.

There are already **over 70,000 deer** in Tasmania's Midlands and eastern regions.

Under current government policies, **that number could climb to over 650,000 deer by 2054**.

Right: The area of Tasmania that was surveyed for deer in 2024. This represents the area for which this report estimates the costs of deer.



Why current deer policy is failing

For decades, feral deer have been managed in Tasmania as a hunting resource rather than as the serious pest they are. Other states take this problem seriously; it's time Tasmania did too.

The science is clear: to reduce the total deer population, removals need to exceed natural population growth, which means removing 35-50% of the population annually for fallow deer. Patchy, ad hoc ground shooting does not achieve these removal rates at a landscape scale.

Tasmania needs coordinated, professional, sustained control across public and private land. We need increased government investment and the removal of the current ridiculous rules that protect deer and prevent proper management.

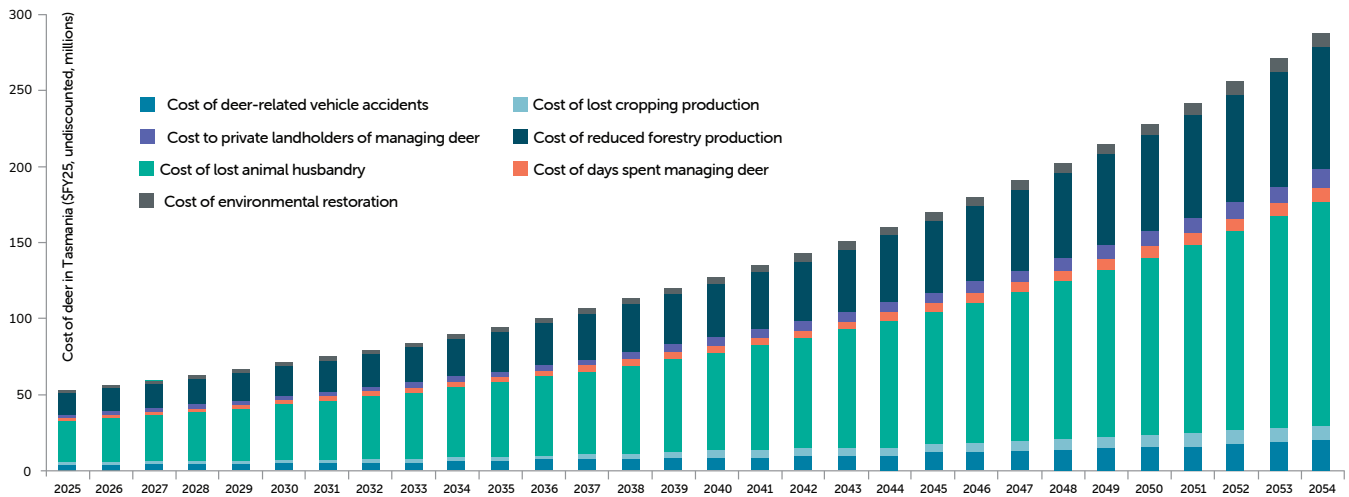


Feral deer in Tasmania. Image: Faye Beswick.

What the report found

The report found the annual cost of deer in the Midlands and eastern Tasmania could increase from **\$53 million today** to almost **\$300 million a year by 2054** if impacts continue to grow in line with feral deer population growth. And in reality, it will probably be much worse than this. This massive cost is also likely to be a significant underestimate, as it excludes many environmental, cultural and biosecurity impacts and only covers part of Tasmania.

The report focused only on impacts and areas that could be quantified using the existing data.



Impact	No escalation	1% escalation	6% escalation
Cost of lost animal husbandry	\$360.80	\$398.80	\$713.70
Cost of reduced forestry production	\$196.50	\$217.20	\$388.70
Cost of deer related vehicle accidents	\$98.20	\$98.20	\$98.20
Cost to private landholders of managing deer	\$30.10	\$33.20	\$59.50
Cost of lost cropping production	\$23.40	\$25.90	\$46.30
Cost of environmental restoration	\$22.70	\$25	\$44.80
Cost of days spent managing deer	\$22.50	\$24.90	\$44.50
Total	\$754.10	\$823.20	\$1,395.90

The modelling tested different escalation rates, including assuming that costs grow at the same rate as deer populations grow – 6%.

What the Tasmanian government should do now

The cost of delay is rising. The longer governments wait, the more deer numbers will grow, the further they will spread, and the more expensive their impacts and the cost of control will become.

The Invasive Species Council is calling on the Tasmanian government to:

1. Remove the legal protection of feral deer under wildlife laws.
2. Commit at least \$15 million over the next 5 years to reduce deer numbers in the Midlands through targeted, coordinated professional control.
3. Commit at least \$14 million over the next 10 years for key island eradications, including Bruny and King Island, with funding frontloaded.
4. Urgently expand and intensify peri-urban deer control, including on the Tasman and Freycinet Peninsulas and around Hobart and Launceston.
5. Continue and expand aerial control on the Central Plateau to protect the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.
6. Ban all new deer farms and increase enforcement of deer farm regulations to prevent deer escaping or being released into the environment.
7. Replace the current three-zone deer system with 2 clear zones: a deer management zone and a deer eradication zone.



Freycinet National Park. Image: Richard Siu.

Inset: Deer damage to topsoil and ground vegetation in the Central Highlands. Image: Tom Guy.

Feral deer are a growing economic, environmental, cultural and public safety problem for Tasmania.

The report shows that deer are already costing the Tasmanian community tens of millions of dollars each year. Without decisive action, those costs will rise dramatically.

Tasmanians need action now.

Read the full report:



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