

National Vertebrate Pest Management Report Card (2026)

Feral deer

1. National Snapshot

Feral deer are one of Australia's most rapidly increasing invasive pests, driving growing environmental, agricultural and economic impacts. Estimated annual costs exceed \$91 million including production losses, management costs and transport impacts (McLeod 2023). Feral Deer damage crops, pasture and infrastructure, compete with livestock, and degrade biodiversity and cultural values. Feral deer also pose biosecurity risks through the potential spread of exotic diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease and by contributing to tick presence in some landscapes, increasing exposure risks to tick-borne conditions such as alpha-gal syndrome.

Australia has six established feral deer species: chital, fallow, hog, red, rusa and sambar deer. Populations are well established across south-eastern Australia, where densities are highest and management focuses on containment and protection of high-value environmental and agricultural assets. In contrast, South Australia and Western Australia have smaller, more localised populations. The Northern Territory has only a few low-density, localised populations.

Over the past five years, deer abundance and distribution have increased across Australia, reflecting ongoing population growth and range expansion. Increases were reported in most jurisdictions, while Victoria and Western Australia reported abundance was largely unchanged, and South Australia reported decreases due to state-wide eradication efforts.

Distribution trends followed a similar pattern, increasing in most jurisdictions, remaining largely unchanged in Western Australia, and decreasing in South Australia.

Environmental and agricultural impacts were assessed as largely unchanged nationally. South Australia reported reduced impacts, reflecting outcomes from state-wide eradication efforts. In contrast, most other jurisdictions reported impacts that remained largely unchanged or increasing, consistent with expanding feral deer populations.

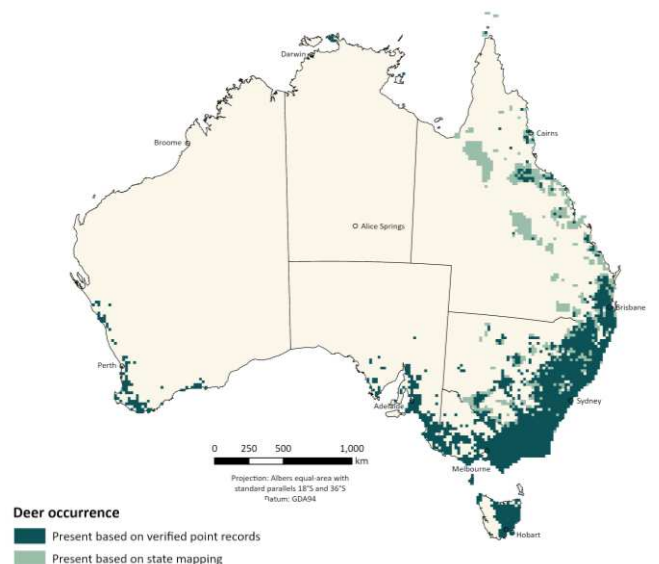
Most states and territories indicated their management programs primarily aimed to protect both environmental and agricultural assets. Reducing road hazards was also an emerging priority as populations continue to spread into peri-urban areas. Tasmania and Victoria, also highlighted the need to protect cultural heritage sites.

Nationally, integrated control programs using aerial and ground shooting continue to be the most effective approaches for reducing feral deer populations at landscape scale. Community engagement also remains critical to landscape-scale management, supporting coordinated action across land tenures, increasing participation in control programs, and improving the long-term effectiveness of feral deer management.

Private land managers play a critical role in feral deer management across Australia through ongoing on-ground control and participation in coordinated landscape-scale programs, with responsibilities that vary under jurisdictional biosecurity legislation.

2. Current Distribution

Current National Occurrence of Feral Deer in Australia (2026)



Source: [ABARES \(2026\)](#)

3. National 5-year trends

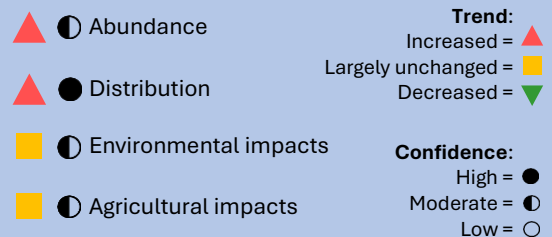
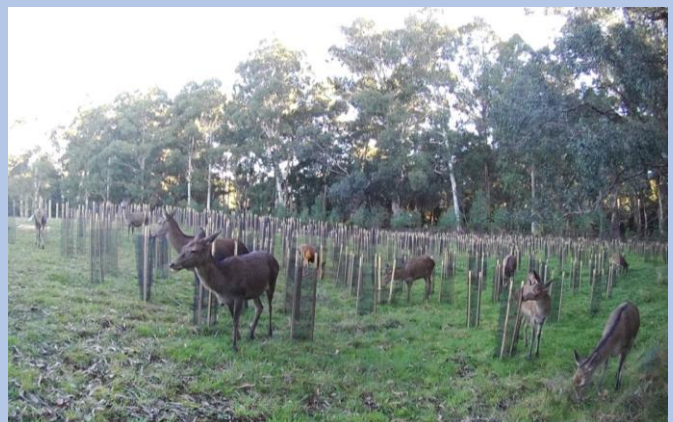


Photo credit: Gaye Gadsdon

Feral deer – State & Territory Snapshot

4. State/Territory 5-year trends

Feral deer increased in abundance between 2020 to 2025, in Queensland, New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania, while numbers remained largely unchanged in Victoria and Western Australia. South Australia was the only jurisdiction to report declining abundance and distribution, reflecting progress achieved through state-wide eradication efforts since 2022. Distribution increased across most jurisdictions, while feral deer populations in Western Australia and the Northern Territory remain limited and localised ([FeralScan](#)).

Several jurisdictions reported increasing environmental and agricultural impacts as feral deer populations expanded. ABARES ([2024](#)) pest animal and weed management land manager surveys (2016–2022) indicated that feral deer remained a persistent problem for landholders. This highlights the need for ongoing management, containment and eradication efforts. [DeerScan](#) also indicates increased sighting and control records over the past five years, reflecting both growing deer populations and increased participation in monitoring and reporting.

Jurisdictional trends are based largely on local observations, landholder reports, control data and expert opinion rather than standardised monitoring. As a result, information remains fragmented, largely qualitative and indicative only, with confidence ranging from low to high across jurisdictions. Reported impacts may lag behind changes in pest distribution or abundance and are also influenced by seasonal conditions, asset vulnerability and management effort.

5-year trend	QLD	NSW	ACT	VIC	TAS	SA	WA	NT
Abundance	▲ ●	▲ ●	▲ ●	■ ●	▲ ●	▼ ●	■ ○	Small, isolated populations
Distribution	▲ ●	▲ ●	▲ ●	▲ ●	▲ ●	▼ ●	■ ●	Small, isolated populations
Environmental Impact	▲ ●	▲ ●	■ ●	■ ●	▲ ○	▼ ●	■ ○	■ ○
Agricultural Impact	■ ●	▲ ●	▲ ●	■ ●	▲ ○	▼ ●	■ ○	■ ○

5-year trend: Increased= ▲ Largely unchanged= ■ Decreased= ▼

Confidence: High= ● Moderate= ○ Low= ○

South Australia on track to achieve statewide eradication

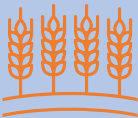
5. Building capacity

As feral deer populations continue to expand, coordinated and collaborative management is increasingly important for effective control. State and local government agencies are increasingly supporting private and public landholders to undertake landscape-scale control programs, particularly in peri-urban areas where communities face additional challenges in managing feral deer. Collaborative approaches improve the efficiency and effectiveness of control by enabling coordinated action across land tenures and maximising the impact of available resources.

The Whitsundays Feral Deer Control Program demonstrates the value of this approach. Led by the Whitsunday Regional Council in partnership with landholders and regional NRM groups, the program protects biodiversity, agricultural assets and reduces public safety risks.



Photo credit: Mid Coast Council



Feral deer management programs protect environmental, agricultural, cultural and community assets.

6. Control tools and efforts

Across Australia, feral deer control in 2024–25 was undertaken by government agencies over more than 2.6 million hectares of public and private land.

Feral deer management programs across Australia apply an integrated approach combining direct control, monitoring and community engagement.

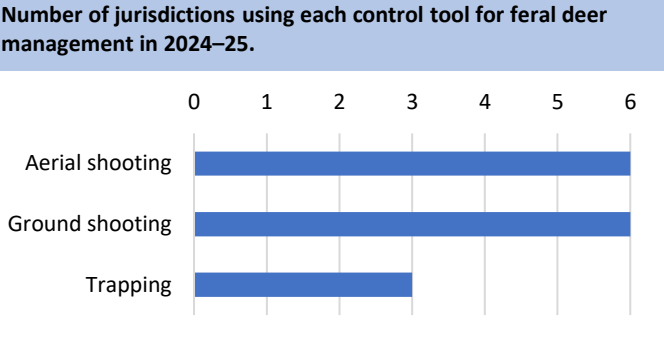
Aerial control, including thermal-assisted aerial shooting, remains the most effective method for reducing feral deer at landscape scale. Over six jurisdictions, more than 32,000 deer were removed through targeted aerial culling programs in 2024–25.

Ground shooting is widely used alongside aerial control to maintain pressure on feral deer populations, while both ground shooting and trapping are employed in peri-urban and urban areas where aerial operations are restricted.

Community engagement and monitoring are core components of most programs, supporting coordinated action across land tenures, increasing participation in control activities, maintaining social licence, and assessing program outcomes.

South Australia also incorporates compliance and enforcement as part of its eradication-focused approach.

Western Australia was in the planning and community consultation phase at the time of this survey, in preparation for their first aerial culling program, targeting isolated feral deer populations.



Over 2.6 million hectares under feral deer control



Over 32,000 feral deer removed by targeted aerial culling in 2024–25

7. Program goals and achievements

Goal	ACT	NSW	QLD	TAS	VIC	WA	SA	NT ^A
On track to reduce impacts	●	●	●	●		●	●	
On track to reduce future impacts	●	●	●	●			●	
On track to reduce abundance	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
On track to reduce distribution	●	●	●	●	●		●	
On track to reduce incursions	●	●	●	●	●		●	

Blank responses indicate that no goal was nominated, reflecting differences in management objectives between programs, regions and jurisdictions. ^ANT agencies reported no current feral deer program to support small, isolated deer populations.

National goal score



- Achieved
- Partially achieved
- Not achieved
- Unsure
- Not nominated

Most jurisdictions considered their programs to be partially on track to reducing feral deer impacts and abundance, with fewer jurisdictions on track to prevent further spread and incursions. South Australia was the only jurisdiction considered on track to reduce feral deer abundance, distribution and impacts, reflecting the outcomes of sustained statewide eradication efforts that commenced in 2022.

Variation in program achievements across jurisdiction, highlights challenges faced by increasing feral deer numbers and scale of control efforts required to reduce numbers and impacts at landscape scales.



8. Future focus to reduce feral deer impacts

Feral deer remain a significant and growing challenge across Australia, with established populations in some regions and emerging populations in others, particularly in peri-urban areas of New South Wales and south-east Queensland. Intensive and coordinated control programs, including aerial shooting, ground control and trap development, are delivering positive outcomes in several regions. Successful examples include the Whitsunday feral deer aerial shooting program, the South Australian statewide eradication program, coordinated ground control in south-east Queensland, and feral deer eradication efforts in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area, and targeted aerial control programs supporting the recovery of sensitive alpine ecosystems in Victoria.

Management is complicated by the differing legal status of deer across jurisdictions and, in some cases, between species, resulting in varying management objectives and obligations for land managers. Increasingly, jurisdictions are adopting proactive approaches to eradicate small emerging populations before they become widespread.

Continued progress will require coordinated control at a landscape scale, with increased participation across private and public land tenures, strengthened local partnerships, improved monitoring and reporting, and sustained investment in early intervention and community-based programs. These actions are critical to reducing feral deer impacts, slowing further spread and protecting high-value environmental, agricultural and community assets.



Photo credit: Parks Tasmania

The [Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Deer Control Project](#) (2023–25), led by the Tasmania Parks and Wildlife Service, used thermally assisted aerial shooting and ground control to eradicate wild fallow deer from the Walls of Jerusalem National Park and substantially reduce populations in the adjacent Central Plateau Conservation Area.

The program protected World Heritage values and sensitive alpine ecosystems, including endangered Miena cider gum communities. Between 2023 and 2025, more than 1,340 deer were removed across the project area.



Photo credit: PIRSA

Thermal-assisted aerial culling (TAAC) is increasingly being adopted across Australia as an accurate, effective and humane method for reducing feral deer populations at landscape scales.

During 2024–25, several jurisdictions undertook trials to assess its application in warmer environments in Queensland and densely forested plantations, with results demonstrating strong effectiveness across diverse conditions.

The technique has been central to [South Australia's statewide deer eradication program](#) and is increasingly recognised as a key tool for achieving large-scale population reduction and eradication objectives.

