

Feral Deer Impacts

Limestone Coast Landscape Board

The impact and population of feral deer throughout the Limestone Coast is increasing. Feral deer cause considerable impacts on the regional economy, agriculture and on the health of native plants and animals in parks and reserves.

Feral deer are deer that are not kept in captivity. Deer were introduced into the Australian environment for farming and recreational shooting purposes in the early 1800's. Almost eradicated by the 1983 Ash Wednesday bushfires, feral deer have since established across the Limestone Coast region, particularly around the Coorong area.

Feral deer compete with livestock for pasture, eat native plants, damage fences, have significant potential to spread diseases, create a public safety hazard and can attract illegal activity.

Under the *Landscape South Australia Act 2019* (the Act) deer are declared for control and the Act includes separate declarations for domestic (farmed) and feral deer.

Several species of feral deer, in particular fallow (*Dama dama*) and red deer (*Cervus elaphus*), are located throughout the Limestone Coast.

In South Australia other feral deer species include chital deer (*Axis axis*), hog deer (*Axis porcinus*), rusa deer (*Cervus timoriensis*) and sambar (*Cervus unicolor*). Increased scale and intensity of control is needed across the Limestone Coast region as numbers continue to increase and the population spread.

Invasiveness and spread of feral deer

Deer are reclusive animals and it is not unusual for a landowner to have significant numbers grazing on or moving through their property without being fully aware of their presence.

Apart from sightings, the biggest indicator there are feral deer on a property is the presence of tracks, damage to fencing or rubbing on trees.

Deer can range widely and are creatures of habit that tend to move along defined pathways. Over time the pathways develop into well-worn tracks, often going through and under fences.

Impact of feral deer in the Limestone Coast

Primary production

- Competition with stock for pasture and damage to crops
- Risk of spreading disease
- Ring-barking paddock trees, destroying saplings and shelter belts, particularly during the rut
- Trampling and grazing of agricultural crops
- Destruction of vineyards
- Soil compaction
- Damage to fences.

Biosecurity

- Reservoir for exotic diseases such as foot and mouth and rinderpest if these were to enter Australia.

Social

- Attracting illegal activities on private and public properties
- Traffic hazards and vehicle accidents
- Destruction of gardens and recreational parks.

Environmental

- Trampling, grazing and ring-barking native bushland
- Soil erosion and compaction in areas of high use such as trails, pastures and creek lines
- Weed dispersal
- Fouling of waterholes
- Spread of plant diseases (*Phytophthora cinnamomi*)
- Disturbing native fauna by destroying habitat including vulnerable species breeding such as trampling malleefowl nesting sites
- Destruction of native revegetation sites and seedlings.



Landholder responsibility

Under the Act, deer are declared for control with separate declarations for domestic (farmed) and feral deer.

In South Australia, feral deer cannot be moved, sold, kept or released.

Landholders are responsible for eradication of all feral deer on their properties under the Act.

Eradication of Feral Deer

Deer control is best implemented at a large scale with cooperation of adjoining landholders as deer are very mobile. It is recommended you contact the Limestone Coast Landscape Board for advice regarding the eradication of feral deer on your property and how to participate in the Limestone Coast Landscape Board's control programs.

The options to assist removal of feral deer on your property include:

- Aerial shooting operations
- Professional ground shooting contractors
- Commercial meat harvesters.

Early Detection & Monitoring

Eradicating feral deer is best achieved before populations establish.

Any sightings of feral deer should be reported to:

- the Limestone Coast Landscape Board
www.landscape.sa.gov.au/feraldeer to help inform the feral deer control programs.
- to Feral Scan at www.feralscan.org.au to ensure all feral deer activity is mapped in the region.

Keeping records of the number of deer sighted and controlled on your property provides useful information on population sizes, distribution trends, deer density and effects of control programs. This information is also of benefit to the region in designing control programs into the future.

Coordinated management

As with any pest species, feral deer do not respect property boundaries. Effective management on one property may be undermined by deer wandering in from adjoining properties. For this reason managing feral deer is best achieved as a joint exercise, involving all land managers in the local area, and ensuring all deer are removed.

Acknowledgements

The content of this publication has been developed with support from the Government of South Australia's Department of Research and Primary Industries.

Disclaimer

Although reasonable care has been taken in preparing the information presented in this publication, neither the Limestone Coast Landscape Board nor the other contributing authors accept any responsibility or liability for any losses of whatever kind arising from the interpretation or use of the information set out in this document. Where products and/or their trade names are mentioned, no endorsement of these products is intended, nor is any criticism implied of similar products not mentioned.

202139 | Feral Deer | Reissued July 2022



Prevent Escapes- Domestic (Farmed) Deer Fencing

Best practise for all deer farms is to prevent farmed deer escaping into the natural environment or adjoining properties and supplementing feral deer populations.

Domestic deer are livestock, which must be registered with PIRSA under a Property Identification Code. Further information on Domestic Deer in South Australia can be found on the PIRSA website.

Under the Act domestic (farmed) deer must be secured or confined within a property by effective deer proof fencing.

Any escaped tagged domestic (farmed) deer should be reported to the nearest regional Limestone Coast Landscape Board office.

Authorised Officers of the Limestone Coast Landscape Board regularly inspect deer farm fences and are authorised to instruct deer farmers to maintain or repair boundary fences.

Escaped Domestic Deer on your property

As a landholder if you see escaped domestic deer on your property, you should immediately report them to the Limestone Coast Landscape Board.

If known, it is recommended the deer farmer is contacted to alert them of escaped deer from their property.

Deer with a visible ear tag fitted cannot be destroyed for 7 days, or a shorter period if instructed by a Limestone Coast Landscape Board Authorised Officer if the deer keeper has a history of deer escapes.

After 7 days, if the deer keeper has not recaptured the deer, the deer will be classified as feral deer, and must be destroyed by the landholder.

More information

Limestone Coast Landscape Board

Mount Gambier Office

11 Helen Street

Mount Gambier SA 5290

Phone: 08 8429 7550