



# **Government Response to the Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee Inquiry into the Control of Invasive Animals on Crown Land**

Final report

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## Foreword

The Andrews Labor Government is committed to reducing the impact of invasive animals in Victoria. I am pleased to release the Government's response to the Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee's inquiry into the control of invasive animals on Crown land.

The Committee made 33 recommendations for Government action on a wide range of issues about the extent, impact and management of invasive animals on Crown land. I would like to thank the Committee for their thorough investigation and comprehensive recommendations.

The response addresses each recommendation made by the Committee. The Government supports a total of 29 recommendations in full, in principle or in part. One recommendation is under review.

I fully support the Inquiry's recommendation to declare feral cats as an established pest animal. Feral cats are a serious threat to Victoria's threatened wildlife. 43 threatened species are directly at risk from feral cat predation. The declaration of the feral cat as an established pest animal is part of a national commitment to the control of feral cats, and a very important milestone in the protection of Victoria's threatened wildlife.

The declaration will enable the humane, efficient and effective control of feral cats in areas of high biodiversity value on public land. The Government will work closely with key stakeholders and the Victorian community to ensure the declaration process considers all views and addresses any concerns.

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning coordinated with the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources, the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Department of Justice and Regulation, Victoria Police, Parks Victoria and the Game Management Authority in the development of the Government's response. I am grateful to these departments and agencies for their hard work.

I am confident the implementation of these recommendations will improve the management of invasive animals on Crown land in Victoria.



**Hon Lily D'Ambrosio MP**

Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change

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# Introduction

The Environment, Natural Resources and Regional Development Committee's (ENRRDC) final report on the inquiry into the control of invasive animals on Crown land was tabled in Parliament on 20 June 2017.

This Government response addresses each recommendation made by the ENRRDC in its final report.

The Andrews Labor Government is committed to reducing the negative impact of invasive animals on assets of importance to all Victorians. Be it vulnerable native plants or animals in parks and forests on Crown land, or supporting community action on adjoining private land to reduce the impact of invasive animals on productivity and other values. The Government recognises the intrinsic connection of Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians to Country and acknowledges their contribution in the management of land, water, and the natural landscape. The Government engage with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal groups, through the implementation of key policies such as the *Victorian Aboriginal Inclusion Framework* and *Protecting Victoria's Biodiversity: Biodiversity 2037*, to increase Aboriginal participation in biodiversity and land management.

Invasive animals can be found in all terrestrial and aquatic environments in Victoria, with many expanding in number and distribution. Invasive animals have significant biodiversity, agricultural and social impacts and management of these is critical to the environment, economy and to community health and wellbeing. The responsibility for managing invasive species in Victoria is shared by public and private land managers. The Government invests in invasive species management to maximise public benefit, intervening where the benefits outweigh the costs.

Victoria uses a risk-management approach to reduce the impact of invasive species across the state. This approach aims to prevent the entry of new high-risk invasive species into Victoria, eradicate from the state those high-risk species that are at an early stage of establishment, contain where possible species that are beyond eradication and protect key assets from the impact of widespread species.

The Government supports the Committee's findings that invasive animals are a significant problem in Victoria, and the recognition that the management of invasive animals is a complex issue. The Government welcomes the identification of potential improvements in the way invasive animals are managed on Crown land.

The Government will ensure that appropriate actions are taken to implement the recommendations to the extent they have been accepted in the Government's response. The agencies involved in the development of the Government's response will be responsible for prioritising the delivery of recommendations. Decisions about resourcing to implement these recommendations will be subject to budget processes in the context of the Government's investment and service delivery priorities.

# Terminology Used in the Government's Response

## Recreational hunting, Volunteer Shooters, Professional Shooters

In preparing the Government's response, some inconsistency has been identified in the terminology used in the inquiry's final report and Government terminology relating to recreational hunting, volunteer shooters and paid professional shooters. It is important to clarify the use and meaning of these terms to ensure a shared understanding and to clearly differentiate between recreational hunting and the participation of accredited volunteers and professional shooters in invasive animal control operations on Crown land:

In this document:

Inquiry Terminology	Victorian Government Terminology	Definition
<b>Co-ordinated recreational hunting / Co-ordinated invasive-animal control programs / Volunteer hunters</b>	<b>Skilled and accredited volunteer shooters</b>	Refers to skilled and accredited volunteer members, currently of the Sporting Shooters Association Australia and Australian Deer Association, who participate in strategic, targeted invasive animal control operations on public land that are coordinated by the Government.
<b>Recreational hunting, Hunters, Hunting</b>	<b>Recreational hunting, Hunters, Hunting</b>	Refers to hunting for sport that is undertaken by a firearms licence holder (required for hunting pest animals), or a firearms licence holder who also holds a game licence (required for hunting game species). The intention of recreational hunting is for enjoyment and leisure by those who undertake it. The Game Management Authority regulates recreational and game hunting in Victoria.
<b>Professional hunters</b>	<b>Professional hunters / Professional shooters</b>	Professional shooters refer to licensed firearm operators that are highly skilled and experienced expert marksmen. Professional shooters / Professional hunters are substantially dependant on hunting as a source of income and enter into formal engagements or contracts to hunt professionally. They may be engaged by Crown land managers to conduct targeted invasive animal control in circumstances that require specific skills.
<b>Paid professional pest controllers / Professional pest controllers</b>	<b>Professional pest animal controllers</b>	Professional pest animal controllers are engaged by Crown land managers to deliver a wide variety of invasive animal control programs including trapping and baiting. The term may encompass professional shooters.

### **The Sustainable Hunting Action Plan**

The Government released the *Sustainable Hunting Action Plan* (SHAP) in December 2016. The SHAP takes a common-sense approach to ensuring the long-term sustainability of hunting and concentrates on practical and measurable actions that will maximise benefits for the environment, the economy, the community and hunters.

### **Protecting Victoria's Biodiversity: Biodiversity 2037**

The Government released *Protecting Victoria's Biodiversity: Biodiversity 2037* (Biodiversity Plan) in April 2017. It is Victoria's plan to stop the decline of the state's native plants and animals, and improve the natural environment so it is healthy, valued and actively cared for.

### **The Invasive Plants and Animals Policy Framework**

The *Invasive Plants and Animals Policy Framework* represents the Victorian Government's approach to managing existing and potential invasive species across the whole of Victoria. It prioritises actions based on a biosecurity approach that aims to prevent the entry of new high risk invasive species, eradicate those that are at an early stage of establishment contain, where possible, species that are beyond eradication and take an asset-based approach to managing widespread invasive species.

## Recommendation 1

**That the Government allocate resources to the appropriate authority to undertake work to quantify and measure the numbers and impact of invasive species populations.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in principle.**

The Government recognises the importance of targeted, evidence based programs for managing the impacts of invasive species.

Agriculture Victoria in the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport, Resources (DEDJTR) has responsibility for the Government's investment in research and development to support the development of effective policy tools for invasive animal management. Allocation of resources to undertake work to quantify and measure the numbers and impact of invasive species populations will be considered as part of annual research and development investment processes. Land managers have responsibility to fund and oversee the implementation of research.

The relationship between the numbers of invasive species and their impacts is complex and multifaceted. Prioritisation is required to identify the most significant impacts that can feasibly be addressed.

## Recommendation 2

**That Victoria Police and the Game Management Authority work collaboratively to better monitor and educate the community on reporting mechanisms for illegal hunting activity.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in full.**

The RESPECT: Hunt Responsibly program, coordinated by the Game Management Authority (GMA) and supported by other Government agencies, industry and hunting organisations, actively encourages the community to report illegal hunting activity. The GMA works in partnership with Crime Stoppers to provide an avenue for concerned members of the public to report illegal hunting. Reports can also be made to the GMA Customer Service Centre phone line, online at the GMA website or directly to Victoria Police.

Victoria Police will continue to work in partnership with the GMA on public education initiatives to improve the understanding of how, when and where to report illegal hunting through collaboration on industry newsletters, other publications, forums and coordinated events. Victoria Police, GMA and other regulatory authorities, such as the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), have agreements which allow them to capture, monitor and share information relating to illegal hunting activity. This facilitates a more integrated, targeted and intelligence-led approach to addressing illegal hunting.

The GMA will recruit an intelligence analyst to support this approach and increase the capacity to monitor and respond to illegal hunting activity.



## Recommendation 3

**That the Government evaluate the effectiveness of existing control programs to manage invasive species.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in principle.**

The Government agrees that robust methods are required to develop effective and efficient programs for the control of invasive species at local, regional and state levels.

A rigorous and evidence based approach allows for sound decision making, prioritisation to ensure return on investment, and the development of best management practices. The analysis of quality information also enables policy development, appropriate investment decisions, adaptive management and accurate reporting of the relative effectiveness of programs.

This is best achieved through the development of a whole of Government monitoring evaluation and reporting framework (MERF) for invasive species to ensure a consistent approach to data collection, analysis and reporting. A cross departmental MERF was developed in 2009, and the Government will, subject to available resourcing, investigate whether the MERF could be reinvigorated, reviewed and reinstated while linking to other relevant MER frameworks such as for biodiversity, and forests and fire. This would include consideration of common principles adopted by other MERFs.

## Recommendation 4

**That the Government make publicly available the results of the Alpine National Park deer management trial once completed and use these findings to inform future invasive species management program designs.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in full.**

The aim of the Alpine National Park deer control trial is to explore whether ground shooting can reduce the impacts of deer on threatened alpine peatland communities in the park, and to investigate the most efficient and effective way to apply ground shooting.

At the conclusion of the trial, the results and lessons learned will be used to provide future directions for ongoing deer control in the Alpine National Park. Parks Victoria will make these results publicly available at the completion of the trial to contribute to and inform deer management programs in other areas.

## Recommendation 5

**That Parks Victoria engage, consult and work together with private landowners whose property adjoins public land where invasive species control programs are occurring to facilitate and ensure complementary control activities occur across land tenures.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in full.**

The Government recognises that in many cases it is important that a cross-land tenure approach is taken to minimise the spread of invasive species and improve the effectiveness of control programs.

Integrated, collaborative, landscape scale invasive animal control is widely accepted as best practice management. This principle involves integrating multiple control techniques, such as baiting and trapping, at the most appropriate spatial scale to ensure management objectives are achieved.

The Government applies this principle where appropriate, through engaging and working with adjoining landowners with a view to protect biodiversity and supporting community action to reduce the impact of invasive animals on productivity and other values. Noting it is not always possible to facilitate and ensure complementary control across land tenure.

## Recommendation 6

**That the Government ensure all coordinated recreational hunting programs are appropriately supervised, involve wide consultation, are well advertised, are rigorously evaluated and are transparent to ensure the concerns and needs of communities are addressed.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in full.**

The Government funds partnership programs with the Australian Deer Association (ADA) and Sporting Shooters' Association Australia (SSAA) to control invasive animals and deer on public land. These programs are developed and delivered in close consultation between Parks Victoria and hunting organisations and draw on skilled and accredited volunteer members of those organisations.

The control programs are targeted operations designed to achieve population management objectives through the application of strategic control. Individual projects are run with strict guidelines in place to ensure safety of operators and the neighbouring communities.

Programs are supervised by Parks Victoria staff and delivered in accordance with an operations plan which includes notifying neighbours. Programs are evaluated annually in collaboration with the ADA, SSAA and regional field staff.

## Recommendation 7

**That the Government develop a monitoring framework that is designed to provide a better understanding of the relative effectiveness of different control methods (and combinations of methods) and can be used to assess whether or not funds for invasive animal control are providing the best value for money.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in principle.**

Please refer to the response to Recommendation 3.

## Recommendation 8

**That programs using volunteer hunters be used to complement rather than displace the use of paid professional pest controllers. Any funding to support co-ordinated recreational hunting programs should be in addition to funding for engaging professional pest controllers.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in full.**

Parks Victoria implements invasive species control programs across the parks estate to reduce threats and impacts on biodiversity, cultural heritage and other values. Professional pest animal controllers, including professional shooters, and skilled and accredited volunteer shooters are used depending on where it is practical and cost-effective for them to be involved.

The Government currently funds partnership programs with community hunting organisations to support and complement Parks Victoria's invasive animal and deer control programs.

Professional pest animal controllers are engaged by Parks Victoria to deliver a wide variety of control programs which involve the control of foxes, rabbits, feral pigs, feral goats, wild dogs and deer in circumstances that require specific skills.

## Recommendation 9

**That the Government declare feral or wild cats to be ‘established pest animals’ under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*, mirroring the way wild dogs are classified.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in full.**

The Government intends to declare the feral cat as an established pest animal on public land in Victoria under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* to help enable public land managers to humanely, effectively and efficiently reduce the impact of feral cats in areas where key biodiversity values are at risk. The declaration will not affect private land. The declaration of feral cats as pest animals is part of a national commitment to the control of feral cats and is a very important milestone in the protection of Victoria’s biodiversity and threatened wildlife.

Feral cats are wide-spread on public land in Victoria and pose a significant threat to the state’s biodiversity. Feral cats are the main threat to the persistence of threatened fauna in Australia, with forty-three *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* listed threatened species directly at risk from feral cat predation.

Feral cats are regarded as distinctly different from domestic cats. The Government recognises that domestic cats are important companion animals for many Victorians, and that responsible cat ownership brings many benefits. In contrast, feral cats generally live completely independent of humans with respect to food, shelter, and without veterinary care. Feral cats survive and reproduce in self-perpetuating populations in the wild.

The Government will consult and seek input from stakeholders and the community as part of the declaration process. In addition, ongoing consultation will be integral to the implementation of control programs for feral cats on public land.

This consultation will inform the design of the declaration and feral cat management approaches, and will help ensure that animal welfare objectives are met and responsible cat ownership remains respected and enshrined as a fundamental right for all Victorians.

## Recommendation 10

**That the Government provide some financial support to private landowners to assist with the additional cost of deer-proof fencing (over and above the cost of regular fencing) where there are ongoing, severe problems with invasive animals entering the private property from Crown land or where establishing a deer-proof fence would provide significant environmental benefits.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in part.**

Government investment in fencing on private land is contrary to current policy established under the *Fences Act 1968* and confirmed by the findings of the 2001 Victorian Law Reform Committee inquiry.

Government-funded fencing schemes are complex to administer, carry significant budget implications for taxpayers and usually do not result in satisfactory outcomes over time. Beneficiary funded approaches are better alternatives as increased responsibility of the fencing infrastructure and its ongoing maintenance is achieved.

However, there may be instances where the strategic use of fencing is part of a program to deliver significant environmental benefits on private land.

## Recommendation 11

**That the State Government raise, during a Council of Australian Governments forum (or other inter-Governmental meeting), the need for urgent funding to research methods and techniques to control deer that could be practically implemented in Victoria.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in full.**

The Government supports the intent of this recommendation and will raise, at a national level where appropriate, the need for research into deer control.

## Recommendation 12

**That the Victorian Environmental Assessment Council undertake a land use investigation to assess what areas of public land could be available for recreational hunting. This investigation should include risk assessments and community consultation.**

**The Government accepts this recommendation in part.**

The Victorian Environmental Assessment Council (VEAC) was established to conduct independent investigations or assessments, and to provide advice, relating to the protection and ecologically sustainable management of the environment and natural resources of public land.

The Government will consider the merit and scope of requesting VEAC to undertake an investigation on the use of public land for recreational hunting, and the relationship with other values and uses of public land. If the investigation were to occur, the Government supports risk assessments and community consultation being part of the process. Public consultation is a key element of VEAC investigations.

With respect to process, the Minister for Energy, Environment and Climate Change is responsible for requesting VEAC to undertake an investigation (or assessment or provide advice), in accordance with the *Victorian Environmental Assessment Council Act 2001*.

## Recommendation 13

**That the Government provide the Game Management Authority with additional resources to manage an increase in recreational hunting, specifically additional authorised Game Officers to improve the in-field monitoring of hunters.**

**The Government has this recommendation under review.**

The Government will undertake further work to determine if any additional resources may be required.

## Recommendation 14

**That the Government develop mechanisms to improve information sharing and communication between hunters and other land users to facilitate safe co-existence on public land.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in full.**

The GMA website provides information on safe, sustainable and responsible hunting. DELWP and Parks Victoria, as the state's public land managers, provide information that is hosted on the GMA's website on where legal hunting can occur. A number of catchment management authorities and local Governments also provide information online, some of which is also hosted on the GMA website.

The DELWP/GMA Customer Service Centre and Parks Victoria Information Centre also provide an avenue for information on hunting. DELWP, Parks Victoria and GMA staff regularly engage with public land users in the field and at public meetings and respond to any queries relating to hunting activity.

The *Sustainable Hunting Action Plan* (SHAP) provides for a number of initiatives to improve information on where hunting may occur, including improving signage at key hunting locations, such as State game reserves, high use state forests and national parks, and providing a map set of where hunting can occur on public land.

The GMA will continue to work with other Government agencies to facilitate the provision of up to date information on areas for which they are responsible and host this on the GMA website as a one-stop shop for information on hunting.

## Recommendation 15

**That the Government review its current pest management plans and explore legislative barriers that prevent shooting of pest species whose control might be assisted by recreational hunting.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in principle.**

Action 3.3 of the SHAP will explore further pest hunting opportunities by game licence holders at State game reserves, subject to appropriate pest control protocols.

This action meets the objective of delivering improved recreational hunting opportunity rather than enhanced pest control, as opportunistic ground shooting alone is generally an ineffective means of invasive animal management.

## Recommendation 16

**That the Victorian Government consult with Victoria Police in relation to recreational hunters having access to category C and D firearms to facilitate greater invasive animal and pest control.**

**The Government does not support this recommendation.**

The Victorian Government does not support recreational hunters having access to category C and D firearms. This is in line with the National Firearms Agreement (NFA). The NFA ensures national consistency in the regulation of firearms and firearm parts and was agreed to with amendments in February 2017 by the Council of Australian Governments.

## Recommendation 17

**That Victoria Police consider including recreational hunters participating in co-ordinated invasive animal control programs within the categories of people eligible to obtain noise suppressors.**

**The Government does not support this recommendation.**

Victoria Police does not support the use of noise suppressors (silencers) by recreational hunters unless genuine need and reason can be demonstrated by an applicant. In general terms, a recreational hunter would not meet the requirements to be issued a permit as they are usually restricted to occupation and are assessed on a case by case basis.

## Recommendation 18

**That the Government promote the use of GPS collars by recreational hunters when hound hunting.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in full.**

Following the making of the *Wildlife (Game) Regulations 2012*, Global Positioning System (GPS) collars were permitted to be used by recreational hunters when hound hunting. The GMA recognises the value in using GPS collars when hound hunting for hound welfare and better control over hound movement and recovery.

The GMA will work collaboratively with the Australian Deer Association and Victorian Hound Hunters Incorporated to promote the use of GPS collars for more responsible hound hunting. Communications will be targeted at hound registration days, industry publications, social media and the GMA website.

## Recommendation 19

**That the Government explore amendments to the Meat Industry Act 1993 that would allow wild deer to be processed at game and general meat-processing facilities for personal consumption.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in full.**

The Government supports hunters maximising the use of wild harvested deer and recognises that there are currently barriers preventing the optimal use of game harvest.

Action 2.2 of the SHAP will investigate and reduce barriers to the processing of wild harvested game meat to allow optimal use of game harvest.

## Recommendation 20

**That the Government examine ways commercial harvesting of game and pest animals could be facilitated during co-ordinated recreational hunting programs in limited areas during short time periods.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in principle.**

Action 2.2 of the SHAP will facilitate the commercial processing of wild deer taken by professional shooters for markets and recreational hunters for personal consumption.

DEDJTR will be responsible for facilitating the commercial processing of wild deer in consultation with the GMA and DELWP.

## Recommendation 21

**That, as part of invasive animal control programs, the Government identify times and places where recreational hunting can make a helpful contribution. The Government should then explore ways to reduce the barriers to hunting at those times and places.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in principle.**

While opportunistic or ad hoc ground shooting is generally an ineffective means of invasive animal control, the Government recognises that in some circumstances, recreational hunters may be able to make a helpful contribution to a coordinated, integrated management approach.

For established invasive animal populations that may be vulnerable to ground shooting and where adequate harvest can be applied, the Government will consider, in addition to professional and accredited volunteer shooter-based control, whether strategies can be implemented to structure recreational hunting to assist in strategic deer control programs at suitable locations on Crown land.



## Recommendation 22

**That the Game Management Authority, in association with Victorian hunting organisations, educate and encourage recreational hunters to contribute to controlling invasive species through shooting larger numbers of animals and targeting females.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in full.**

The GMA will work with Victorian hunting organisations to educate, promote and encourage hunters to contribute to population control through targeting female deer when deer hunting. A benefit of reducing deer density is that the quality of remaining animals is improved.

Action 2.2 of the SHAP will investigate and reduce barriers to the processing of wild harvested game meat to allow optimal use of game harvest which may promote greater take and use of deer and greater targeting of females.

## Recommendation 23

**That the Government implement an ongoing evaluation program of the current wild dog and fox bounty systems which evaluates whether the bounties are providing value for money or whether the money would be more effectively spent on alternative invasive animal control methods.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in principle.**

The Government is collecting data on hunter participation and subscription to the fox and wild dog bounty. As a first step, the Wild Dog Management Advisory Committee has been asked to provide advice on the future use of a bounty as a strategic tool for managing the negative impacts of wild dogs. The outcomes of this review could then inform the need to also evaluate the fox component of the fox and wild dog bounty following the end of the funding cycle.

## Recommendation 24

**That the Government publicly release the results of any evaluations of the bounty system.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in full.**

The Government supports the release of the results of evaluations of the fox and wild dog bounty.

## Recommendation 25

**That the Government conduct research into the location, numbers, behaviour and movements of invasive species in Victoria. Key insights from this research that could assist hunters should be communicated to the hunting community.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in principle.**

Research into the distribution of deer species in Victoria has been completed and the results of these studies will be made available as appropriate. Future research on the behaviour and movements of deer is being considered as part of research proposed under the new national Centre for Invasive Species Solutions.

Similar approaches could be applied to other invasive species, subject to resources and priorities.

## Recommendation 26

**That the Government include both invasive animals and native pests within one strategy that applies across all land types.**

**The Government does not support this recommendation.**

The Government does not consider it appropriate to manage native wildlife and invasive animals under one Government strategy, as there are clear differences in the policy objectives and legislative arrangements for their management.

## Recommendation 27

**That, as part of the planned deer management strategy, the Government develop an explicit strategy to contain deer within their current range and limit the spread of deer to new parts of Victoria.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in full.**

The Government has recognised the need to reduce the impact of deer on biodiversity in Victoria.

Action 4.3 of the SHAP will develop a deer management strategy that sets a strategic plan to maintain sustainable hunting opportunities while reducing the impact of deer on biodiversity on all land tenures in the state.

The strategy will include development of a range of management tools that seek to eradicate and prevent the spread of deer based on land tenure, location and the likelihood of successful eradication, and reduce the impact of widespread deer populations on ecological, social and cultural assets.

DEDJTR and DELWP are responsible for developing the strategy.

## Recommendation 28

**That, as part of Protecting Victoria's Environment – Biodiversity 2037, the Government guarantee long-term recurrent funding for invasive animal control.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in principle.**

The 2017 State Budget provided \$86.3 million over four years and \$20 million ongoing to DELWP for the implementation of the *Protecting Victoria's Environment - Biodiversity 2037* (Biodiversity Plan). The Biodiversity Plan contains 20-year management output targets across public and private land that if achieved will deliver the state-wide biodiversity targets in the plan. This includes targets for invasive animal control that follow the principles of the *Invasive Plants and Animals Policy Framework*:

- 4 million hectares of control of pest herbivores (e.g. deer, rabbits, goats, feral horses) in priority locations
- 1.5 million hectares of control of pest predators (e.g. foxes, feral cats) in priority locations

The funding will be planned and delivered, subject to future budget processes in the context of Government's investment and service delivery priorities, under a new strategic and collaborative process called 'Biodiversity Response Planning' (BRP). The aim of BRP is to strengthen collaboration between Government, NGO, Traditional Owners and the community to improve targeting of effort and identification of shared objectives and priority actions.

The process will consider all environment and land tenures, use the best available science, and include a broad range of interests, including engaging with Aboriginal Victorians to ensure Aboriginal values and traditional ecological knowledge in biodiversity planning and management is included. DELWP will begin designing the BRP process with stakeholders in late 2017.

## Recommendation 29

**That the Government investigate barriers preventing proper consultation and collaboration between individuals, organisations and other bodies in relation to animal control and implement measures to ensure that this occurs in the future.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in principle.**

Under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*, the management of invasive species is a shared private and public land manager responsibility.

The Government will seek to:

1. Establish an inter-agency invasive species committee to provide a strategic, integrated and coordinated approach to invasive species outcomes across all tenures.
2. Investigate barriers to community led action by building on existing work undertaken by Agriculture Victoria.

## Recommendation 30

**That the Government engage paid professional pest controllers in an advisory role when designing and implementing invasive species control strategies and programs.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in principle.**

The Government recognises the experience and knowledge of professional pest animal controllers in Victoria and engages specialists in certain circumstances where required.

Specialist expertise is procured by Government to assist in design and implementation of invasive species control programs. This expertise is sourced from research institutions, state Government and interstate agencies, consultants and other professional invasive species managers. Expertise in invasive species control exists in a wide range of professions including, but not limited to professional shooters.

## Recommendation 31

**That the Government raise the issue of research into controlling deer with the Council of Australian Governments and request the Federal Government initiate comprehensive research into control methods.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in full.**

Refer to the response to Recommendation 11.

## Recommendation 32

**That the Government develop initiatives to educate the public on the invasive species problem in Victoria.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in principle.**

The Government recognises that effective management of invasive species relies on a broad commitment from many sectors of the public as well as Government agencies and land managers.

Key to the success of a program is the communication of a consistent message about how best to manage the challenges posed by invasive species to achieve defined outcomes and meet legislative requirements.

The establishment of an inter-agency invasive species committee (refer to the response to Recommendation 29) will provide a forum for determining priorities and key messages (tailored to intended audiences) regarding invasive species for dissemination to the broader community.

## Recommendation 33

**That the Government designate one Government body to be a single point of contact for private landowners, local Government and community groups, that has overall responsibility and accountability for invasive and pest animal control in Victoria. This body's responsibilities should include:**

- A. developing an overarching plan for invasive and pest animals, including identifying priority actions;**
- B. ensuring that programs take place in accordance with the plan;**
- C. monitoring landowners' compliance with their legal responsibilities in relation to pest animals;**
- D. promoting best practice among people undertaking animal control programs, and**
- E. promoting best practice among people undertaking animal control programs.**

**The Government supports this recommendation in principle.**

The roles and responsibilities provided by the Government for the management of invasive species in Victoria rests primarily with DEDJTR, DELWP and Parks Victoria. They can be summarised as follows:

DEDJTR has overall state-wide invasive species policy and direction setting responsibilities and delivers enforcement and compliance services of the noxious weeds and pest animals provisions of the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* (CaLP Act), on behalf of the Secretary of DELWP. DEDJTR is also responsible for taking reasonable steps to eradicate 'State prohibited weeds' and control 'Restricted pest animals' on all land in the state on behalf of the Secretary of DELWP.

- DELWP and Parks Victoria have responsibilities as land managers and for the protection of biodiversity and threatened wildlife from the impact of invasive species on Crown land.

An inter-agency invasive species committee (refer to the response to Recommendation 29) will provide a practical and cost-effective way of ensuring appropriate governance of invasive species management, strategic direction setting, and coordinated action across the state. It would also ensure that the management of invasive animals is considered within a national and state legislation, agreements and policies.

A single point of contact for interested parties is already provided through DEDJTR's and DELWP's Customer Contact Centre and Parks Victoria's Information Centre. Enquires are directed to the relevant areas within these departments. The Government continues to explore opportunities to streamline and improve this process.

**A. developing an overarching plan for invasive and pest animals, including identifying priority actions;**

The *Invasive Plants and Animals Policy Framework* (IPAPF) represents the Government's approach to managing existing and potential invasive species across the whole of Victoria. It prioritises actions based on a biosecurity approach that aims to prevent the entry of new high risk invasive species, eradicate those that are at an early stage of establishment, contain where possible species that are beyond eradication and take an asset-based approach to managing widespread invasive species.

**B. ensuring that programs take place in accordance with the plan;**

There are a number of programs across Government that manage invasive species at different stages of establishment. Each of these programs follow the principles set out in the IPAPF. The proposed inter-agency invasive species committee will provide a forum for program coordination and issue resolution.

**C. monitoring landowners' compliance with their legal responsibilities in relation to pest animals;**

DEDJTR has delegated responsibility, on behalf of the Secretary DELWP, for the enforcement of the noxious weed and pest animal provisions of the CaLP Act. DEDJTR uses a risk based approach and a range of tools to encourage land managers, both public and private, to meet their responsibilities. These tools range from providing technical information and awareness, to infringement notices and court prosecutions.

**D. promoting best practice among people undertaking animal control programs;**

Invasive animal control work undertaken by and on behalf of the Government is managed under codes of practice and associated standard operating procedures. Codes of practice outline the legislative authorising environment under which invasive species control is undertaken in Victoria. They guide managers and participants in control programs on public land on the most appropriate, efficacious, cost effective, humane, target specific and environmentally suitable technique for reducing the negative impact of invasive species. Codes of practice also detail the occupational health and safety requirements associated with implementing control programs. Technical and best practice information is also available to private land managers.

**E. Facilitating collaborative efforts involving different Government bodies, community groups and private landholders.**

DEDJTR has developed and implemented a systems-strengthening approach to managing rabbits and a number of established weed species. This work has yielded positive results in empowering community-led action and building collaborative working relationships. The proposed inter-agency invasive species committee will provide a forum for collaborative efforts across Government.

**F. Publicly reporting on the effectiveness of animal control programs each year**

Refer to the response to Recommendation 3.



