

A black and white aerial photograph of a rural valley. A road winds through the center of the valley, flanked by fields and scattered buildings. The background shows rolling hills and mountains under a hazy sky. The foreground is dominated by a dense forest of trees.

Harrietville Community Forum  
submission to the Victorian  
Government Parliamentary  
Enquiry into Invasive Animals on  
Crown Land

— Harrietville —

# Sambar Deer are a pest animal, if not by legislation then by their action!

- Sambar Deer are pervasive across environmental gradients – no environmental control factors such as long cold winters disrupt their high growth rates – estimated to be population size doubling in 3 years, but not actually known
- There has been a rapid increase in numbers post-fire
- They have no natural predator
- Current recreational shooting is having insignificant impact on population growth rates in the Harrietville area
- Essential deer control actions and research to support reduction in numbers around towns like Harrietville will not be considered until they have a pest status

# Deer are impacting significantly on our community

- Deer are common throughout the township zone at night and are literally destroying gardens, which impacts peoples quality of life, negating a primary reason they move to Harrietville.
- Fencing for deer exclusion is prohibitively expensive and contrary to the image our tourism industry is promoting for the town – for example the recent removal of barbed wire along the shared trail was followed by destruction of property by deer in an adjoining horticulture business.
- Deer are endangering life and property on our roads for locals and visitors – simply reducing speed limits will increase travel time from Melbourne and reduce our appeal as a weekend ski trip destination for example.

# Deer are impacting significantly on our community

- Deer are decimating local revegetation projects – since 2007 \$71,000 in government grants plus hundreds of thousands of dollars has been spent in government agency activity in Harrietville (e.g. NECMA removing willows with machinery, Land Mates program, Green Army). This is in jeopardy from deer damage, failure of which would compromise the integrity of riparian zones through
- Visiting deer shooters have a small positive economic impact on our community (max 2.5%<sup>1</sup>) but create a large concern to locals and visitors when firearms are discharged near town and dead animals are left near roads, tracks and rivers. Total visitor spending in 2013 in Harrietville was \$6.3 million<sup>2</sup>

1 Joint Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Control of Invasive Animals on Crown Land. DELWP, DEDJTR & PV. August 2016

2 Assessing the economic value and vulnerability of nature based tourism in the Ovens and Alpine area of NE Victoria. Pyke *et al.* 2015

# Deer are impacting significantly on our community

- The European Wasps that are plaguing our town in the late summer and early Autumn are impacting negatively on our tourism income at that busy time. Wasps are feeding on the meat abandoned by deer shooters on the periphery of town.

# Deer are increasingly impacting on local farming

- Economic diversity is essential to the resilience and sustainability of the town, non-tourism businesses are under threat from deer
- Deer are competing with livestock for feed
- Deer are destructive to fencing, revegetation, crops and trees
- Deer degrade water quality causing siltation and damage to water pumping infrastructure
- The cost of completely deer proofing properties is expensive and has a negative visual impact
- Grazing, nursery, tree nut, aquaculture and cropping industries in Harrietville have all reported significant and increased economic disruption from deer in the past 12 months.

# Deer are impacting heavily on the local environment

- Harrietville is a Nature Based Tourism Destination and most of our town income comes from that source. Deer are hurting our pristine brand and image.
- Deer are degrading local waterways and gullies from heavy wallowing
- Local walking tracks are being eroded from heavy deer traffic
- Deer shooters sometimes leave dead animals near walking tracks or along rivers

# Deer are impacting heavily on the local environment

- Selective grazing is leading to changes in botanical composition and changes to ecosystem function, particularly on the river flats where they crush native shrubs in favour of a grassy (usually non-native) understory
- Deer range from the valley floor up to the high plains and endanger sensitive areas such as the Alpine Bogs
- Massive erosion of some areas, particularly steep slopes, has already occurred from deer traffic
- Erosion on the slopes leads to silting of the rivers, effecting water quality



# Alpine National Park Deer Control Program

- Reliance on this program to initiate more widespread action in the ANP will cause unnecessary delay

# Control Strategies

- Recreational shooting is not keeping the population growth rate in check
- **We support action that has a primary focus of protecting ecosystems and biodiversity, and the sustainability and resilience of our town, and have no objection to the use of the following methods if that is the best way to meet the desired aim:**
- We support the harvesting of wild deer meat for human and pet consumption
- We support the revocation of Sambar Deer protection status under the *Wildlife Act 1975* and the declaration of Sambar Deer as pests
- We support partnerships between Parks Victoria and Accredited Volunteer Community Shooting Organisations
- We support the application of the partnership approach in State Forest
- We support the idea of temporary closures to the Alpine National Park in order to control deer, as occurred at Wilsons Prom in August 2015

# Responses to the Terms of Reference

1. Assessment of the **biodiversity** outcomes, **community safety** and **limitations** of the trial conducted by Parks Victoria on control of deer populations in a national park

**Limitations** - The asset protection program, while being entirely appropriate for the designated purpose, is not a reasonable method for determining the future direction for ongoing deer control in the park because:

- the reliance on 'landscape specific'<sup>3</sup> techniques may not be valid in other landscapes (e.g. forested and dense ecosystems of the slopes and valleys)
- It is an asset protection program which may be of little use for informing eradication or containment programs
- It does not contribute substantially to the key questions on population size or population growth rates as animals are not present in the high plains year-round

3 Joint Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Control of Invasive Animals on Crown Land. DELWP, DEDJTR & PV. August 2016

# Responses to the Terms of Reference

**Limitations** - The High Plains is a sub-optimal habitat type for the deer and it can be hypothesised that deer only go there because of high numbers in the lower, more optimal areas. Thus no matter how many deer you remove up there, more will come from the optimal areas where no control is being implemented and population growth rates continue unchecked. Thus the current program will need to run into perpetuity to successfully protect the bogs from an increasing population source below

- The trial does not deal with the complexities of the valleys which will take time to establish protocol for example: multiple land tenure and associated multi level laws, disposal of hundreds of corpses, the impact of shooting near towns and many other complex factors

# Responses to the Terms of Reference

**Biodiversity** – As there is very little overlap in species distribution between the High Plains and the slopes and valleys, it is unlikely there will be any informative overlap on the impact on biodiversity of either flora or fauna

- Deer are not present in the High Plains in the late autumn and winter when food sources are most scarce and animals are more likely to cause damage to less palatable plant species
- The low densities of deer seen so far in the High Plains indicates they are unlikely to be having the same impact on biodiversity as the lower slopes and valleys
- A major destruction to biodiversity will occur in the slopes and valleys if no action is taken while waiting for the trial to complete (2018), to then be decided it is of no value in determining the best course of action for addressing deer in the entire public estate, then another trial, then time to secure funding, then maybe action in 2025? Action is required NOW.

# Responses to the Terms of Reference

**Community Safety** – it is very easy to keep the community safe when you are in the remote High Plains, tackling the more complex issues of keeping the community safe in the valleys will require careful planning

2. Consideration of the application of these types of programs for other invasive animal species in partnership with Crown Land managers

**- We support action that has a primary focus of protecting ecosystems and biodiversity, and the sustainability and resilience of our town, and have no objection to the use of partnership programs if that is the best way to meet the desired aim.**

# Responses to the Terms of Reference

3. Assessment of the relative costs and benefits, financial or otherwise, of other forms of pest control in National Parks

- **We support action that has a primary focus of protecting the sustainability and resilience of our town and the surrounding ecosystems and biodiversity of our neighbouring National Park and State Forest, and have no objection to the use of alternative forms of pest control if that is the best way to meet the desired aim**
- We support research into genetic and biological control and baiting delivery methods where they fit with the stated aim