Feral Deer Impact
FACT SHEET

Deer were brought to Australia for hunting and farming in the 1800s. In recent decades – particularly after the venison industry declined in the 1990s – farmed deer escaped, were released, or were relocated for recreational hunting. These animals soon established new populations.

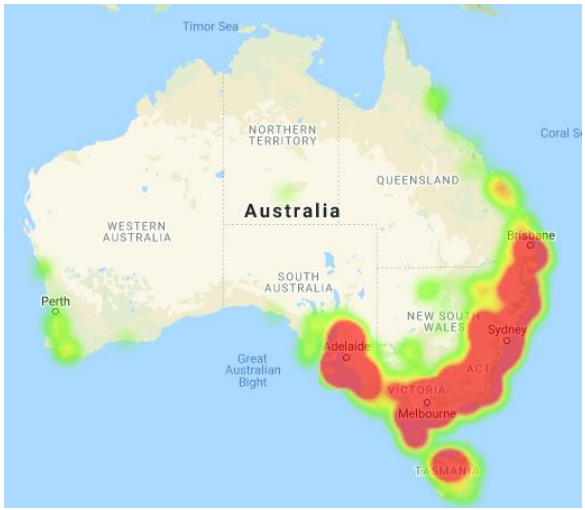
Today the extensive population growth and spread of feral deer poses threats to Australia's primary production, environment and communities.

Feral deer populations are found across almost one-quarter of New South Wales and Tasmania, and nearing half of Victoria. Habitat modelling indicates that feral deer are yet to occupy all suitable areas.

Established populations are growing in numbers and spreading to new areas. For example, in Tasmania, farmer control and recreational hunting of feral deer have slowed population growth, but the growth is still around 6 to 11 % per year. At this rate, the population doubles every 7 to 12 years (1). Deer have also expanded their range dramatically in NSW in the last 10 years, almost doubling to cover nearly 22 per cent of the state.

Similar population growth and spread is expected in Queensland. For example, a local Gold Coast Hinterland resident recently reported an increase in feral deer on his property from 1-2 sightings a week to 80 sightings a week in just 5-10 years.

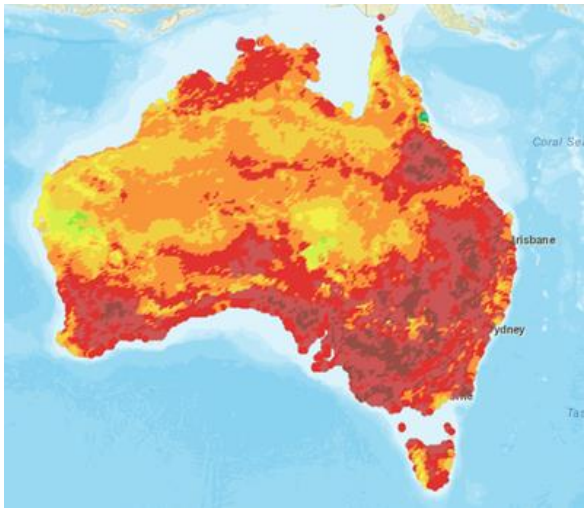
While such numbers can cause significant impacts, numbers are still low compared to those in other states. It is essential that further growth is prevented in QLD so that populations can be adequately managed.



Current distribution of feral deer

Dark red areas indicate higher densities, with green indicating the lowest densities

**map attributed to Feral Scan*



Potential distribution of feral deer

Potential distribution of deer (six species) estimated using the Climatch algorithm. Dark red shows the areas where the habitat and climate are most suitable for one or more species of deer. Green shows areas less suitable for deer.

Read more about feral deer at www.feraldeerplan.com.au

Fact Sheet made in February 2022 by the National Feral Deer Action Plan
(1) (Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment; Cunningham et al. 2021).

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Environmental impacts of feral deer

The CSIRO have reported that invasive species have been the major cause of native animal and plant extinctions.

Feral deer are no exception, and are described as ecosystem engineers. They modify and destroy habitats, creating simplified vegetation communities that affect all levels of the food-chain.

They browse on young trees and foliage, damage or destroy mature trees through ringbarking and can spread weeds. Like other hooved animals they impact vegetation through trampling and pugging waterways.

Feral deer are currently contributing to the decline of several threatened species and threatened ecological communities. Thee include the Northern Corroboree Frog, and Littoral Rainforest.

After major bushfires, feral deer are more likely to spread into new areas to seek food and new habitats. This causes significant damage to the recovering habitat, as feral deer eat and trample the regenerating vegetation, and compete with native animals for food.

Social impacts of feral deer

Feral deer that run across roads pose a significant motor-vehicle accident risk. In Victoria, more cars are hit by deer than any other animal. Motor-vehicle accidents or near misses are increasingly reported around New South Wales, and Queensland.

Additionally, deer attract poachers, who sometimes trespass, use firearms illegally, cut fences and frighten residents. Land managers struggling to control feral deer report declines in their wellbeing and problematic relationships with neighbours who do not control their feral deer.

Agricultural impacts of feral deer

Feral deer cause severe economic impacts, particularly through causing loss of crops, saplings and pasture. For example, Fallow deer in Tasmania cost the state's agricultural industry at least $10 million annually.

Feral deer eat 1.8 to 3.6 times as much as a sheep (Dry Sheep Equivalent) and they can heavily impact resting paddocks in rotational grazing systems. Feral deer also flatten fences and damage infrastructure that have to be continually repaired and replaced.

Additionally, feral deer pose a biosecurity risk through the transmission of diseases and parasites to livestock. Biosecurity risks include Brucellosis, Bovine Tuberculosis, Johne's disease, Cattle tick, Leptospirosis and Foot and Mouth Disease (not currently in Australia).

In other countries, Foot and Mouth Disease outbreaks result in export bans on livestock products, and low market prices. Containing such outbreaks in feral deer populations is difficult and expensive. A small Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak, controlled in 3 months, could cost Australia around $7.1 billion, while a large 12-month outbreak would cost $16 billion.

Community-led deer management is needed to tackle the growing problem. Contact the National Feral Deer Officer on shannon.evenden2@sa.gov.au or 0478745161 if you want to make a change.