

# Inquiry into the Control of Invasive Animals on Crown Land

## Submission to the Environment, Natural Resources & Regional Development Committee

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MANSFIELD SHIRE



### ABSTRACT

Mansfield Shire Council has prepared this submission in support of residents, ratepayers and visitors who value the sustainability of our destination and have concerns over the negative impacts of invasive animals.

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## Executive Summary

Our natural landscape and the huge tracts of associated public land are fundamental to our environmental, social and economic health. Large numbers of invasive animals impact negatively on the amenity of the destination and on its environmental health.

The range of invasive animals that cause damage and concern in our patch include but are not limited to deer, European wasps, carp, foxes, rabbits, feral pigs and wild dogs.

Tourism is the main economic driver for Mansfield Shire and the attributes that drive visitation also appeal to our non-resident ratepayers and fuel our buoyant lifestyle property market.

Hunting forms a significant subset of our tourism dollar and is an important recreational pastime for many locals. While hunting can be incompatible in close proximity to public land areas with high visitation, it can and does successfully co-exist with appropriate separation and regulation.

A public forum on the concerns about invasive animals is being held by Up2Us Landcare Alliance in Mansfield for property owners and interested parties to comment. Key themes and findings will be available outside of the submission timeframes however should be able to be presented at a public hearing if the Committee is in a position to accept our invitation to Mansfield.

Our key messages include:

- ✓ Deer aren't the only trouble makers
- ✓ Invasive animals spread from public land to impact private land and landowners
- ✓ Invasive animals impact public safety
- ✓ Hunting has its place in control measures
- ✓ Control measures must take account of visitation patterns and work to reduce negative impacts on tourism
- ✓ Take a destination cross tenure approach to control programs

## A destination approach

Tourism is the key economic driver in Mansfield Shire; generating 18.6% of employment; 19.6% of industry output and 52% of retail spend in a local economy generating \$823.1m.<sup>1</sup>

Lake Eildon and Mt Buller are key destination drivers of visitation in summer and winter respectively while activities undertaken range from water and snow sports to horse riding, biking, four wheel driving, touring, walking, camping and fishing.

The total contribution of hunting to Mansfield Shire is estimated at \$14.6 million per annum.<sup>2</sup> It is significant and has the potential to grow, particularly in those areas less densely visited and populated. Care would be needed to ensure development of this niche market is not at the expense of the destination's core and mainstream markets.

Seasonality helps define the tourism offer in Mansfield Shire with much of the high country closed for vehicular access during the snow season. A plethora of activities, products and events to suit our approximately 1.2million visitors over the calendar year, means there are peaks and troughs of visitation in various areas and altitudes but pretty steady visitation overall.

The challenges for coordinated cull efforts of deer for example would be similar to those facing the planners for controlled burns. The intersects between various public land managers, the interface with private land managers and the rate and variety of visitation make control measures complex.

Council has over past years led a Destination Sustainability Program which sees all land manager and key stakeholders come together to agree key principles, share strategic directions and collaborate for the benefit of the whole destination. Founding signatory partners include Mt Buller Mt Stirling Alpine Resort Management, Parks Victoria, DELWP, GBCMA, GMW, Tourism Victoria, VicForests and Mansfield Shire Council. This model could be reinvigorated and used to contribute toward a destination based control strategy.

### Recommendation

Council recommends that programs to control the numbers of invasive species on public land in the Mansfield Shire be developed in a strategic and coordinated way:

- with input from all land managers and key stakeholders and with a view
- to minimise impacts on our mainstream tourism markets and lifestyle property owners
- while optimising the potential to support the niche market that comes from hunting.

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<sup>1</sup> Regional Development Australia Hume Economic Profile

<sup>2</sup> Victorian Government's 'Estimating the economic impact of hunting in Victoria in 2013

## Resident Concerns

Council invited comment from the public to help inform its response and a number of written responses were received. The opinions below represent those of a handful of individuals and cannot be taken as representative.

Safety was a key concern identified. Deer were a focus for many with comments around the numbers being seen on private land in and around Mansfield. The perception is that lack of control of numbers on public land has seen the movement of increasing numbers of animals to private land.

The increased risk of crashes for drivers was noted as was concern over increase in hunting levels in some more recreationally accessed state forests for horse riding and walking.

Concerns over illegal hunting were mentioned a number of times. One respondent felt so intimidated by shots fired over her private property that she fears to go out or erect barriers for fear of reprisal.

Our farmers in particular are concerned about the numbers and impacts of foxes and wild dogs on lambs. The suggestion of reintroduction of a bounty system was made.

Co-ordinated and controlled shooting and trapping were suggested for smaller ferals and promotion of reporting to Parks Victoria of European wasp nests for treatment.

The ability of volunteer and community groups to contribute to control measures was commended and the example given of being the Granite Creeks Program (<http://www.geckoclan.com.au/group/granite-creeks-project-landcare-network/>).

## Recommendations

Resourcing of control measures ought to consider appropriate use of existing organisations and associations including local government in a coordinated, funded approach.

Consider the introduction of incentives for authorised shooters.

## Future Discussion

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Inquiry into the Control of Invasive Animals on Crown Land.

Mansfield Shire Council values the opportunity to work with the State Government toward great outcomes to reduce impacts from invasive animals on our social, economic and environmental health and sustainability.

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