

August 2025

The Australian Deer Association's

SUBMISSION TO THE
NEW SOUTH WALES
SELECT COMMITTEE
INQUIRY INTO ACCESS
RESTRICTIONS TO
PUBLIC LANDS AND
WATERWAYS



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ADA MISSION

We advocate for the sound management of wild deer and ensure recreational hunting is sustainable, respected, and valued by the wider community and future generations.

We do this via our commitment to the sustainability of wild deer through habitat management, education, political advocacy, and community engagement.



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Introduction

The Australian Deer Association (ADA) welcomes the opportunity to provide input into the New South Wales Legislative Council's Select Committee Inquiry into access restrictions to public lands and waterways.

The ADA is a non-profit association established in 1969, representing the interests of Australia's recreational deer hunters. The ADA advocates for the sound management of wild deer and public land access for recreational deer hunting. The ADA continues this work today, having contributed to unlocking public land access for recreational deer hunting in New South Wales, Tasmania, and Victoria and developing a rich catalogue of scientific deer research.

Recently, as a result of the ADA's advocacy work, the Victorian government has announced that two new national parks will be open to recreational deer hunting in 2026: the Errinundra and Snowy River National Parks.

Public land access is cherished, and the ADA will continue to engage with the government and its departments to provide feedback that best serves the interests of recreational deer hunters, ensuring the implementation of appropriate policies and regulations.

Executive Summary

The New South Wales Legislative Council's Select Committee Inquiry into access restrictions to public lands and waterways presents a unique opportunity to explore current limits and expose the lack of reasoning behind restricting recreational activities on public land, and to provide recommendations to remedy such situations.

As it stands, recreational deer hunters are a victim of a culture war that, for no sound reason, sees them locked out of national parks, despite a neighbouring jurisdiction demonstrating the sustainable practice for close to 50 years and recently building upon that by announcing more national parks to be open to recreational hunters.

Recreational hunting delivers improved health and wellbeing outcomes for its participants, while also providing a pathway for them to connect with nature. As a result, they also experience a higher level of physical well-being compared to the general public.

Underpinning these improved social outcomes is public land access for recreational deer hunting. Access has had to be fought for and won over many years, despite the apparent benefits of allowing deer hunting on public land, particularly in national parks, which is still denied in New South Wales.

While not a primary motivation for hunters, who are typically driven by food, the consequence of their harvest scale is a population-level impact on wild deer herds in Australia. This is underappreciated, particularly given hunters pay for the privilege of doing so.

The Australian Deer Association urges the committee to make a recommendation to introduce recreational deer hunting to the following national parks as first step towards unlocking public land for recreational use:

- Kosciuszko National Park
- South East Forest National Park
- Mount Imlay National Park
- Wadbilliga National Park



Access to National Parks

Public land access is the cornerstone of recreational deer hunting, enabling citizens, regardless of their socioeconomic status, to pursue this activity on public land.

Despite recreational deer hunting being complementary to all other public land users, its access and acceptance have needed to be fought for and defended.

This was demonstrated in New South Wales with the original drafting of the Game and Feral Animal Control Act 2002, where the proposal to include National Parks was met with significant opposition. As a result of this opposition, National Parks were not included in the Act, and the opportunity to have sustainable recreational hunting allowed was lost.

This inquiry into access restrictions to public land and waterways now presents an opportunity to recommend that National Parks should be open, where appropriate, to recreational deer hunting.

The most popular state in Australia for recreational deer hunting is Victoria, which is home to nearly 50,000 licensed hunters. Victoria has enabled public land access to its National Parks since many of them were declared in the 1980s, the most famous of which is the Alpine National Park.

In July 2025, the Victorian government announced more opportunities for deer hunting in Victoria by announcing the opening up of some 130,000 hectares across the Errinundra and Snowy River National Parks as a direct result of the Australian Deer Association's advocacy efforts.

Recreational hunters enjoy these parks harmoniously with other park users, and in Victoria's southern Alps, outside of the snow resorts, are the largest user and stakeholder of the national park.

This serves as evidence that there is no good reason not to allow recreational deer hunting in national parks and that recreational deer hunting can and should be an embraced activity on public land.

Health and Wellbeing Outcomes of Recreational Deer Hunting

Recreational deer hunting delivers significant health and wellbeing benefits to thousands of Australians, particularly in regional and rural communities. For many participants, deer hunting is far more than a pastime—it is a meaningful activity that contributes to physical health, mental wellbeing, social connection, and cultural continuity.

According to the Economic Contribution of Recreational Hunting in Victoria (DJPR, 2020), game licence holders report higher levels of personal wellbeing, general health, and social capital compared to the broader Victorian population. These outcomes are supported by rigorous survey data and align with international research showing the positive health impacts of spending time in nature, engaging in physical activity, and participating in community-based outdoor recreation.

Key Wellbeing Findings:

- Higher life satisfaction: Hunters scored significantly higher in the Personal Wellbeing Index across all domains, including satisfaction with life as a whole, relationships, health, and standard of living.
- Better general health: 69% of surveyed hunters rated their health as "excellent" or "very good" compared to only 44% in the general Victorian population.



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- Stronger community ties: Hunters reported a greater sense of belonging and social inclusion, indicating that hunting supports the formation of strong community and social bonds.
- Mental health benefits: Spending time outdoors, particularly in remote and natural landscapes, offers stress relief, mental clarity, and a sense of escape from modern pressures—factors consistently cited by hunters as key motivations.

Physical and Social Benefits:

Recreational deer hunting promotes:

- Physical activity through hiking, climbing, and fieldcraft over extended trips.
- Nutritional benefits by sourcing free-range venison, contributing to food security and healthy eating.
- Cultural identity by continuing family and community traditions, particularly in rural Australia.
- Skill development including bushcraft, marksmanship, navigation, and environmental stewardship.

These benefits are especially pronounced for deer hunters, who were found to take more trips and engage more frequently in related outdoor activities such as camping, four-wheel driving, and fishing. For many, deer hunting provides a year-round outlet for personal growth and meaningful recreation.

Importance of Enabling Deer Hunting

Given the wide-ranging physical, mental, and social benefits, it is essential that government policy recognises and supports recreational deer hunting as a legitimate and valuable activity. Maintaining and expanding access to public land, investing in sustainable deer management, and ensuring fair and evidence-based regulation are all crucial to enabling these outcomes.

Disruptions to hunting access would not only diminish the economic contribution of the sector—estimated at \$201 million annually for deer hunting in Victoria alone—but would also risk undermining the health and wellbeing of tens of thousands of individuals who rely on it as a key component of their lifestyle.

Supporting deer hunting is an investment in healthier communities, especially in regional areas where opportunities for recreation and social connection may be limited.

The Importance of Public Land Access for Recreational Deer Harvesting

Access to public land is essential for maintaining the scale, sustainability, and social benefits of recreational deer harvesting in Victoria. In 2023, more deer hunting occurred exclusively on public land (52% of hunting days) than on private land (33%), demonstrating the vital role that public lands play in enabling broad community participation in hunting activities.

Despite a slightly higher proportion of deer being harvested on private land (42%) compared to public land (41%), public land yielded a greater number of Sambar Deer, the most commonly harvested species (78% of total harvest). This underscores the ecological importance of public land access for population management of widespread species like Sambar.



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Key findings include:

- 52% of all deer hunting days in Victoria occurred on public land in 2023.
- 48% of all Sambar Deer harvested came from public land, which is significant given their dominance in the statewide deer population.
- Hunting on public land supports a broad and diverse base of recreational hunters, including those without access to private property.

Stalking without a dog on public land was the most common hunting method (41% of days), illustrating that public land is not only heavily utilised but also suitable for ethical, low-impact hunting practices.

Restricting access to public land would reduce hunting opportunities for the majority of Victoria's licensed deer hunters—over 52,000 as of 2023—many of whom rely on this access for sustainable harvest, food sourcing, and outdoor recreation.

In conclusion, maintaining and expanding access to public land is critical for:

- Effective wild deer population management
- Equitable recreational opportunity
- Realising the health, economic, and environmental benefits associated with regulated deer hunting

Recreational Deer Hunting Trial in Select National Parks

The State of New South Wales currently, for lack of a compelling reason, does not allow recreational deer hunting in National Parks. The committee has an opportunity to right a wrong dating back to 2002 by recommending that recreational deer hunting be introduced to the following remote national parks that are suitable candidates, given their location and ability to become popular with recreational deer hunters:

- Kosciuszko National Park
- South East Forest National Park
- Mount Imlay National Park
- Wadbilliga National Park

Summary

The New South Wales Legislative Council's Select Committee Inquiry into access restrictions to public lands and waterways has the opportunity to make a recommendation to open up national parks for recreational deer hunting, delivering health, social, physical, economic and environmental benefits to citizens of New South Wales. It is a low-cost initiative that will mirror a neighbouring jurisdiction that has successfully implemented this policy for nearly 50 years.





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