

Supplementary Submission: Response to Questions on Notice



Supplementary Submission – Response to Questions on Notice

The Australian Deer Association (ADA) appreciates the opportunity to provide this supplementary submission following its appearance before the Committee. The Questions on Notice raise a number of related issues concerning public land management, recreational deer hunting and future policy development. Rather than responding to each question individually, this submission addresses those matters collectively to avoid repetition and to provide a coherent response that builds upon the Association's original submission and oral evidence.

The Australian Deer Association respectfully recommends that the Committee:

- recognise that New South Wales already has an established multiple-use public land management framework through its State forest estate, where regulated recreational deer hunting occurs alongside a range of other lawful recreational activities;
- consider whether the principles already operating successfully within that framework may, where compatible with conservation and land management objectives, inform future approaches across other public land tenures;
- acknowledge the contribution regulated recreational deer hunting makes to integrated wild deer management, regional communities, outdoor recreation and community wellbeing; and
- encourage continued collaboration between government agencies, researchers and representative recreational hunting organisations to strengthen hunter education, harvest reporting and evidence-based wild deer management.

New South Wales already has extensive experience managing regulated recreational deer hunting on public land through its State forest estate. Hunting occurs alongside bushwalking, camping, horse riding, four-wheel driving, mountain biking and numerous other recreational activities under an established legislative and operational framework that includes firearms licensing, the NSW Game Hunting Licence system, public land hunting permissions and compliance arrangements. This experience is significant because it demonstrates that the coexistence of regulated recreational hunting with other public land users is not a theoretical proposition but an established feature of public land management within New South Wales.

The Association considers this existing framework to be the appropriate starting point for the Committee's deliberations. The question is not whether regulated recreational deer hunting is compatible with public land in principle, as New South Wales has already answered that question through its management of State forests. Rather, the Committee has an opportunity to consider whether the principles already operating successfully within one public land tenure may, where compatible with conservation objectives and statutory responsibilities, inform future policy across others. This submission is therefore not about replacing New South Wales' existing public land management framework, but about considering how it may continue to evolve through evidence and practical experience.

Comparable Australian experience is relevant in that context. Victoria has managed regulated recreational deer hunting within parts of its National Park estate for almost five decades and, in 2025, expanded hunting opportunities within the Errinundra and Snowy River National Parks. While New South Wales should determine its own policy settings, the Victorian experience provides contemporary Australian evidence that regulated recreational deer hunting can operate within National Parks under appropriate governance arrangements. It also demonstrates the value of reviewing public land policy in light of changing environmental conditions, emerging evidence and practical management experience rather than assuming existing arrangements should remain static.

The Committee's questions also raise the role recreational deer hunters may play within broader public land management. The Association submits that New South Wales already has an established and regulated community of recreational deer hunters operating within an effective legislative framework. Through firearms licensing, the Game Hunting Licence system and associated licence conditions, the State has developed a capable community that already contributes to public land management in practical ways.

While recreational deer hunting is often discussed solely in terms of harvesting deer, licensed hunters also contribute through harvest reporting, observations of deer distribution and habitat condition, reporting damaged infrastructure encountered while using public land, identifying emerging pest or animal health issues where observed, and promoting ethical hunting practices through mentoring and education. This capability could be developed further through structured partnerships between government agencies, universities and representative hunting organisations. Depending on research needs, hunters could assist with field observations, trail-camera programs, the voluntary collection of biological samples, disease surveillance and the recording of harvest, age and sex data. Hunters are already active across large and often difficult-to-monitor areas of public land, making them a potentially valuable complement to—not a replacement for—professional research and land management programs.

This reflects a broader principle of contemporary environmental management. Increasingly, governments seek to work collaboratively with communities to achieve environmental outcomes through volunteer programs, citizen science initiatives and stakeholder partnerships. Recreational deer hunters should be viewed in the same context—not as a substitute for government, but as an organised and regulated community capable of making a practical contribution to integrated wild deer management. Recognising that capability does not require the creation of new institutions or regulatory systems; it simply builds upon arrangements that already exist.

Well-regulated access can also strengthen accountability by keeping hunters engaged with licensing, education, representative organisations, research and public land management, while connecting participation with clear standards, reporting requirements and opportunities to contribute to conservation.

The Committee's Questions on Notice also invite consideration of the broader contribution that regulated recreational deer hunting makes to the community. While the management of wild deer is an important aspect of this discussion, the Association submits that decisions relating to public land should also recognise the wider public value that responsible recreational hunting can generate. Public land serves many purposes. It protects biodiversity and cultural heritage, supports recreation, contributes to regional economies and provides opportunities for people to engage with the natural environment. These objectives need not always be viewed as competing interests. Where they are compatible, public policy should seek to maximise the overall value that public land delivers to the community.

Regulated recreational deer hunting contributes to that broader public value in several ways. Participation requires hunters to travel to regional and rural areas where deer occur, generating expenditure on accommodation, fuel, food, vehicle maintenance and outdoor equipment. Unlike many forms of tourism, this expenditure is dispersed across numerous regional communities and local businesses. Independent analysis commissioned by the Victorian Government estimated that recreational deer hunting contributes approximately \$201 million annually to the Victorian economy, involves more than 45,000 licensed deer hunters, results in approximately 137,000 deer harvested each year, and accounts for around 332,000 hunter days, with more than half of those hunting days occurring exclusively on public land. While these figures relate to Victoria, they provide contemporary Australian evidence of the economic contribution that recreational deer hunting can make where an established public land framework exists.

The benefits extend beyond regional economies. Recreational deer hunting is one of many outdoor activities that encourages physical activity, self-reliance and regular engagement with the natural environment. Australian research examining recreational hunting has identified positive outcomes relating to physical wellbeing, social connection and participation in nature-based recreation. These benefits are not unique to hunting, nor is the Association suggesting they should take precedence over conservation objectives. They are, however, relevant considerations because public land policy influences the opportunities available for people to participate in healthy outdoor recreation and to develop an ongoing connection with the landscapes that public land protects.

The Association also considers equitable access to public land to be an important principle. Many recreational activities depend upon public land because participants do not have access to private property. Recreational deer hunting is no different. While some hunters have access to private land, many rely upon public land as their only practical opportunity to participate in lawful hunting. New South Wales has already recognised this principle through its State forest estate, where public land provides opportunities for a range of different recreational users. The Association submits that, where conservation objectives and visitor safety can be maintained, access to public land should continue to be considered through the broader principle of equitable participation rather than by reference to land tenure alone.

The Association acknowledges that recreational deer hunting is not appropriate in every location, nor is it presented as the sole solution to the management of wild deer. National Parks have distinct legislative objectives, and any future policy must remain consistent with those responsibilities. Equally, wild deer management requires a range of complementary approaches that may include professional control programs, research, community education and recreational hunting, depending upon local circumstances. The question is therefore not whether one management tool should replace another, but how the available tools may best be integrated to achieve environmental, recreational and community outcomes.

Against that background, the Association considers there is value in the NSW Government continuing to evaluate opportunities to build upon its existing public land management framework. Should the Committee consider further investigation appropriate, one option would be to recommend a carefully designed trial of regulated recreational deer hunting within selected National Parks containing established deer populations. Any trial should be consistent with statutory park objectives and supported by baseline ecological data, ongoing monitoring, stakeholder consultation and independent evaluation. Measures should include environmental outcomes, hunter participation, operational performance, safety and the experience of other park users, with the results reviewed after a defined period. This would allow future decisions to be informed by practical evidence generated under New South Wales conditions rather than assumptions about how such access might operate.

Throughout this inquiry, the Australian Deer Association has sought to contribute constructively to the discussion surrounding public land management. The Association supports continued investment in hunter education, ethical hunting practices, harvest reporting and collaborative research because these initiatives improve the evidence available to governments regardless of future policy decisions. Effective public land management is strengthened when governments, researchers, public land managers, Traditional Owners, conservation organisations, regional communities and recreational users work collaboratively towards shared outcomes. The Association welcomes the opportunity to continue contributing to that process.

In closing, the Association respectfully submits that New South Wales already possesses the experience, regulatory framework and community capability necessary to consider the next stage in evidence-based public land management. The State has successfully managed regulated recreational deer hunting within its State forest estate for many years, demonstrating that hunting can coexist with other lawful recreational activities under appropriate governance. Comparable Australian experience provides additional evidence that may assist future policy development, while the broader economic, recreational and community benefits associated with responsible deer hunting reinforce its place within a modern multiple-use public land framework. This submission is therefore not about replacing New South Wales' existing public land management framework. It is about building upon it through careful evaluation, practical experience and evidence-based decision-making.