

# South Australian Deer Advisory Group

## Meeting Summary

Wednesday 1st November 2006

**NOTE: At the time of distribution, the Minister has not approved the outcomes listed in this document. Any misuse of information by individuals or associations will cause this service to be withdrawn.**

*The meeting commenced at 1:05 pm.*

### 1. Welcome

The Chair welcomed all members and guests to the meeting.

### 2. Attendance

<i>Milton Stevens (telephoned)</i>	<i>Commercial Deer Industry Representative</i>
<i>Jack Van Wijk</i>	<i>Ministerial Representative (PIRSA)</i>
<i>Doug Clark</i>	<i>Deer Industry Association of Australia Representative</i>
<i>John Delaine</i>	<i>Deer Industry Representative – Velvet</i>
<i>Prof John Thonard</i>	<i>Commercial Deer Industry Representative</i>
<i>Jeffrey Varcoe</i>	<i>Commercial Deer Industry Representative</i>
<i>John Morley (Acting Chair)</i>	<i>Deer Industry Association of Australia Representative</i>
<i>Kevin Barnes</i>	<i>Deer Industry Representative - Venison</i>
<i>Judith Phillips</i>	<i>Proxy Commercial Deer Industry Representative</i>
<i>Trudi Goodwin</i>	<i>Executive Officer, Livestock Advisory Groups (PIRSA)</i>

### Guests:

<i>Geoff Raven</i>	<i>Manager, Food &amp; Plant Services (PIRSA)</i>
<i>Peter Dean</i>	<i>Senior Quality Insurance Officer, Food &amp; Plant Services (PIRSA)</i>

### 3. Apologies

*Nil*

### 4. Confirmation of the 16<sup>th</sup> Meeting – 8 March 2006

The minutes from the SA DAG meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2006 was accepted as a true and accurate record subject to identified amendments.

### 5. Matters Arising from 16<sup>th</sup> SA DAG Meeting Actions – 8 March 2006

All action items from the 8<sup>th</sup> March 2006 meeting were considered to be completed or in progress. The following action items were discussed:

**Item 7.2 (Forward correspondence to all SA registered deer owners requesting permission to release their contact details to assist in escaped deer enquiries).** As advised out of session, permission is not required as the *Livestock Act 1997* allows the Chief Inspector to release registrant details to authorised officers who have a legitimate interest in the information on the register. Therefore, deer owners were advised in October 2006 - that to improve the recapture of escaped deer, PIRSA would provide each Natural Resource Management (NRM) Board with the contact details of deer owners sourced from our Primary Industries Information Management System (PIIMS) database. Local Councils will also be made aware of this initiative. To date, four of the NRM Boards have received the information and the remaining Boards will be followed up shortly.

### 6. Correspondence

The correspondence was noted.

## **7. Business**

### **7.1 Introduction of Members**

Members were advised that Angus Lees (Commercial Deer Industry Representative) did not renominate in September 2006. Following consideration by the SA DAG selection Committee, it is expected that Judith Phillips will become the new Commercial Deer Industry Representative on SA DAG. J. Phillips is the proprietor of Mt Compass Venison, and member of the National Fallow Alliance. She has Committee and Industry experience, and largely represents the end of chain markets (including wholesale, retail and value adding).

### **7.2 DAG Terms of Reference**

For the benefit of J. Phillips, the Terms of Reference (TOR) was provided. The terms define the scope of the Group's activities besides also providing an overview of Advisory Group administrative procedures. The principle role of the SA DAG is to:

- provide strategic policy advice to the Minister on the operation of the *Livestock Act 1997* and relevant regulations for the deer industry &
- the consultative committee for the Deer Industry Fund (DIF) under the *Primary Industry Funding Schemes Act 1998*.

The purpose of the Fund is to provide a mechanism for the collection and use of industry funds to benefit the deer industry.

### **7.3 Deer Industry Fund - Financial Statement**

As at 30 June 2006, producer contributions totalling \$1,124 were received by the Deer Industry Fund (DIF). Total revenue (including interest) was \$7,748, which is above the annual budget by \$2,648.

Total expenditure to June 2006 was \$6,327, which is less than the year to date budget (of \$11,480). The closing balance of the Fund as at the 30 June 2006 was \$122,194, which is \$7,801 more than the budgeted annual income (of \$114,393).

### **7.4 Escaped Deer – Fleurieu Peninsula**

Members discussed that in response to community concern about the alleged deer escapes in the Fleurieu Peninsula, an Inspector from the Fleurieu Animal and Plant Control Board (APCB) investigated a property in 2005 and 2006. As a result of this investigation and action to be taken, the boundary fence was rectified by July 2006 and the husbandry issues have been negotiated with a neighbouring property owner.

Due to community concerns about escaped and feral deer across the State, the Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation (DWLBC) is undertaking a fence audit of all registered deer properties. This audit has clearly demonstrated that the issue of escaping managed deer is not an industry wide problem. Further, to reduce issues caused by feral deer, Rural Solutions SA and DWLBC will jointly fund a project officer to work with regional NRM boards and local landholders on developing and implementing strategies for controlling feral deer.

### **7.5 Bundaleer Forest Update**

J. Van Wijk reported that a local shooter has continued to monitor and dispose of escaped deer in the Bundaleer forest. In consultation with PIRSA Animal Health, the owner of the nearby property has agreed to voluntary de-stock, which is expected to be achieved by the end of November 2006. He has received permission to send some deer to another block, which is currently understocked. There is no guarantee that the Johne's Disease (JD) vaccine would be effective in deer (unlike the effectiveness on sheep) however PIRSA has advised that the deer should all be vaccinated. As there is an abundance of feed on the deer property adjacent to the forest, the owner has agreed (in consultation with PIRSA) to graze a few hundred Gudiar vaccinated ewes. Animal Health has recommended that any re-stocked deer (following the grazing of sheep) should also be vaccinated.

## 7.6 Project Application - Drought subsidy for deer farmers

The release of up to \$72,215 from the DIF is sought by Mike Riley (PIRSA) to fund a 'Drought subsidy for deer farmers' project. The application was written in conjunction a deer producer located in the Naracoorte area. The project is designed to:

- subsidise the cost of feed to SA deer producers to assist them to maintain breeding herds and provide continuity of supply of slaughter animals; and
- maintain the viability of the industry through supplying prime animals for slaughter and maintaining the profitability of deer farming.

The methodology of the project is to provide a subsidy of \$5/head for small breeds and \$10/head for large breeds for all deer farmers paying levies under the *Primary Industry Funding Schemes (Deer Industry Fund) Regulations 2002*. In order to relate the benefit to contributions to the Fund it is proposed that the subsidy is capped at \$6,665, equivalent to paying levies of \$200 on 1,333 small deer or 667 large deer, the maximum under the Act.

Currently there are 110 deer farmers registered under the Funding Schemes Regulations and contributing levies. Should the feed subsidy of \$4/head for small deer and \$8/head for large deer be applied, the cost to the Fund would be \$57,596 (subsidy would be capped at \$5,332. per producer).

There is no market for cull breeding does and female weaners except for slaughter. As a result these animals have to be carried through to meet viable slaughter weights. The price of slaughter animals has not increased since last year decreasing the margin between returns and production costs. To assist producers to meet feed requirements for lactating does, growing weaner does out to achieve mating weight and for finishing slaughter animals it is proposed that a subsidy be made available from the DIF to help offset the increased cost of fodder caused by the drought.

A subsidy on fodder could assist producers that may be tempted to sell breeders for slaughter (due to the current high cost of feeding). A reduction in the number of breeding stock would threaten the viability of the venison industry in South Australia.

Members noted that deer producers only contribute to the Fund through a biennial deer registration, which equates to approximately \$900/year over a 2 year registration period. J. Van Wijk described that interest on \$120,000 equates to approximately \$6,500 per annum, which he believes is an important income supplement. In order to fund this project, the discontinuation of an existing project may be required, and \$72,215 drawn down from capital reserves, which will leave only \$54,000 in the DIF (only generating \$2,940 interest per annum). Any subsequent project would require an increase in the contribution to restore capital reserves, and a delay in new projects until the reserves are restored.

Members discussed that as at 30 June 2006, only \$1,124 in producer contributions was received into the DIF. The total revenue (including interest of \$6,624) was \$7,748. There is only \$67,300 in capital that can be drawn, due to the Advisory Group expenditure (of \$2,900) and the BJD program expenditure (of \$3,600), which equates to approximately \$6,500.

Members noted that the BJD program (JD monitoring at the Strathalbyn abattoir) was designed to avoid deer producers paying out of pocket TD testing expenses. This testing program was the key reason for developing a deer industry contribution in South Australia and previously, the cattle industry has paid for JD testing in deer. J. Van Wijk added that the abattoir testing costs \$40 per Inspection day (ie when deer are slaughtered) and PIRSA pays for the cost of JD laboratory testing. He suggested for members to consider keeping the BJD project and added that there are State and National drought packages available including the Exceptional Circumstances program and currently several PIRSA working groups were developing applications for funding assistance. Members also raised the following issues:

- a portion of deer operators are not commercial and a providing feed subsidy to them would not benefit the industry;
- some deer farmers will not be able to produce receipts from using last years feed or growing own fodder;
- the project would need to be administered (with conditions) and both the DIF and Animal Health do not have the capacity to audit this requirement;

- the desired outcome may not be achieved as producers could use funding to bring stock up to slaughter and not necessary keep for breeding; and
- more research is necessary to quantify the figures provided on the cost of finishing deer.

It was raised that the DIF was originally set up to fund disease surveillance programs, and he would rather projects that are for the longer term, rather than a bandaid solution. Given the apparent decrease in deer farms, less contribution would be collected in the future. While the impact of the drought is a reality, it would be sensible to reduce stock numbers and some of that money can then be used to purchase feed. Members also discussed the following points:

- pork prices are currently increasing because of a lack production (not from lack of grain supply);
- currently hay is not cutting well with only half to one third of the normal production;
- 2-3 tonnes of velvet production is produced by two farmers in South Australia;
- velvet returns are looking more promising this year than last 10 years; and
- lack of feed contributes to escaped deer.

## RECOMENDATION

- **SA DAG supports the aims of the project application to subsidise deer farmers in South Australia, however the project will be left on the table until more accurate deer figures can be investigated by sending a survey to all deer producers.**
- **Seek advice from the Office of the Minister for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries on how the South Australian Deer Industry could be assisted in light of the drought, and any potential funding sources (State/Federal/DIF).**

*[Note: Subsequently, the Director of the Production Sustainability Division in PIRSA provided the following response to the SA DAGs correspondence.*

*The State Government encourages producers and industry organisations to ensure that they have access to the information required to best manage their businesses. A survey of deer producers to ascertain accurate numbers would appear to be consistent with this direction.*

*Regarding the provision of feed subsidies, Minister McEwen has publicly stated that the State Government does not support the provision of subsidies as a drought response measure on the basis that they distort markets and unfairly disadvantage those producers who are not able to access them.*

*South Australian deer producers within current EC regions are able to apply individually for income support and interest rates subsidies, while those producers located in the five prima facie declared EC regions can apply for income support. Applications to seek further EC declarations across the State are currently being prepared. Further information on Exceptional Circumstances support and other programs that may assist producers is available from the Freecall Drought Hotline 180 20 20 or from the DroughtLink website [www.service.sa.gov.au/drought.asp](http://www.service.sa.gov.au/drought.asp).*

*PIRSA Animal Health provided the following response to SA DAG members. In light of the Minister not supporting feed subsidies, it is arguable that there is no need to further quantify the number of deer owned within South Australia for this purpose. The deer industry already has this mechanism in place though biennial registration. To effectively increase the accuracy of the data, the 'standard' registration correspondence could be reviewed to explain the importance/benefits of correctly updating deer numbers. Members were encouraged to circulate the attached EC information to deer farmers and encourage those that may be in recognised EC areas to apply for financial assistance.]*

## 7.7 Abattoir Surveillance Update

J. Van Wijk reported that JD inspections are still being undertaken on deer lines processed at the Strathalbyn Abattoir. To date, there has been 193 inspection days (at \$40 per day) with samples taken from 5,741 fallow deer and 667 red deer and 17 other breeds. A total of 6,425 deer have been inspected since the commencement of the program, with no evidence of JD detected to date.

## 7.8 Downgrading of Harvested Deer for the Pet Market

For the benefit of Geoff Raven and Peter Dean, members explained that field harvested deer can have an economic impact on the domestic venison market and could have meat hygiene and animal welfare issues (due to does being shot with young fawns). For example, the harvested meat is been sold for as low as \$1 kg and is forcing down the price of the domestic market. Commercial deer producers also pay high abattoir slaughtering costs (of \$25 - \$28 per head).

G. Raven explained that livestock and poultry species have an Australian Standard for the slaughter and retail game of meat, and a Tafe Certificate accreditation can be obtained for this purpose. He explained that all vertebrates are considered to be game (wild) if are not managed (ie not fenced or receiving husbandry care) and can be killed in the 'field' by accredited personnel.

The processing facility used is also accredited and the whole animal (skin on) is inspected. Deer are shot then bled and gutted, taken to designated area and chilled, then sent off to an abattoir. There would be approximately 200 slaughtered per year in SA. The costs associated with field shot deer would include an Australian Quarantine Inspection Service (AQIS) veterinary and meat inspectors. The supply of game meat can vary considerably, and it is likely that commercial harvesters are not producing sufficient numbers to be economically sustainable over time.

M. Stevens suggested that game shot deer should be restricted to being sold as pet meat, as already occurs with western grey kangaroos and horsemeat. Members raised concern that if deer are fenced, yarded and velveted they are confined and receiving husbandry therefore should be considered managed. G. Raven advised that the Federal Government had approved areas where the deer are considered wild. Members suggested for Food Safety to consider that harvested deer must not be owned or managed.

## **RECOMENDATION**

**Request the Deer Industry Association of Australia to write to the Federal Minister regarding the apparent contradiction in legislation administered by AQIS and the NRM Boards (ie confinement and husbandry status of deer).**

### **7.9 South East Regional Development Board Meeting Update**

The South East Deer Advisory Committee met on 24 October 2006 and attendees included J. Van Wijk and J. Varcoe. The Committee had raised concerns about the anecdotal information that was travelling the rural grapevine about deer and disease and the suspected inaccuracies of the information. Given the regional issues currently being experienced, J. Van Wijk was able to clarify the Johnes's disease (JD) potential of feral deer in the South East and the implications for landholders in regards to this issue.

Subsequent to the meeting a draft medial release was developed to clarify this issue. It explained that the Committee is charged with providing advice to the South East NRM Board on the most effective and locally relevant methods for controlling the feral deer population in the region.

The release highlighted that as fallow deer are the most common species in the region, it should be noted that JD has not been found in any fallow deer in Australia to date. It has however been confirmed in farmed red deer in South Australian properties (4), New South Wales (1), Queensland (1) and Victoria (8).

There is also a low prevalence of JD in the South East and Murrayland regions. Only small numbers of sheep flocks and dairy herds in these regions that are infected with JD and none of the 28 deer herds (8 with red deer) in the South East have been reported to have JD. There is also a geographic separation of the core area of feral deer (upper South East) and the known infected JD properties (lower South East and lower Murray).

The evidence for the low prevalence of the disease in SA farmed deer is based on an abattoir-monitoring program conducted at the Strathalbyn abattoirs. Over the last 2.5 years some 6,425 deer carcasses have been inspected for JD and all have been negative.

The risk of spread of JD by feral deer is dependent on a high prevalence of the disease, feral deer becoming infected and high levels of interaction between feral populations and domestic livestock. The crux of the matter being that feral deer would have first contracted the disease from domestic stock but may then transport it and infect other stock under the right conditions – considered to be a low probability. The highest risk is still from unknown infected domestic stock being able to infect farmed animals rather than feral deer, in circumstances where infection has not been demonstrated in the deer. Hence, the safest options for producer's is to ensure livestock are "vaccinated" for OJD and new stock are sourced from properties with a high JD score or are accredited under the various Johnes's market assurance programs.

In concluding the discussion with the Deer Advisory Committee, J. Van Wijk noted that the priorities for deer management in relation to the disease risk are to:

- encourage vaccination and control of the disease in known infected domestic stock,
- Minimise the introduction of JD from high-risk areas such as Victoria and New South Wales by purchasing high JD score or accredited stock; and
- Reduce the feral deer population and ensure confinement of farmed deer.

The Committee will consider this information during its planning of regional deer control programs that will increase efforts to significantly reduce feral deer numbers over the next few years. Justine Drew, Operations Manager (telephone 8762 9114) was the nominated contact for enquires.

J. Van Wijk explained that J. Drew (NRM Board Coordinator) has assisted to develop the South East Deer Advisory Committee Terms of Reference. He went on to cite that the last detected Australian case of TB in deer was in 1986. The last detected outbreaks of TB were in Queensland cattle in 2000 and in NT buffalo in 2002.

The sheep and cattle industries are also encouraged to adopt JD risk management strategies, including purchasing stock from MAP accredited herds. Cattle producers are recommended to purchase beef cattle (with no contact with dairy for the past five years). Both industries have disease surveillance control programs (funded by industry), including a dairy industry testing program (75% tested in the last 18 months, resulting in 26 confirmed infected diaries out of 96 in the SE and Murraylands regions). The sheep disease surveillance program has detected OJD in 17 deer/sheep flocks to date. He suggested that if SA DAG were to consider any potential new deer industry projects that the current DIF contribution income would need to be reviewed.

J. Van Wijk reinforced that deer fences should be fixed and maintained (as per the NRM Board auditing initiative) and the deer outside the fenced areas should be eventually eliminated. Members raised that there are no JD positive fallow deer in Australia. J. Van Wijk commented that in New Zealand the disease has been cultured in fallow deer (most likely BJD rather than OJD). The main carrier of TB in New Zealand is stoats and ferrets, which were originally introduced from Europe. Currently a Silirum vaccine trial is underway in New Zealand and their technical Group has expressed interest in the use of Gudair vaccine in 2 infected red deer herds in South Australia. J. Van Wijk highlighted that JD is potentially a big problem for Australian deer producers and that the risk-based trading systems and vaccine approach should be developed. He recommended that Australia should finalise the DeerMAP and examine credits for reduction of disease risk through vaccination (as per SheepMAP) and look at expanding abattoir surveillance interstate as well.

## **8. Next Meeting**

The next meeting is scheduled for **June 2007** in the Seminar Room, Level 1, Primary Industries and Resources SA, 33 Flemington St, Glenside.

*Meeting closed at 4:45 pm.*