

Senate to shine spotlight on Australia's growing feral deer, pig and goat impacts

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A large male red deer in the Grampians. Photo: Steve Morvell

A new senate inquiry into the growing impacts of deer, pigs and goats in Australia will put a national spotlight on the destruction wrought by these feral animals on the country's natural environment and farming communities.

“This inquiry will bring an important national focus to a nationally significant environmental and agricultural threat,” Invasive Species Council CEO Andrew Cox said today.

“We are hoping it will identify national priorities for research, policy reform and management of these destructive animals.

“Feral deer, pigs and goats are a major growing problem for the natural environment, farmers and Australian public.

“Deer populations in particular have grown exponentially in recent decades. In Victoria they are believed to number in the millions, in NSW they cover over one sixth of the state and there are more than 40,000 feral deer in Tasmania.”

Feral pigs can be found across Australia, but are most abundant in New South Wales and Queensland, where they have recently expanded their range. They pose a risk to many other areas, including large parts of the Kimberley. Feral goats are also found in all states and territories, but are largely absent from mainland Northern Territory. The greatest numbers of goats in the arid and rangelands are found in Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia and Western Australia.

Feral deer are particularly worrying. They have the potential to spread across most of Australia and cause severe environmental and economic harm. They also pose a serious risk to motorists.

Deer were introduced into Australia the mid-1800s for hunting. Wild populations have established due to deliberate releases and escapes from deer farms. Feral deer occur mainly in south-eastern Australia (where they were released or escaped), but **could occupy most of the continent**.

Six species of deer have established in the wild – sambar, fallow, red, chital, hog and rusa. They occupy a wide variety of habitats including temperate forests, montane and arid woodlands, grasslands, tropical savanna and rainforest.

As a recent scientific review of deer impacts stated, ‘Northern Australia could be the next frontier for deer invasion’ – four species are well suited to the tropical and subtropical climates of the north.

Research will be a key focus of the inquiry. The Centre for Invasive Species Solutions has just commenced four deer research projects, with \$8.7 million direct and in-kind funding from Australian Government, NSW, QLD, Vic, SA.

The committee is to report to the Senate by February 2019 and will set submission dates in the coming week.

Terms of reference for the inquiry by the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee

The impact of feral deer, pigs and goats in Australia, and national priorities to prevent the problems worsening for the natural environment, community and farmers, including:

(a) the current and potential occurrence of feral deer, pigs and goats across Australia;

(b) the likely and potential biosecurity risks and impacts of feral deer, pigs and goats on the environment, agriculture, community safety and other values;

(c) the effectiveness of current state and national laws, policies and practices in limiting spread and mitigating impacts of feral deer, pigs and goats;

(d) the efficacy and welfare implications of currently available control and containment tools and methods, and the potential for new control and containment tools and methods;

(e) priority research questions;

(f) the benefits of developing and fully implementing national threat abatement plans for feral deer, pigs and goats; and

(g) any other related matters.

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