



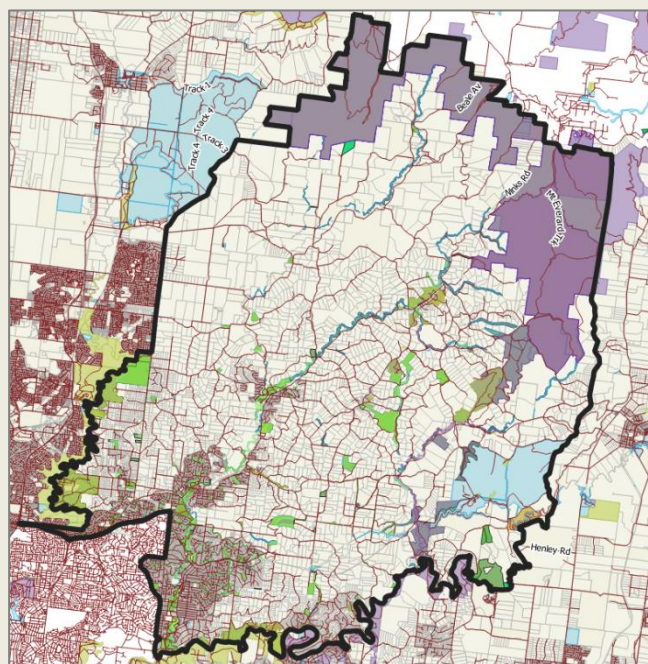
# Tips for Undertaking Deer Control in Rural and Peri-Urban Areas

Control of deer in peri-urban areas is vastly different from recreationally hunting in a State Forest or in more rural private land. Properties are smaller, and there are more people, houses, tracks and roads to consider. This fact sheet will outline some important considerations.

## Where deer are found

Sambar, Red and Fallow Deer are found across Nillumbik, some being widespread, and other species found only in fairly isolated pockets.

Deer are often seen in rural areas, but have also been seen in built up areas including in the Eltham Township.



## Where shooting is allowed

Shooting is only permissible on private properties with the written permission of the landholder.

There are no public land areas large enough, or legally accessible for safe recreational hunting.

## Public Place Permits

Many private properties in Nillumbik are deemed to be 'public places' (also called 'populous') due to the number and proximity of houses, people, roads and trails.

Only those with a Public Place Permit issued by Victoria Police may use a firearm in 'public' areas.

Always speak with the local Divisional Firearms Officer (DFO) before considering any firearm use, to confirm whether the property on which you plan to control deer is suitable for volunteer hunters and controllers, or whether it requires a Permit.

Eligibility for Public Place Permits (PPP) is almost entirely restricted to professionals with a registered business as a 'Professional Vermin and Animal Controller' or 'Professional Hunter'.



Fig 1: A large rural property likely to be approved by the DFO for recreational hunting / volunteer deer control

There are many factors that determine whether a property requires a Public Place Permit, including:

- size and location of the property
- proximity to and visibility from houses
- location of walking tracks and roads
- usage of the area by people
- topography
- vegetation
- whether there are safe shooting zones

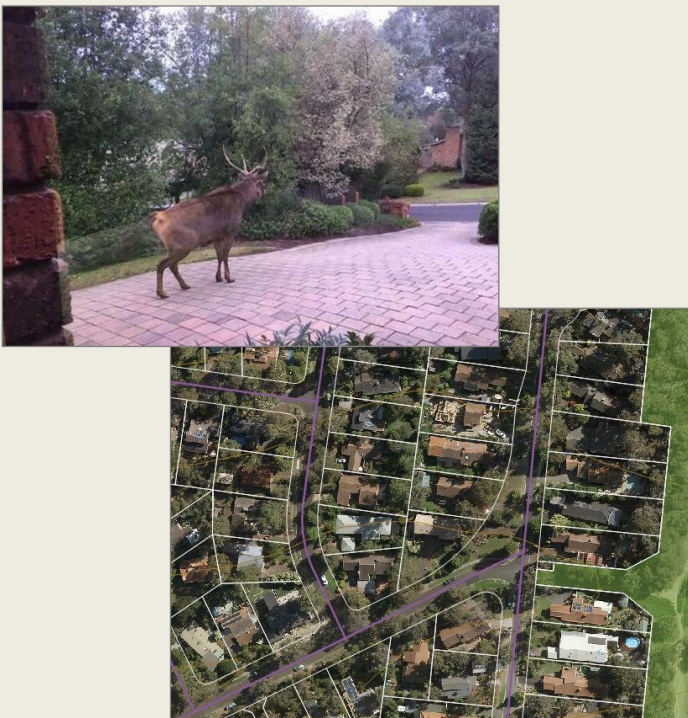


Fig 2: Small urban properties requiring Public Place Permit from Victoria Police

A landholder can speak with the DFO to get an idea of whether a permit will be needed, but ultimately it is the controller/hunter who will have to apply for the permit.

If the DFO tells you that a Public Place Permit is not needed for deer control on your property, getting this confirmation in writing is recommended.

## Landholder Written Permission

Deer can be recreationally hunted on private property (that is not deemed 'public') with Firearms and Game Hunting Licences and the landholder's permission.

Control of deer at night is also possible under a Governor In Council (GIC) **Unprotection Order** on properties where deer are causing damage.

Anyone acting under this Order must carry a signed copy of the permission form, valid for 12 months.

Game hunting principles do not apply under the Order – you can control the deer at night and using spotlights. You don't need a Game Hunting Permit, only a valid firearms licence, and you must always act in accordance with *Firearms Act 1996*, and where applicable, a Public Place Permit.

The GIC Order sets out the minimum requirements for firearms, calibres and projectile weights.

All deer taken under the order must be tagged.

These permission forms are available on the Game Management Authority website.

Permission to destroy deer on private property

I, \_\_\_\_\_  
of \_\_\_\_\_  
give permission to \_\_\_\_\_  
to destroy any wild deer (except Hog Deer) on my property at \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Permission is given subject to the following conditions and all other conditions contained within the attached schedule to the Governor in Council Order (see over) which was made on 27 February 2018 and published in the Government Gazette No. G9 on 1 March 2018 declaring certain deer unprotected on private property:

1. This permission **must** be carried by the person destroying, or in the pursuit of destroying, deer listed in the GIC Order on my property, and when transporting deer or their parts taken from my property;
2. This permission **must** be produced on demand by an authorised officer or member of the Victoria Police;
3. This permission shall, unless revoked, remain in force for 12 months from the date of signing.

Signature of landowner: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Fig 3: GIC Order Landholder Permission form

## Shoot Plans

When a Public Place Permit is required, the controller must present the District Firearms Officer with a site-specific Shoot Plan and Job Safety Analysis Worksheet, to demonstrate that the site has been inspected and all hazards noted, and a map needs to be provided to show where the shooting will occur.

Shoot plans generally include:

- Property boundaries and internal fences
- Entrances / gates (warning sign locations)
- Safe shoot zones and no-shoot zones
- Roads, tracks, buildings, stock and other animals etc
- Locations of hides, tree stands and/or vehicle routes
- Expected movement of deer

Also required under the Permit is the requirement to have Level 1 First Aid accreditation, warning signage in place at entrances where undertaking works, and provide appropriate notification to local police.

Whilst not strictly required by Victoria Police, notification to neighbours is highly recommended.

## Shoot Program Options

A deer cull program is usually undertaken when deer are causing excessive damage and loss to a property, with the aim being to remove as many deer as possible. Culling is done under controlled circumstances.

Deer harvesting includes removal of the animals and delivering them (within certain restrictions) to a meat processing facility. Different facilities are able to process deer for human consumption, pet food or render. Harvesting can be time-consuming with removal of culled animals from steep or heavily vegetated areas being a difficult process which may reduce the number of deer able to be culled per night.

Deer hunting is a recreational activity that includes the elements of fair chase and the taking of 'trophy deer' or removing meat for personal consumption.

### Professional Culling

Perhaps best used for strategic control of large numbers of deer and/or in peri-urban areas where there are smaller properties experiencing deer damage.

Professionals should be expected to have Public Place Permits, their own public liability insurance, First Aid accreditation, their own quality equipment, as well as suppressors which can help with neighbour complaints.

Professionals may be more likely to undertake the neighbour notifications (and sign up more properties for a wider landscape approach), and perhaps more likely to have the required equipment to be able to remove carcasses.



Some professionals also harvest the deer. Harvested meat is used for human consumption or pet food, or sometimes inedible render.

The cost to engage a professional / commercial deer culler may be based on an hourly or nightly rate, or a per Deer rate.

Costs are highly variable, and you should find out what is included in the rate – some may seem expensive, but may only charge for the hours spent shooting on site and be inclusive of all other costs, whilst others may charge less per hour but may bill you for administration or shoot plan preparation time etc.

### Commercial Harvesting

Commercial harvesters generally work in areas where there are large properties – or they can work across many properties – and where there are many deer available to be harvested.

Generally, commercial harvesters are also professional deer controllers, with permits to work in peri-urban (public) places, but you should always check these details.



Harvesters may be able to offer a cheaper – or even free - service as they derive their income instead from the sale of the carcasses to the meat processing facilities.

Some harvesters may provide landholders with a rebate for the deer taken, on an agreed 'per kilogram' rate.

Their willingness to work on properties may be restricted by the number of deer present, in order to remain commercially viable. Some harvesters set up large cool rooms in an area, storing carcasses there until there are enough deer to transport to the knackery. This can enable them to work on properties with fewer deer.

To become accredited, harvesters have to undertake prescribed training courses set by PrimeSafe, which then allows them to take deer to licensed knackeries.

### Volunteer Culling

Volunteer deer controllers are often recreational hunters who understand that deer numbers are too high, or are inappropriate in peri-urban areas. Some volunteers are also professional controllers who are willing to undertake free control works for landholders.

If they are not professionals, then volunteers are best utilized on large / farming properties where no Public Place Permit is required, and they would act under the

GIC Order to enable them to work at night under spotlight.

Volunteers sometimes offer deer control services for private properties through special programs coordinated by the Australian Deer Association (ADA) or Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia (SSAA). These include the SSAA's Farmer Assist Program, and the ADA's Conservation Pest Management (CPM) program.

Volunteer works must be free if the hunter does not have their own Public Liability Insurance for deer control, as any payment (including reimbursements) would void insurances provided by their hunting club.

Volunteers may work best where deer numbers are low, and only a few deer need to be removed to keep numbers low (maintenance shoots). In general, fewer deer are removed by volunteers, which may be due to their level of experience, or may be due to lack of equipment or facilities to enable them to remove more.



Of course, removing small numbers is not always the case! If volunteers are well set up with the equipment to easily remove deer (or they can be left in situ), or they also have a deer control business with a PPP, but also do volunteer work, you might find that volunteers are absolutely your best bet!

Contact the ADA and SSAA directly as they can refer the best hunters for you.

### Recreational Hunting

Recreational hunting can be undertaken during daytime hours only (from half an hour before sunrise to half an hour after sunset), on large rural properties, or in public land (certain State Forests and other reserves set aside for hunting).

The motivation to hunt is not usually to reduce deer numbers – although it can – but instead to take only what is needed for personal consumption, or large stags with antlers for trophies.

Victorian hunter numbers increased from 39,000 in 2018 to 41,985 by the end of 2019, but collectively they do not take enough deer to keep numbers stable – estimates by the Game Management Authority for Victoria were that 173,800 deer were harvested in 2019.

## Control Types

### Stalking on foot



Stalking is one of the most common methods used as it requires very little equipment. A self-levelling tripod can assist with keeping the rifle steady.



Stalking may be used where vehicle access is difficult.

It is important to be familiar with the terrain and location that you are working in, as controlling deer at night means that hazards are hard to see.

### Static Hides



Static hides are a great choice where there are limited options for safe shoot zones. They are set up in a location where deer are known to move past, and where the shoot directions have been pre-determined following a daytime site inspection.

### Tree Stands



Tree stands and platform towers offer elevated positions so that deer are seen from a greater distance, giving more time to prepare shot placement. As shots are at a downward angle there is also a safe backstop – the ground. This is especially important when hunting near homes.

The downside of these is the weight to carry into a site, the time to set them up, and the danger when climbing them in the dark or in wet weather.

Tree stands are set up along expected deer pathways, and where safe shoot directions have been established.

## Vehicle-based



Vehicle based deer control is suited to large scale culling, and enable controllers to cover larger areas quickly.

This method does require that the property has good vehicle access, either on or off a track/road.

Firearms are mounted in a rack to keep them secure and steady, and the height of the vehicle means, as for the tree stands, that the elevated shots are often directed downwards, increasing safe backstop options. Shots are only taken from a stationary vehicle.

Using a vehicle can also assist with carcass removal through the use of a winch.

## Aerial / Helicopter



Control of deer from a helicopter is effective in inaccessible areas such as broad-acre crops, swamps and marshes or in inaccessible locations such as in the Australian Alpine regions.

However, this method is not very effective where deer are at low densities or in areas of thick vegetation cover, as it is not likely to be an economical option. Helicopter shooting also risks disturbing and dispersing deer populations.

## Shoot Program Work Details

There is more to deer control than just shooting!

Other elements that may be included in deer control operations are:

- site inspections to:
  - o confirm boundaries
  - o determine likely deer movements
  - o assess risk and
  - o define safe shoot zones
- installing and monitoring trail cameras
- shoot plan preparation
- liaison with the local District Firearms Officer
- speaking to neighbours
- travel and petrol
- ammunition
- time to transport carcasses to knackery
- waste disposal charges (if relevant),
- other as required....
- 

## Public Liability Insurance

The controller / hunter should have a minimum of \$20 million public liability insurance covering hunting, or be a member of a club (e.g. ADA or SSAA) which has insurance to cover members.

Please note that club insurances only cover recreational / volunteer dispatch of deer, and therefore if the hunter / controller is paid (including reimbursement of petrol or ammunition), this would void the insurance policy.

## Carcass Disposal

Many people feel that deer should not be wasted. Whilst it is ideal if deer can be used for personal consumption, it is not always practical when undertaking an intensive control (culling) program.

There is no legal requirement for hunters to recover all of a deer that has been harvested, but the GMA encourages hunters to maximise the use of any game that are harvested and dispose of remains.

Deer products can be used – with the meat used to feed the hunter or landholders, and antlers used to make buttons or knife handles, or carcasses can be taken to a meat processing facility (knackery) to be prepared for human consumption, pet food or inedible render.

- Disposal of deer carcasses is not always easy
- Animals can be hard to retrieve due to access constraints, such as steep gullies or thick vegetation, or
- Animals may be too far from a vehicle to remove more than just selected cuts of meat.



## Options for disposal

- Leaving the deer in situ (remember animals die of natural causes too and these are not removed from the environment) might be OK when:
  - o not visible / 'smellable' by others
  - o not in a water catchment area
  - o not in a high biodiversity area or
  - o not near a water way.
- Carcasses left where they fall may attract foxes (then you can control them too), but they also provide feed for raptors.
- Burial on site is possible if your property has the space to do so – refer to the [Animal Health Australia Disposal Manual](#) for details.
- Disposal at a waste disposal centre (landfill / tip) may be permitted but there will be fees involved.

- Harvesting is a great option because the controller is paid per kilo for the meat,
- Deer can be used for 'personal use' by the controller or landholder, but cannot be provided to friends and neighbours as this breaches the Meat Act, being regarded as 'trade' or 'donation'.

## Arranging deer control programs



To assist with planning, templates for landholders to record agreed deer control works and site access conditions, as well as neighbour notifications have been developed. These can be found at

[www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au/Environment/Environment-projects/Collaborative-Community-Deer-Action-across-Nillumbik/Community-Deer-Directory](http://www.nillumbik.vic.gov.au/Environment/Environment-projects/Collaborative-Community-Deer-Action-across-Nillumbik/Community-Deer-Directory)

### Recommendations

- Be clear on your goals
  - What do you want to achieve? Many deer removed (cull), or just a couple every so often – this will influence the type of shooter and frequency of visits required
- The landholder should seek advice from the DFO regarding shooting on their property before engaging a controller, and then ensure the controller also discusses their plans with the DFO
- If the DFO advises that the property is a Public Place, make sure your controller has this permit
- Record all of the controllers' details and check all licences and permits are current
- Get references from previous jobs if possible
- Undertake a daytime site visit with the controller/s:
  - confirm property boundaries
  - note any hazards or areas to be avoided such as farming infrastructure or high biodiversity areas
  - note stock and other animal locations– including on neighbouring properties
  - note deer signs and expected pathways
  - determine safe shoot zones
- Agree on the control methods (hide, stalking etc)
- Agree on cost or rebate (if any)
- Agree on the carcass management – i.e. left on site, legs and backstraps removed, whole/part of animal provided to landholder, whole carcass removed, deer harvested and rebate from knackery to be paid to hunter or landholder
- Ensure that a Shoot Plan and risk assessment are submitted to the DFO if a Public Place Permit is required.
- The Shoot Plan has to be approved in writing by the DFO before any control works commence
- It is good practice to prepare a Shoot Plan to provide to the landholder even when it is not required by the DFO. This will reassure the landholder that everything has been considered
- Agree on dates and times for shooting in advance – the landholder or neighbours may prefer weeknights only or for shooting to finish by midnight etc
- Ensure that a Neighbour and Victoria Police Notification Plan has been prepared
  - Include contact details for all neighbours
  - An agreed method and timeframe to advise neighbouring properties and Vic Pol of shoot dates in advance
  - Decide if the controller will let the landholder know when they arrive and leave – they may prefer not to be disturbed at night!
  - Be considerate of neighbours – if they ask the controller to minimise the number or length of shoot nights, you should try to accommodate this.
  - Notifying neighbours goes a long way towards maintaining positive relationships with your neighbours.
- Ensure that the GIC Landholder Permission Form is signed by landholder and carried by the controller when on site
- Put warning signs in place at all property entrances when undertaking control works – this is mandatory if working in a Public Place
- The deer controller/s should leave a property as they found it – only minus a few deer!
- The controller should provide a report to the landholder (and Council) on number of deer seen and the number dispatched including species, gender and age of the deer.

## More Information

Contact the Nillumbik Environment Team on 9433 3543 or email [environment@nillumbik.vic.gov.au](mailto:environment@nillumbik.vic.gov.au).