

Dear Committee Members,

I am writing this because I am concerned about the lack of action being taken to protect Victoria's rainforests from feral deer.

I've lived in many Australian states, but the two I love the most are Victoria and Tasmania. In my youth I often hiked and camped in Tasmania and fell deeply in love with nature and natural habitats. I also felt incredibly proud of the steps that were taken in Tasmania to help protect its native flora and fauna, such as limitations placed on its logging industry (including the extension of its world heritage area in 2013), and the state's sustained program that ensured the complete eradication of foxes.

I've lived in Victoria for eight years now, and I love the forests here, especially the Yarra Ranges. My mother is currently having a house built in Seville, within the Yarra Ranges, and I very much look forward to the increased opportunities it will give us to explore the local rainforests. I love this area, but I fear strongly for its future. The reason for this fear is the destruction caused by feral deer.

Victoria is now home to over one million deer. Deer are much larger than any of our native herbivores, and in such high numbers, Victorian rainforests simply cannot cope. Deer denude the rainforest floor of ferns, shrubs, and young trees. This removes habitats for native ground species, and allows creek banks to be eroded. This erosion in turn causes the muddying and pollution of creeks, resulting in loss of habitat for stream invertebrates, among other issues.

The biggest problem with deer, however, is that they kill fully grown trees. Deer like to rub their antlers against trees, which can result in ring-barking of the tree, making it impossible for the tree to move nutrients between its roots and its branches, which kills the tree. The impact from this issue is so severe that in some areas, such as Monbulk Creek in Sherbrooke Forest, 95% of sassafras trees have had their bark rubbed by deer and are in a state of decline. Experts have predicted that at their current rate of population growth, deer will cause the complete loss of all rainforest in the Dandenong Ranges within the next 50 years. Deer also have an economic cost, with farmers frustrated due to deer wreaking havoc on farms and vineyards being hit hard due to the destruction of grapevines.

Victoria's current method of deer control is simply not working. Hunters shoot up to 100,000 deer each year, yet deer populations are still growing rapidly. In 2018 a draft Victorian Deer Strategy was produced, but still has not progressed any further. Even so, this draft strategy put too much focus on control of deer through voluntary shooting, which will never remove enough deer to protect the rainforests. Instead, deer need to be reclassified as a pest species in Victoria, and a large scale, adequately funded program needs to be enacted to remove the deer. This program needs to include the use of 1080 poison baits (which kill deer but can be tolerated by native species), as they are the only thing that will remove enough deer to reverse their rapid population growth. Regulations regarding the capacity of large land managers to control deer also need to be relaxed, and rules regarding fencing and control around farmed deer need to be strengthened to prevent their escape into the wild.

I love the beautiful forests we have here in Victoria. Controlling deer is a simple but incredibly important action we can perform as a state to protect our forests and ensure they are still here for the next generation of Victorians to enjoy.

Thank you for giving me a chance to have my say. I am happy for my submission to be made public.

