



UPDATING OUR UNDERSTANDING SOUTH EAST FERAL DEER

LANDHOLDER SURVEY RESULTS 2017

BACKGROUND

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The Natural Resources South East Board carried out a 'Landholder Survey on Feral Deer' of landholders in the South East in 2017. This survey mirrors those conducted in 2006 & 2012 and was repeated for a third time to update our understanding of community views on the current situation. NRSE also aimed to gauge any changes to landholder perceptions, knowledge and actions in the past 5 years. Throughout the 5 year period since the last survey the NRSE Board have continued to pursue their aim of increasing community awareness and involvement in the feral deer issue. Control measures have also been carried out to reduce feral deer numbers, thereby reducing the overall impacts of feral deer on environmental and agricultural resources.

FERAL DEER DISTRIBUTION AND POPULATION TRENDS

In 2017, 65% of respondents reported that feral deer were present on their property, either permanently or temporarily. This is an increase of 5% from 2012, which could reflect an expansion in the distribution and range of the feral deer or an increase in landholder awareness of the presence and potentially negative impacts of feral deer.

In 2012, the most common response was that deer numbers had **declined** over the previous 5 years.

By contrast, in the **2017** survey a majority of respondents felt that feral deer numbers have **remained constant** over the past 5 years.

Consistent with previous surveys Fallow deer were reported as the most predominant species, with Red deer following closely behind (see Figure 1) This concurs with anecdotal reports of landholders and staff who have observed increased numbers of this species, in the past 5 years. Deer are still primarily seen in small groups (see Figure 2)

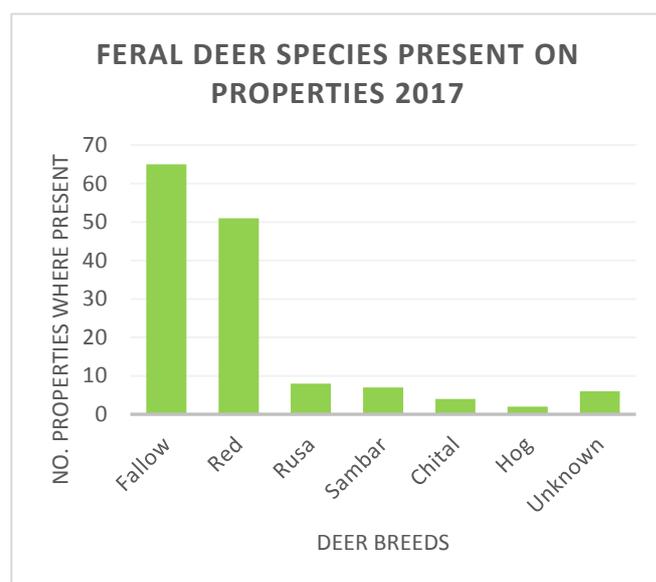


Figure 1. Feral Deer Species Present on Surveyed Properties



LANDHOLDER PERCEPTIONS OF IMPACTS

Landholder perceptions have continued to shift toward the negative around the impacts of feral deer in our landscape.

71% of respondents perceive feral deer to be a pest animal of varying definitions including 'Pest', 'Potential Pest' or 'Undesirable Wildlife'. As with previous surveys, there still remains a higher than desirable portion of respondents that consider feral deer to be desirable or a resource of some kind, these categories totalling 29%. (See figure 3) This is of course contrary to the regional aims to destroy feral deer and highlights the need for further awareness.

Survey respondents rated the most serious impact of Feral Deer on their property to be: 'Eating fodder', again closely followed by 'illegal hunting'. Landholders' 'Top 5' impacts have remained reasonably constant across all 3 surveys. (Table 1)

'Eating fodder' has become the top issue in 2017. Whilst 'Attract illegal hunting' has come in at second place, it still remains a constant impact to landholders in 2017. 'Disease risk' remains in the top 5 and has increased in perceived importance. This may be due to a further increase in understanding about this issue and attention must continue to be given to this.

'Traffic hazard' remains the top human safety issue, as was the case in both 2006 and 2012, with 'Illegal Hunters' following closely behind.

Perhaps the most significant change seen in the 2017 survey was the reduction in landholders who find the level of impact of feral deer 'tolerable', only 64% overall. This is a decrease of 15% from 2012. (see Figures 4 & 5). 66% of respondents said they would be willing to participate in a regional control program.

Over 40% of respondents reported an increase in illegal hunting on both roadsides and public land.

Alarming 25% of respondents reported an increase in illegal hunting on **their land** over the past 5 years, posing serious risks to landowners and their livestock. (see Figure 6)

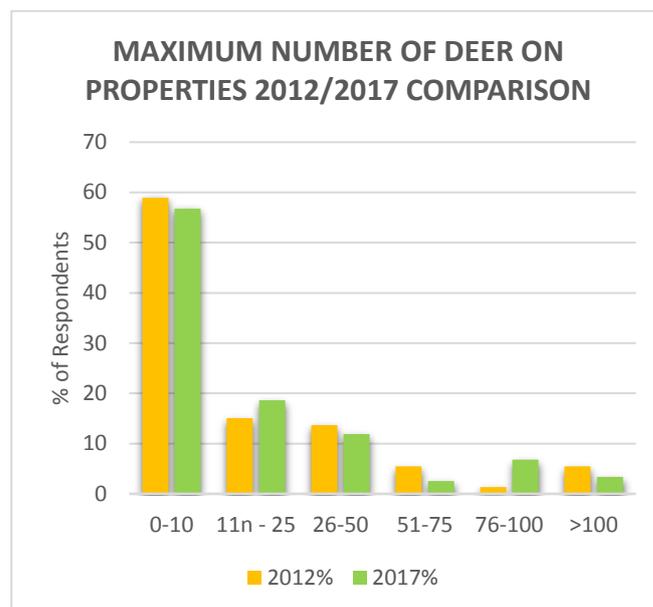


Figure 2. Maximum Number of Deer on Surveyed Properties

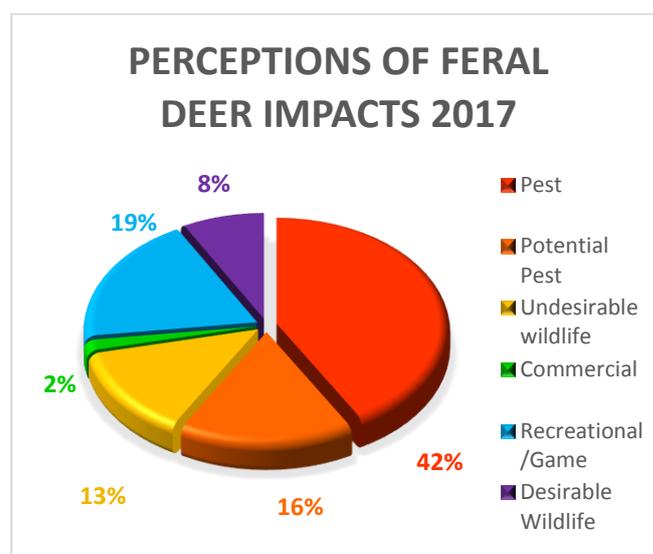


Figure 3. Perceptions of Feral Deer Impacts

TABLE 1. TOP 5 IMPACTS OF FERAL DEER REPORTED BY LANDHOLDERS

2006	2012	2017
1. Eat fodder	1. Attract illegal hunting	1. Eat fodder
2. Disease Risk	2. Eat fodder (equal 1 st)	2. Attract Illegal hunting
3. Attract Illegal hunting	3. Damage fences	3. Disease risk
4. Damage fences	4. Disease risk	4. Damage fodder
5. Damage trees	5. Damage fodder	5. Damage fences

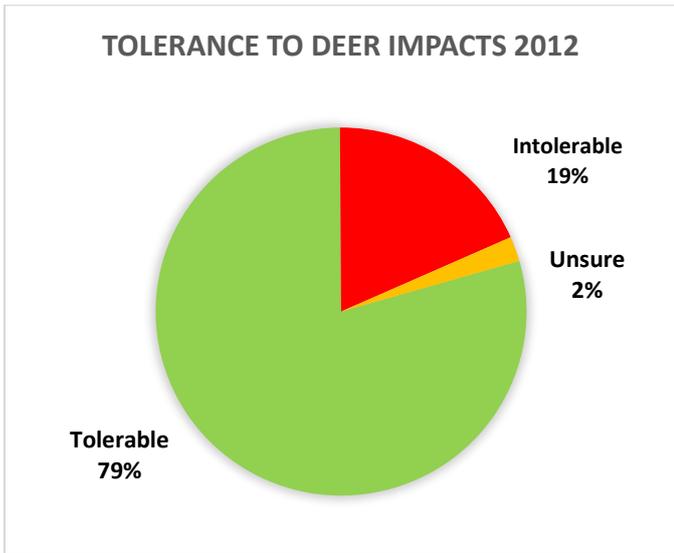


Figure 4. Tolerance to Deer Impacts 2006

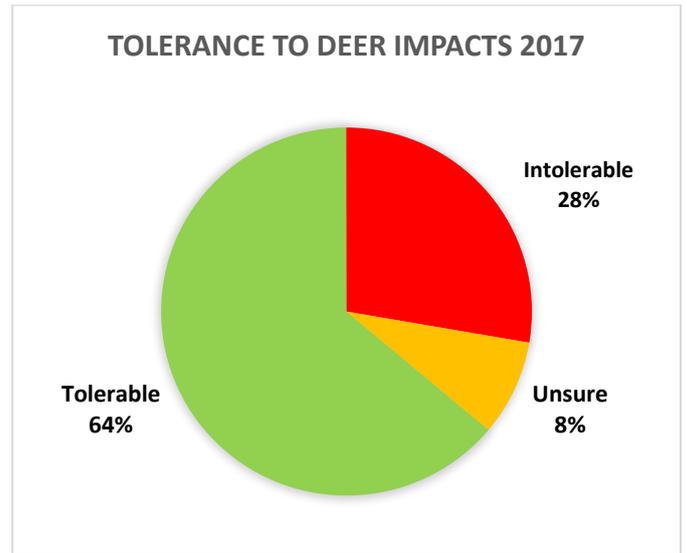


Figure 5. Tolerance to Deer Impacts 2017

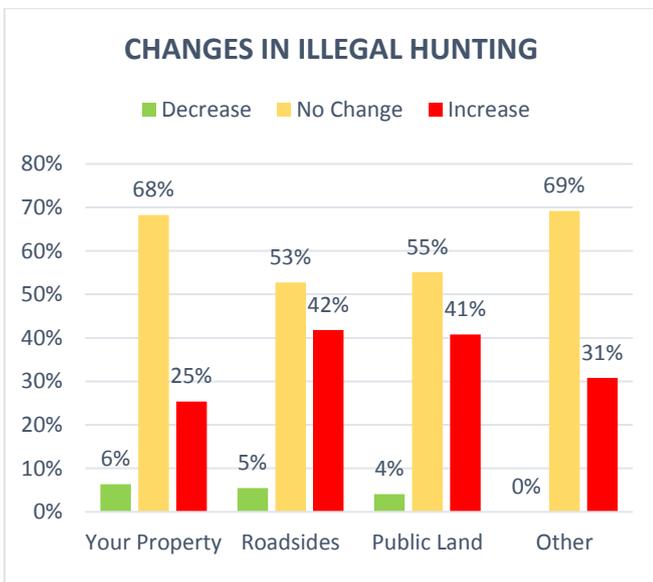


Figure 6. Perceived changes in Illegal hunting activity

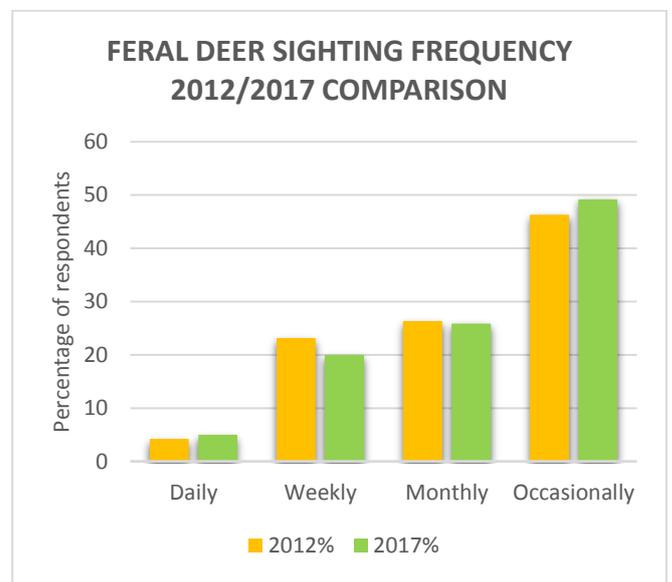


Figure 7. Feral Deer Sighting Frequency

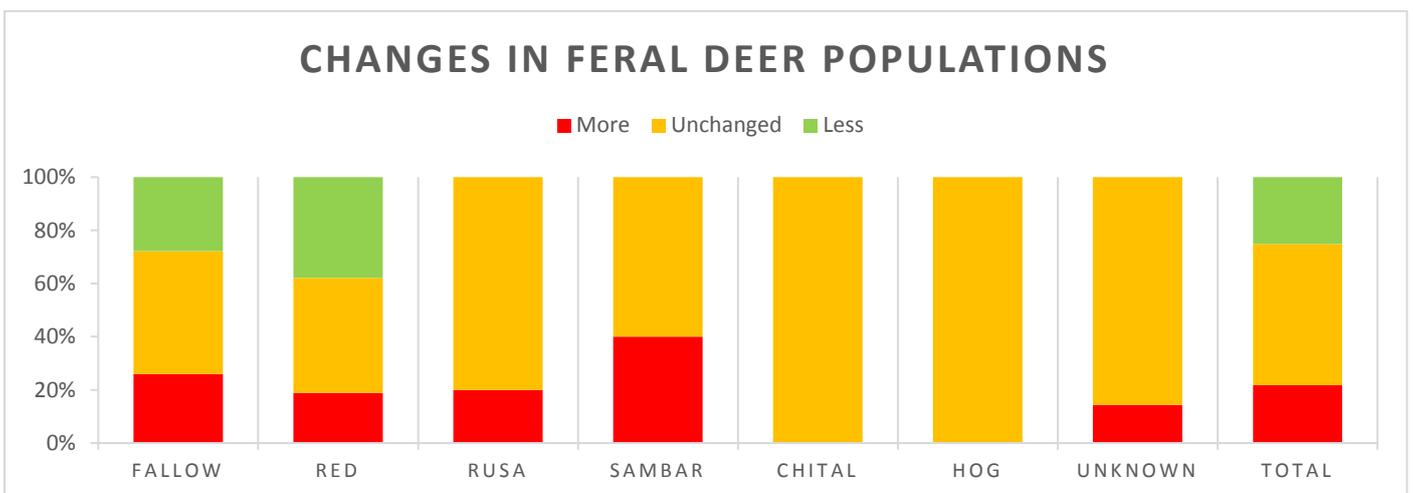


Figure 8. Perceived changes in Feral Deer Populations



TABLE 2. MAJOR BARRIERS TO LANDHOLDERS IN CONDUCTING FERAL DEER CONTROL

2006	2012	2017
1. Lack of time	1. Lack of time	1. Lack of time
2. Feral deer not a problem	2. Feral deer not a problem	2. Feral deer not a problem
3. Lack of control by neighbours	3. Lack of control by neighbours	3. Lack of control by neighbours
4. Illegal hunters	4. Escapee concerns	4. Lack of equipment

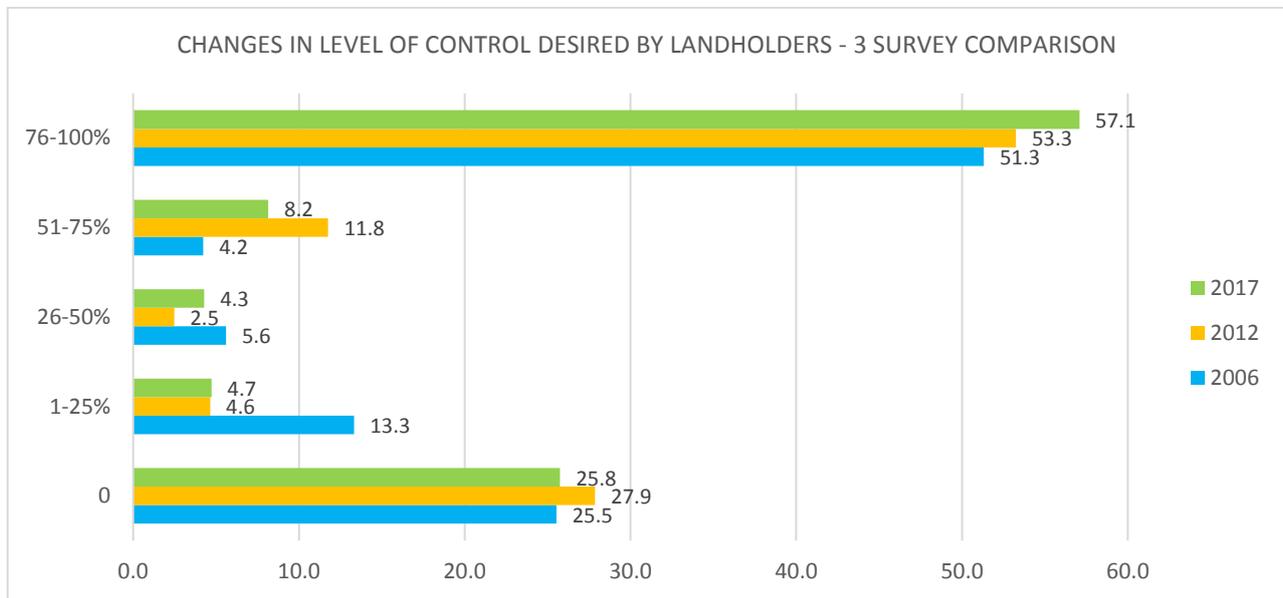


Figure 9. 3 Survey Comparison of Desired Level of Deer Control

CONCLUSIONS

Results from the landholder survey have been used to gain a greater understanding of the current perception and attitudes of landholders toward feral deer in this region. Information gathered will be used in a confidential manner to develop long-term, coordinated strategies for the management and control of feral and farmed deer.

The information gained from the 2017 landholder survey confirms on-ground observations that feral deer numbers and impacts remain a major concern to landholders in the region. These results show that growing numbers of landholders are growing intolerant of the impact that this pest has on their lives and livelihoods, but report ‘Lack of Time’ is still the major barrier to their own control effort.

Whilst deer numbers are remaining constant the risk of increase in the population to unacceptable levels of damage is ever-present. Natural Resources SE have continued to invest in awareness, compliance and control measures over the past 5 years and the need

for this to continue into the future has been clearly communicated by the landholders of our region. The Natural Resources SE would like to thank all landholders who participated in the 2017 survey.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This survey was made possible by the support of Natural Resources SE, the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources and the participating landholders. The survey was funded through the Australian Government’s Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper, the government’s plan for stronger farmers and a stronger economy.



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