Transcript

Environmental Biosecurity Webinar of National Feral Deer Action Plan supported by Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

National Feral Deer Action Plan

Shared Biosecurity Culture

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**Presented by:**

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[*Opening visual of slide with text saying, ‘Working with communities to encourage collaborative pest management: Feral deer case study,’ ‘Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, ‘Shared Biosecurity Culture,’ ‘Webinar 1 – Overview’, March 2023*]

**Annelise:**

The project that I'm working on is funded by the Australian Government, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and it originated as a Centre for Invasive Species Solution project. In the work I've done over the last year and a bit, I've certainly recognized that communities play an important role in deer management and that's what I'm going to talk to you a bit about today.

And yeah, I guess I'll talk a little bit about some case studies that I have either had some involvement in or my project had some involvement and some others that I'm just aware of, but I think are fantastic.

So, the talk for today is about working with communities to encourage collaborative pest management. And because I'm a deer coordinator, most of the slides will be about feral deer as a case study.

So, before I start, I just want to let you know that I will be referring to deer as feral deer. However, my project acknowledges that in some states deer are referred to as wild deer and that sometimes at the state level or individuals may refer to either. But in today's talk, I'm going to refer to them as feral deer.

Okay. For those that don't know very much about deer, I just want to give you a couple of slides about the problem that we have in Australia and where it's heading. So, on the left you can see a distribution map of deer, which is quite splotchy I would say, and that probably reflects the fact that deer are spreading and emerging and appearing in lots of little patches.

They have been around in Australia since the 1800s, but certainly the populations and numbers have been increasing over the last 20 years. And on the right, you can see a bit of a theoretical graph of some numbers and a trajectory of deer numbers nationally into the future. We recognize deer are very difficult to count and so these numbers are quite rubbery, however, the trajectory is heading upwards.

It's likely that there’s about 1 to 2 million deer in the country at the moment and that there really was probably way fewer at the turn of the century. So, this is a bit of a problem and I guess we have a window of opportunity now to really try and put a bit of a cap on that trajectory that's heading skyward.

I also just want to let you know that there are six species of deer established in Australia at the moment. I'm going to mostly talk about them generally as deer as a whole, but those six species are at different stages of the invasion curve in in many of those little patches of black on that screen. And also, to complicate things, we do have different policies for the management of deer in different states. And the legislation around controlling them or managing them is quite different.

So that's just to make things exciting and interesting. Okay. I'm just going to show a little schematic which was done by the invasive Species Council of deer spread in Victoria, which hopefully will show you some of the problem. And this is sort of happening in other parts of Australia as well. So just watch the dots over time as we approach the turn of the century. So, there you go, 2020.

I think that's a really effective graphic that shows how the spread of these animals are going quite quickly. Deer have many impacts, and this is fairly common for herbivores. These pictures, I guess, show agricultural impacts or competition for pasture at the top.

There's a cow there with Johne’s disease, which is one of the diseases that deer can potentially transmit. They have road safety problems if you hit one in your car. They love to eat regenerating plants that people put in to regenerate bushland. They love to nibble on your vegetables and horticulture and roses in a domestic sense and certainly also impact on environmental assets as well.

So, because they have so many different impacts, it can be difficult to use messages about impact. Often predators, the impact of predators can be a little bit more visual and a little bit more specific and maybe in some ways easier to have in messaging. Yeah so, deer have many impacts and that that's just one of the challenges with awareness raising. These slides here represent some of the environmental problems that they have.

At the top there you can see a deer exclusion fence that was put in, in 2019, and then you can see the improvements to one side of the fence in 2022. That just shows you the types of impact that deer can have on the understory of bushland environments. And down the bottom are some of the species that are particularly impacted by deer.

We've got the helmeted honeyeater, the mallee fowl, magenta lily pilly and some examples of stripping trees through to the extent of killing them and wallowing as well. There are many other impacts that they have on the environmental side of things. Okay. One of the problems with deer is that they don't stay put, they run, and they run quickly across property boundaries.

They jump fences. And for this reason, it's difficult or not as effective to manage them at the property level. And we really need to manage them across property boundaries at a landscape scale because of this movement issue. So that is one of the reasons why we really need to get all the people who manage those lands together and get them to work together.

And this slide is really about the fact that the people that manage the different adjoining lands are all very different, have different land uses, different values, and it's really these people that we need to engage with and talk to. To encourage them to all work together. I'm just going to show you a little schematic of why co-ordinated control across property boundaries is useful or beneficial.

And I'm actually using rabbits here just to mix things up a bit. So, the yellow squares represent property boundaries and when everybody is participating in co-ordinated control, like on the screen here and managing a pest, we've got a fairly large area which can be somewhat pest free or at least reduced and it makes it easier. There's a lot smaller perimeter to manage.

If, however, we only have a few of these people participating or doing control, it means that there's more property boundary to keep track of or to manage, and also that there's more land for the pest to harbor and breed up and spread into those areas. So, I guess that just shows that getting as many people together as possible to have a coordinated approach together is as best, we can.

And when I say co-ordinated control, this is really about finding complementary methods and timeframes that ensure that the effort is more efficient at a larger scale, and they can be all sorts of combinations. All right, so why is coordinated control so hard? There are many reasons for this, but these are a number of them. Some people say, the problem's too big or the problem's too small.

They may see as someone else's problem. Well, I don't know how to do it. I don't have the skills or licenses. For some things like rabbits where there are biocontrols some people think that one off tools, like a biocontrol or a one-off attempt will do the trick. I don't need to do any more. They may have other priorities.

In the deer world, the animal is too cute is a common one. There’s a few connections with other stories in our lives that don't align I guess with impacts. Many people in Australia say I have no I had no idea we had deer or that they were a problem. Some would like to have a few around for meat for the freezer or that they appreciate them in the wildlife.

Some feel that any attention will attract illegal shooting on their properties, and some believe that humans are the real invasive species and let's just tackle that instead. So, it's a real range of different views. And these are just some of the challenges, I guess, to get everybody working together. So how do we encourage participation?

We've got a couple of pictures there of people with different motivations, I guess, and I've put down a bit of a recipe of four things, starting with awareness. And then secondly, getting people together to co-develop a plan. The third one is about providing training, tools, and support to enable that plan to be enacted and the fourth one is about encouraging, engaging, following up, reporting back, reviewing, trust, to keep things going.

So, the first one I'm going to talk about is awareness. And I've got a little star there to remind me that the next slide is really busy, and that is because awareness raising has many different options and possibilities, and it can be very busy. So, this is a slide that represents all sorts of things that have been done in the deer world that I know of and there are many more.

So, we've got radio interviews on the left, field days, down the bottom some videos of impacted farmers talking. There are newsletters. There's one in the middle at the top there from cross tenure feral deer management project. Media in the middle. We've got a dob in the deer fridge magnet to encourage people to report.

In the top right-hand corner, there's a program called Feralscan, which has a subset called Deerscan, where people can be encouraged to report sightings. And that also raises awareness of the problems and shows where problems are at a large scale. Reports and analyses of impacts, like an economic analysis there and other things they've got, they're called the buck Stops Here Report Feral deer.

So many different ways to raise awareness. I'll just talk about one media campaign that we've piloted through the national program which we're going to expand in some other regions soon. So, this one really was to address the misunderstandings, I guess, around what we call the Bambi effect, that deer are native, and a misunderstanding that deer numbers are not or will not become a problem in the future.

The map down in the bottom right corner just shows some blue dots where we ran a pilot and some yellow dots which is where we are proposing to expand it. So, this social media awareness campaign was really just to get people aware, I guess, of the very, very basic impacts of deer. These are some of the things that we put out in four regions in late last year.

So, we had billboards, we had print media. In some places there were fliers and there was social media like the social toll down the bottom, but there were a whole range of them for different impacts. And these were tailored somewhat to communities and their values, whether they had an agricultural or an environmental impact or a road safety issue.

And the outcomes of these really were a lot more reporting of deer. There was also quite a lot of discussion amongst the community and certainly some more awareness. So that was very effective. And we think this sort of thing is a good tool. However, we can't just leave it there at awareness. We need to take a next step of engaging communities.

So, the next one is really about getting people together. And a co-ordinator that has taught me a lot has always said to me, it's all about the people. Listen, talk to them, gain their trust, show you'll go the extra mile. And so here are a few photographs of different ways that people are engaged. Certainly, a lot of coordinators are like the lady on the left just on the phone a lot or on Zoom or having face to face meetings, which is a really great way to do it.

I put down the bottom, Victorian Deer control community network, and that is really to give an example of a network in Victoria that's been set up which is working brilliantly to bring community together. They have been supported by the Invasive Species Council and also the Victorian DEECA has supported them as well and they've gotten a lot of community members from all sorts of organizations and from the community together and encouraging people from all across Victoria to learn, share knowledge, share information and support each other in that network.

So that sort of a model is a fantastic way to help get people together. So, we can ask the question, well when is it necessary? Do we always need to bring the community together to engage them in issues like this? Well, I would suggest that the community are our eyes and ears. Well, where governments can't be everywhere and hear everything, communities can do the work or some of the work for I guess in the whole in the shared biosecurity culture, community can certainly provide land access as well.

And that is really important when we need to manage pests across multiple properties and as well, social license is really important for some species. So how do you do it? Well, really, I would recommend that you tailor the venue, the time, the food, the guest speakers that you provide make it really social and fun. Ask about their experiences, their concerns, their goals, and their values, and discuss options for control plans that that community would like to do and certainly to agree on next steps, which is pretty important.

So, the third one in my little recipe is about providing tools and activities to engage. So, this is additional to tools that will actually get the control work done, but tools and activities to engage help keep the community motivated. So here we've got some photos of people doing vegetation type monitoring, and that's particularly, I guess, useful if the community doesn't have the capacity themselves to do control, they might have to get it in from outside or pay for it.

But having something that they can do actively is a great way to engage. The photo there with the fences is a group that is installing exclusion plots, I guess, to protect some of their valued vegetation. Down the bottom, we've got some activities that Watergum in Queensland developed for their communities there, so they encourage deer scan, which is a reporting app.

They encourage people to go on deer walks and record activities and people could also review footage from cameras. And on the right, there's a mobile phone image there of cameras with some yellow squares around them. This is another activity that some communities have used where they've used 4G type cameras that send images directly to your phone, tied together with artificial intelligence that can detect that it's taken a photo of a deer and send it to your phone in real time.

And the fourth one is about keep engaging the community. So, these are some photos of some activities that have been done after the initial awareness raising of deer. So, in the left there's a butcher there showing landholders how to dress down a venison carcass, I guess. And the middle one is about rabbit warren ripping. And the third one is somebody showing landholders how to autopsy lambs.

So, these are all things that I guess are a little bit separate from the initial awareness raising of deer, but they keep people coming back for meetings and keep them engaged and maybe stretching their interest to other land management things. At the bottom, I've got a graph there of monthly culls and a newsletter and these are also really important tools for getting that feedback back to the community, telling them how things are going and keeping them engaged.

I'm going to talk about two case studies of groups that have been working really well that I know of amongst many. The first one is in the Northern Rivers part of New South Wales. So, this program was an initiative of the Tweed Shire together with other surrounding councils and funded by a Commonwealth Government grant. So, they have a map, that's the map on the left with a bunch of dots.

And their region really has very, very few deer, but they didn't really know how many or if there were none and they wanted to be able to prevent further deer incurring into the area. And the area was surrounded by large populations of deer. So they did a media campaign, a social media, radio newspaper, they developed up a communication tool kit, they developed up a Microsite, a website which had a call to action to report, and they did many face to face engagements and went to field days, and went to people's properties to inspect whether there were deer there as well.

And then they also developed a prevention and monitoring plan. So together all of these things have really engaged the community and there's a lot of eyes and ears out there now keeping an eye out whether any deer turns up, then it can be nipped in the but quite quickly. The other case study I wanted to mention is about South Gippsland in Victoria.

So, you can see a map there in the middle. And this is a community group that is really led by a Landcare network supported by State Government and Parks, and they have gone from not knowing very much about what to do with deer to amazing things within 12 months, they're using volunteer shooters, they're co-ordinating property owners together and shooter led carcass management, which is something that's important for them.

They've run meetings, videos, they've got camera networks out for surveillance, and they've now got a fantastic control strategy as well. Down the bottom there you can see, a podcast and also a video that they've developed to raise awareness of their community and they're having meetings after meetings and getting more and more people on board.

So that's certainly working. And this slide just captures a lot of feedback that I've heard from community groups that have got involved in some of these programs. So, many people have said that they feel more connected. They feel they have more support. They can see and hear results in their district. They feel encouraged and appreciated. Part of a bigger program.

They know the benefits of control. They've enjoyed getting involved in citizen science and motivated to take ownership and keep going. So, I'm actually only going to have one more slide. And this is really an additional, I guess, fairly large initiative to try to encourage more coordinated participation of many people from all different sectors.

So, this is the National Feral Deer Action Plan. It’s actually still in draft. That's being developed by a working group that has representatives from a whole range of sectors, from government, non-government, research, volunteer and professional shooting groups, environment sectors, farming groups, all sorts that have come together to develop this. And the aim is really to do some of the things I've talked about, to raise the profile of deer issues, to outline a national approach and priority actions to manage the impacts of feral deer and to encourage coordinated participation as much as we can from all sorts of people across Australia.

[End of Transcript]