Department of Primary Industries and Water

Hobart GPO Box 44, Hobart, Tasmania, 7001
Launceston PO Box 46, Kings Meadows, Tasmania, 7249
Devonport PO Box 303, Devonport, Tasmania, 7310
Ph 1300 368 550
Web www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au

Tasmanian Government

# Animal Welfare Guidelines - Deer

Approved under Section 44B of the *Animal Welfare Act 1993* by the then Minister for Primary Industries and Water – October 2008.

For further information contact:

Animal Biosecurity and Welfare Branch
13 St Johns Avenue, New Town, 7008
Telephone 03 6165 3777
E-mail: AnimalWelfare.Enquiries@dpipwe.tas.gov.au

---

## ANIMAL WELFARE GUIDELINES

Animal welfare considerations are becoming increasingly important in the keeping and farming of animals, both in Australia and internationally. Practices which may have once been deemed acceptable or justifiable, are now being reassessed in the light of new knowledge and changing attitudes. High standards of welfare are not only important legally and ethically, but also have direct economic benefits and are becoming increasingly necessary for continued market access.

Tasmania's Animal Welfare Guidelines are approved by the Minister for Primary Industries and Water, after consultation with the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee, in accordance with section 44B of the *Animal Welfare Act 1993.*

Under the Animal Welfare Act, Animal Welfare Guidelines are to include guidelines for the education and guidance of persons involved in the care and management of animals. Animal Welfare Guidelines are therefore advisory in nature. They are intended to help people involved in the care and management of animals adopt high standards of husbandry. In addition, they may be used by the Courts as a yardstick to assess husbandry and management

The Animal Welfare Guidelines may be based on the *Australian Model Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Animals*, or the *Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines*, endorsed by the Primary Industries Ministerial Council (PIMC). Alternatively, where there is no suitable national model, Animal Welfare Guidelines may be developed in Tasmania, in consultation with industry and animal welfare groups.

Animal Welfare Guidelines will be revised to take into account changes in animal management practices and in knowledge of animal welfare.

The *Animal Welfare Guidelines – Deer* are based on the *Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals – Deer*

## CONTENTS



# 1. SCOPE AND INTENTION OF THESE GUIDELINES

These Guidelines set out the minimum requirements for the welfare of farmed fallow deer. They are intended as a guide for all people responsible for the welfare and husbandry of Fallow deer with the aim of achieving humane husbandry throughout all types of deer farming enterprises. Assistance and specific advice on management and disease control in deer should be obtained from qualified advisers, whose services are available through government and private agencies.

In Tasmania, the farming of Fallow deer is regulated under the Wildlife Regulations 1999. People wishing to apply to farm deer should contact the Department of Primary Industries and Water.

Deer farmed for commercial purposes are kept in various situations including small enclosures on fauna parks, intensive deer farms and those utilising extensive grazing at low stocking rates on unimproved pastures. Regardless of the type of husbandry, owners, managers or handlers of deer are responsible for the care of animals under their control.

Sound animal husbandry practices are essential for the welfare of farmed deer. The importance of competent stockmanship in animal welfare cannot be over-emphasised. The important skills of a competent stockman are the ability to handle deer in such a way as to minimise stress, to utilise their

natural behaviour, to recognise the early signs of distress or disease and to initiate prompt and appropriate and remedial actions. Good stockmen are flexible in their approach and adapt to the needs of differing stock circumstances.

The basic behavioural, anatomical and physiological characteristics of deer vary considerably from other farm livestock and this should be taken into account.

Deer have the following basic requirements:-

- food and water to sustain good health and vitality
- protection from extremes of climate
- protection from predators
- provision of appropriate management to allow for the establishment of herd social hierarchy and
- social interaction
- protection from disease, injury and pain.

These Guidelines are based on knowledge and technology at the time of publication and may need to be revised in the light of future knowledge or changed circumstances. It is stressed that further advice on husbandry and disease control procedures should be obtained when required from qualified advisers in private or government employment.

## 2. DUTY OF CARE

*Under the Animal Welfare Act, persons who have the care or charge of animals have a legal "duty of care" for the welfare of those animals, and must take all reasonable measures to ensure their welfare.*

*In the case of deer, persons with this legal duty of care include the owner, the person with control or custody, the operator or manager of the premises where the deer are kept and the manager or director of a body corporate which owns them.*

## 3. FOOD AND WATER

### 3.1 Food

*Under the Animal Welfare Act it is an offence to fail to provide animals in your care with appropriate and sufficient food.*

Deer have a typical ruminant digestive system requiring similar macro and micronutrients to other ruminant animals. The quality and quantity of the diet of farmed deer should be adequate to maintain health and vitality.

In cold climates, the appetite of deer is markedly depressed in winter and substantial weight loss normally occurs, particularly in mature males. Deer should be well fed in summer and autumn so that they are in good body condition by the end of autumn, with adequate fat reserves for the winter period. In addition to the amount of feed required to maintain body condition, increased feed should be provided to ensure growth in young deer, and to meet the nutritional demands of pregnancy and lactation in females and antler development in males.

Deer should be protected as far as possible from dietary components and foreign materials deleterious to their health.

Changes of diet generally require very gradual introduction of new components over several days.

### 3.2 Water

*Under the Animal Welfare Act it is an offence to fail to provide animals in your care with appropriate and sufficient water.*

Deer require free access to an adequate supply of good quality water. Water reticulation systems should be inspected daily for normal function during summer and at least twice a week during winter. Where dams or waterholes are the main water source of drinking water measures should be taken to prevent contamination with effluent.

Water requirements vary widely according to body weight, temperature and type of diet. As a guide, lactating Fallow deer on dry summer pasture require up to 10 L daily.

### 3.3 Drought

Drought conditions may be defined as a severe rainfall shortage resulting in a lack of paddock feed and/or drinking water resulting in excessive weight loss or death.
Supplementary feeding should be conducted at least every third day and the herd observed carefully for weak or recumbent animals.

Where the requirements of food or water to sustain health and vitality cannot be met, deer should be moved, agisted, sold for slaughter or slaughtered on site.

Deer being fed for survival should be examined regularly; less thrifty deer may need to be segregated for special treatment. Deer too weak to stand and walk should be slaughtered on site or provided with emergency veterinary care. Methods of humane destruction are given in Section 8.

## 4. PROTECTION FROM CLIMATIC EXTREMES AND PREDATION

*Under the Animal Welfare Act it is an offence to fail to provide animals in your care with appropriate and sufficient shelter.*

Deer in general are less capable of maintaining their body temperature in the face of climatic extremes than cattle and sheep. Farmed deer should have access to sufficient shelter and shade to prevent cold stress or heat stress. Bush or other shelter in paddocks can minimise climatic stress.

Newborn deer have a poor thermo-regulatory mechanism. Therefore, fawning deer should have access to paddocks with wind- and rain-proof shelter and shade.

Protection from predation may be required on farms, particularly at the urban/rural land interface, because of marauding dog-packs.

In the event of fire or flood, deer should be attended to promptly to minimise injury and pain.

## 5. PROTECTION FROM DISEASE AND INJURY

*Under the Animal Welfare Act it is an offence to have possession or custody of a sick or injured animal and fail to provide veterinary or other appropriate treatment.*

Persons responsible for the care of farmed deer should be familiar with the husbandry of deer, the signs of ill-health and the common diseases affecting deer in that area.

Because of their nervous disposition, deer are prone to injury. Sick, injured or diseased deer should be

given prompt and appropriate treatment or slaughtered immediately.

Appropriate preventative treatments should be administered to deer to prevent disease conditions that are common in the district or are occurring in the herd.

If the deer farm manager is unable to resolve a disease condition, veterinary help should be sought to diagnose the complaint and initiate proper treatment.

Projectile syringe (“tranquilliser gun”) equipment should only be used by trained and experienced operators. Small deer may be injured by projectile syringes discharged from firearms, particularly at short ranges. Where possible, alternative delivery systems such as blow guns or pole syringes should be used for small deer. NB: Drugs used for this purpose are restricted by law.

Projectile syringes and sedatives should not be used routinely as an alternative to properlyd esigned handling facilities.

## 6. ACCOMMODATION AND HANDLING

Facilities for deer should be designed with due regard to the behavioural patterns of deer, as a prerequisite for ease of handling and reducing risk of injury. Obtain qualified advice in these areas.

There should be an adequate number of paddocks to permit animals of similar age, sex, size and compatibility to be grouped and to allow separation of incompatible groups where necessary at certain times of the year.

Overcrowding of deer results in competition for food, water and space which may lead to fighting and the risk of injury. Aggressive behaviour is mainly a problem with male deer in 'hard antler'. Care should be taken to avoid handling deer at times of the year or in facilities that increase the risk of injury from fighting.

Deer require social interactions with members of their own species. Single animals should not be confined alone for more than a short period except for disease quarantine or management practices.

Fencing should be high enough to prevent escape and of a design which minimises risk of injury. The provision of secure fencing, constructed to required specifications is a condition of registration of deer farms.

Gateways and passage ways should be free of internal projections which might cause injury.

Provision should be made for reduced light in the drafting pens and handling cradle in order to reduce stress and assist the handling of deer.

To avoid risk of injuries, deer should be handled quietly and not provoked to a level where they panic and seek escape from a yard or other restraining facility.

## 7. MANAGEMENT PRACTICES

### 7.1 General

General farm management practices are an integral part of deer farming and help to minimise injury and maintain health and vitality. Such practices should be performed competently.

Restraint used on deer should only be as much as is needed to efficiently carry out the required procedure.

Practices that cause pain should not be carried out on deer if painless and practical methods of

husbandry can be adopted to achieve the same result.

**7.2 Removal of antlers**
Antlers of male deer should be removed annually, preferably before development of the 'hard antler', to protect handlers, other deer and the farming facilities. Deer in 'hard antler' should not be yarded with other deer.

Removal of the 'velvet antlers' should be performed by or under the supervision of a registered veterinary surgeon. The procedure should be performed when the animal has been made insensitive to pain with an appropriate analgesic drug.

**7.3 Identification**
The preferred methods of individual identification of deer include ear tagging, ear marking, ear tattooing and freeze branding. Hot iron and chemical branding should not be used.

**7.4 Castration**
Castration without local anaesthetic or general analgesia/anaesthesia should be confined to deer as young as possible but under six months of age. Where it is essential to castrate sexually mature deer, local or general anaesthetic should be used.

An appropriate method of castration should be used and the operator should be competent.

## 8. TRANSPORTATION

Deer should be segregated into groups of the same species, sex and age during transportation. Only fit and healthy animals should be transported.

Transport of deer during hot weather should be avoided. Where the ambient temperature may exceed 30° Celsius, deer should be transported at night. The temperature inside a deer crate should not exceed 35° Celsius during transportation.

Deer should be transported in properly designed crates which are darkened, but well ventilated, with no light access above 0.5 m from the floor. Timber walls are preferred as metal sheeting is very noisy.

Floor space should be adequate to allow deer to lie down during transport for journeys in excess of two hours. As a guide a minimum floor space required for the small species such as Fallow deer is 0.5 m2 per animal.

Ventilation is essential and should be adjustable to remove gases and excessive moisture through lightproof vents.

Floors should be non-slip, preferably with a bedding of straw or wood shavings to absorb moisture.
Water should be provided for journeys greater than eight hours. Feed to which the deer are accustomed should be supplied if the animals are to be crated for more than 24 hours.
Inspection of the crate should be carried out within 30 minutes of commencing the journey and then at about two hourly intervals. Inspection ports located at strategic positions in the crate will assist inspection.

Deer should have antlers removed prior to transport. If this is not possible deer with hard antlers should be transported separately from any other deer.

# 9. HUMANE DESTRUCTION

The method of slaughter should be effective and humane, causing sudden and painless death for the animal. The animal must be handled quietly beforehand to ensure it is not unnecessarily distressed or alarmed.

Effective and humane methods of euthanasia for deer include either shooting with a firearm or stunning with a captive bolt pistol followed by bleeding.

The methods recommended are those which are considered most suitable for a farm situation.

**9.1 Use of Firearms and Captive-bolt Stunners**
The use of firearms and captive-bolt pistols is subject to the provisions of the Firearms Act 1996.

The most efficient and widely available method of humanely destroying cattle is a gunshot to the brain from close range. There may be legal restrictions on the use of firearms other than on private property, in which case assistance should be sought from veterinarians, the RSPCA or the Police.

The effectiveness of shooting is dependent upon the destruction of major centres at the back of the brain near the spinal cord. A common mistake is to direct the bullet too low, damaging frontal areas. Partial recovery may then occur.

The following aspects of firearms safety should be borne in mind:

- A .22 calibre rifle or .31 calibre humane killer pistol is adequate for humane destruction of Fallow deer.
- Any use of firearms is potentially hazardous.
- Persons other than the marksman and a handler should be cleared from the area or should stand well behind the marksman.
- Never fire while the animal is moving its head; wait for a quiet interval before firing.
- To provide maximum impact and the least possibility of misdirection, the range should be as short as circumstances permit.
- Whilst the humane killer pistol and captive-bolt stunner are designed to be pressed firmly on the head before being discharged, it is not desirable to do this with a standard rifle or pistol.

The **captive-bolt stunner** is safer since a blank cartridge is used. The operator does not have to be a marksman as the instrument's muzzle is firmly pressed against the animal’s skull before firing. It must, however, be assumed that the animal has only been stunned and a follow-up method of ensuring death, such as bleeding out, is required.

Blank cartridges for the captive-bolt stunner are colour-codes according to the amount of charge they contain. The manufacturer's directions should be followed on the most appropriate blank cartridge for cattle. Regular maintenance of the captive-bolt stunner is essential for efficient stunning.

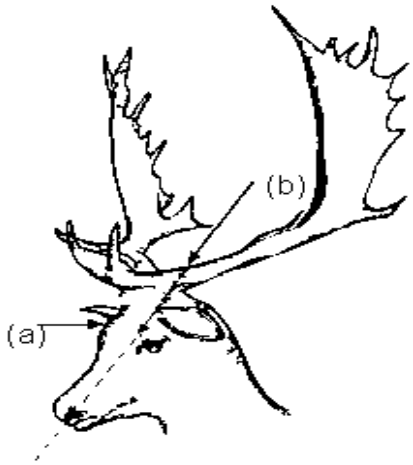
Two types of captive-bolt stunner are available. The concussion stunner has a wide mushroom-shaped head which delivers a knock-out blow to the skull. Thep enetrating stunner has a narrow bolt which is driven a short distance into the brain.

The penetrating type of captive-bolt stunner is recommended, since it is more reliable at delivering an

effective stun. The concussion stunner (non-penetrating) is not recommended.

### 9.2 Recommended Method

**Figure 1: Recommended positions and direction of fire for captivebolt pistol or firearm - deer.**
**(a) Frontal method**
**(b) Poll method**




**Frontal method:** A firearm or captive-bolt pistol should be directed at the forehead where lines taken from the base of each ear to the opposite eye intersect. A firearm should be fired horizontally into the forehead.

**Poll method:** (Firearm only) If the deer are disturbed when approached from the front, an equally effective method is to fire the instrument through the skull just behind the base of the antlers. The firearm should be aimed in line with the animal's muzzle.