



INHFA SUBMISSION ON DEER CONTROL MANAGEMENT

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INHFA Submission on deer control management in Ireland

The wild deer population in this Country has increased at such a rate that where once these animals were only to be found in our more remote upland areas, now they are now present in most counties.

The prevalence of deer leads to many problems both the farming community and the public. For many years, the farmers in the traditional areas with high deer population have faced many challenges such as; the damage caused to fencing and the consumption of grass needed for farm animals by deer.

Farmers also feel that a main source of the bovine TB infection comes from infected deer accessing their farms. As the deer population spreads, these problems are now being encountered by farmers in many other areas. The proliferation of deer also leads to damage to gardens and too many road accidents and as these are wild animals all costs for any damage caused by them must be borne by the individual whose property has been damaged.

In areas such as Wicklow, the planting of forestry on the hills during the last Century resulted in the deer being forced from their natural grazing ground and having to migrate to the farmlands at the foothills to find food. The forestry surrounding these farms provided cover for them during the day and allowed them to graze the farmland at night. However, as time passed these wild animals have become more accustomed to being near humans and will graze farmland along with the farm stock during the day. As their numbers increase, they are having to move further inland to seek food. The better nutrition available to these animals has resulted in less fawn mortality and therefore has added to the growth in the population. In countries where there are natural predators the strongest animals survive and this leads to healthier populations of wildlife. As there are no predators of deer in this Country the population of wild deer has been allowed to grow.

In other Countries various sources of wildlife have been identified as the root cause of the spread of TB to bovines e.g., France Badgers, Wild Boar and Wild Deer, Spain Wild Boar and Deer, and in the USA White-tailed deer in Michigan.



I would refer you to an article in the Irish Veterinary Journal by Simon J. Moore (link 1 below) in which the author highlights the findings in these countries regarding the role of deer in the spread of Bovine TB. This article also states that the present policy of Vaccination of Badgers alone will not result in the Eradication of TB by 2030 was committed to by the Irish Government in 2019. I would also refer you to a study funded by the DAFM and conducted on its behalf by Dr. David Kelly, Enda Mullen, and Margaret Good (link 2 below) this article highlights the link between deer in Wicklow and the high instances of Bovine TB.

Under the Wildlife Act 1976, the NPWS is responsible for the management of the deer population in Irelands National Parks. This Act also states that Landowners are responsible for control of wild deer on their private property. However, in practice, this does not seem to work. Therefore, when deer are outside the National Park area the NPWS would appear to no longer be responsible for their management. The damage to the fencing in the Glenveagh National Park in Donegal has resulted in a spread of deer throughout that County. For a farmer wishing to control wild deer encroaching on their land, they must avail of the services of a licensed deer hunter, however, during the hunting season there are constraints on the numbers and types of deer that can be culled a various times of the season. Outside the deer hunting season, the farmer must apply for a section 42 license which can be hard to obtain and again comes with constraints.

We would like to suggest that a proper deer management programme be implemented. This would involve using the services of experienced gamekeepers to manage the deer population. At present any deer being hunted are only for domestic use and these numbers have little or no impact on the overall population. In all properly managed deer herds necessary culling is carried out at the appropriate times of the year and we would suggest that there is no need for the product of this cull to go to waste if properly managed the meat from this cull could be used to help feed those in need.

Climate change poses many challenges for all the citizens of this Country. Our bovine herd comes under much scrutiny regarding methane emissions. We would like to quote from the January 2022 Report by Scottish Environment Link.



"As well as damaging emerging woodland and peatland, Scottish red deer produce 5,500 tonnes of methane each year this is the equivalent of 137,500 tonnes of CO₂". No similar study appears to have been carried out here, but I would assume that if done so it would produce the same result. A reduction in our deer herd would have an impact on our carbon emissions.

There have been many discussions over the years about this problem however no meaningful action has been taken to provide a solution. The INHFA would like to suggest the following:

An umbrella body be set up to take full responsibility for the management of deer in this Country. This would encompass all State and Semi-State bodies that have responsibility for land on which deer are present. Farming and community interests should also have representation on this body.

Suitably qualified gamekeepers be employed to manage the deer population.

Culling to be carried out each year at appropriate times.

Suitable State land be set aside as deer sanctuaries. This land should provide a good habitat and sufficient food for the deer living there and be properly fenced to keep the deer in and these fences to be properly maintained at all times.

Finally, for your information:

In October 2022, the INHFA requested membership to the Irish Deer Forum. To date, we have had no response. As we are a national farming organisation representing thousands of farmers, we deem it necessary to represent our membership on this subject matter.



References:

1. Irish Veterinary Journal 72 Article 3 (2019)
<https://www.veterinaryirelandjournal.com> (Accessed, February 9, 2023)
2. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fvets.2021.632525> (Accessed, February 9, 2023)
3. <https://www.scotlink.org/publication/link-annual-report-2022-summary> (Accessed, February 9, 2023)