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## STUDY TRACKS DEER IMPACT ON PEST PLANTS

**By Fidelis Rego**  
**ABC Website**

Early findings from a project at a dam on southern Queensland's Darling Downs suggest feral deer may be helping reduce pest plants.

University of Queensland researchers are conducting a wide-ranging study of red deer at Cressbrook Dam near Toowoomba. Tracking collars have been placed on 24 deer in the past year.

Associate Professor Peter Murray says they are trying to find out how far the animals travel and what they eat. "We know for example that deer eat prickly pear because we've seen deer teeth marks in prickly pear that could not be eaten by kangaroos," Professor Murray said.

"Now the question is how much of that eating is actually important in reducing the impact of prickly pear and equally lantana. We've seen deer eating lantana."

The researchers say wetter than average conditions last summer have changed deer habits. Heavy rain filled the dam to capacity from a low of 8 per cent last year.

Professor Murray says a vast area of grazing for the deer has now disappeared under water. "They are now having to do more browsing and move back into the forest," he said.

"That has obviously had ramification for kangaroos as well. All of these questions we really don't have answers for at this point of time, so that's why the research needs to continue."

The study is being funded by the State Government and the Toowoomba Regional Council.