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## **DIAA SOUTH AUSTRALIAN BRANCH ANNUAL REPORT 2011**

### **Deer Industry Association of Australia Annual Reports**

The decline in both the South Australian deer herd and the number of deer farmers appears to be leveling out after several years of serious reduction. This is due mainly to the stability of the venison demand and the continuing efforts of our venison wholesalers, operating in a highly competitive retail and hospitality trade. Their expansion is now being limited by the lack of product supply – not consumer demand. This had been predicted and forewarned of for the last few years, considering the major breeder herd reduction and farmer exit that has recently occurred due to prolonged drought, low product values, profitability and ageing farmers.

The venison wholesalers have been quietly and steadily raising grower returns through efficiencies of production and distribution, but they are now lacking the critical mass of product to get the economies of scale that their New Zealand competitors enjoy. The building of grower confidence and therefore breeding herds will be a slow process. I cannot see very many new farmers entering the industry but I would urge those existing farmers who have the infrastructure and space available to increase their herds to do so to improve economies of scale and increase productivity to help satisfy product demand. At present the wholesalers are not actively pursuing new outlets and enquiries. They are only servicing their existing stable markets due to lack of product supply. This is not helping future industry growth.

The majority of South Australian velvet this season was coordinated through Adelaide and Western Victoria, graded on site by a visiting New Zealand buyer and purchased at \$70-75/kg all grades. Everyone was happy and we are looking forward to refining the process next season. Approximately 3 1/2 ton was traded.

The South Australian Government Primary Industries attempt to introduce a "Biosecurity Fee" in addition to the P.I.C. fee has so far failed. This has been totally rejected by all livestock industry advisory groups. Hopefully we can continue to prevent the introduction of this 'double dipping' fee.

The next major threat emerging for national agriculture is the mining boom spreading into productive closer settled agricultural country. The dewatering of major underground basins, contamination of groundwater systems, acquisition and destruction of large tracts of productive farming and grazing country, as well as heritage native vegetation, is occurring throughout the 'inside' country of South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland. Add to this foreign ownership of ports and food producing land, a labour drain from the rural workforces and towns, an imported workforce and the mental and social stresses and uncertainties that exploration and mining is creating throughout rural Australia and we really do have some problems that someone (governments?) must address!

If government regulators and watchdog departments sit on their hands, it will not be hard to imagine how the mining "free for all" will continue unchecked for the near future.

It will be up to grassroots farmers and groups to apply pressure, stand their ground and pull up the explorers and miners and make the regulators apply and enforce the rules. If necessary, make the regulators change the rules to protect our farming country and the right to farm.

Regarding grassroots farmers and their organisation, is the DIAA effective and doing its job? If not, it's up to producers to speak up and come forward with constructive criticism and ideas to improve the process. It's no good just grizzling in the background of the deer yards. If we don't know where it's broke, we can't fix it.

I thank Jacquie and Daryl Schulz for their secretarial/treasury backup and assistance through the year and wish all members well through the coming season.

Keep on deer farming, increase if you can and see if you get someone else interested. May be that new landowner of the nearby ex deer farm would be interested in running some for you or maybe having a go themselves with your help! There is now a demand for the product and you do get paid.

**Milton Stevens**  
**President DIAA SA Branch**