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PRICING OF TROPHY DEER

By Steve Lamplough

I have recently returned from a deer farming tour of New Zealand. As you may be aware the trophy side of the industry is unbelievable over there. It is certainly what has kept their live sales on a high over the last few years. I would like to see our industry try to further develop this sector of deer farming. I believe we should be able to use the trophy side of the industry to leverage the live sale price of our stock which should help kick start all sectors of deer farming. If you don't think this is possible, just jump on a plane and see for yourself what is happening in NZ.

I tried hard to get my head around the prices, but just could not believe them!! The prices are based on Safari Club International (SCI) scores. The New Zealand farmers all talk in SCI values and you should be studying up on this if you do not know how it works. I personally intend to do a SCI master scorers course at some stage in the future. The following is a guide of the SCI scores and their current prices for a red stage in NZ\$:

- SCI 330 to 349 is selling for \$1,500 to \$2,500 (this is only a reasonable red stag, but known as a "Gold" scoring stag)
- SCI 350 – 379 are going for up to \$4,000
- SCI 380 – 399 are going for up to \$6,000
- SCI 400 – 500 ("Platinum Gold") it is possible to get \$10,000 up to \$20,000 plus
- Elite stags over SCI 500 can pretty much name their own price. Some elite world record SCI scoring stags have gone for well over NZ\$100,000!!!

These prices are what the farmer is getting. The top end stags are sometimes sold on consignment or some other deal, but the other stags are purchased from the farmer at these prices. As a rule of thumb the outfitter will double this price and convert it dollar to dollar to US currency, to obtain his hunting price of the stag. You must remember the hunting outfitter has a lot of expenses. This includes advertising, promotional material, trade stands, travel and accommodation while attending international trade shows in order to attract clients. This is without taking into account the hunting block, guides and accommodation facilities for clients.

Farm prices for fallow bucks in NZ are \$1,000 to \$3,000 depending on the SCI score. Elk start at about \$4,000 for SCI 320 and go up to \$12,000 for SCI 420. Again they negotiate a price if they are over SCI 420.

Most farmers put the deer through the crush and measure SCI scores of the deer to confirm sale prices. It is important to hold the deer head to one side of the crush when opening it. This ensures that the antlers are not damaged if he pulls down his head. Many farmers have converted yards to allow for the bigger heads. Some farms will sell a mob at a negotiated price and the buyer will take the good with the not so good.

Are you starting to ask yourself why we don't receive prices anywhere near this? I know I am!!!!

Why can't we at least get somewhere near these prices in Australia????? After all, a lot of the hunting outfitters here in Australia are competing for the same customer markets as the New Zealanders. These customers are predominantly Americans, Europeans and yes, Australians!

The other side of the story is we may have some hunting outfitters here in Australia who appear to be price cutting. They tend to have a short term view and take any opportunity to make a quick dollar.

I was baled up at the NZ velvet competition and had an in-depth conversation with a big time NZ trophy farmer/outfitter. He has major concerns about the very low prices Australian farmers and outfitters are selling quality deer for. He believes this is impacting on his business and could threaten the long term future of the trophy industry, especially if we continue to sell superior animals for "cut throat prices". His words to me were: "You have been using all our good genetics over in Australia and are now selling animals for a few hundred dollars, then your outfitter undercuts our safari prices and tries to win customers on price. Are you trying to ruin our trophy industry?"

After having seen, first hand, this "cut throat pricing" practice in the Australian venison industry and, as a consequence, the live sales almost being wiped out, I can see where he is coming from!!

I told him, with the way the industry has been over here for the last few years, \$500 \$600 for a very good animal has been a fantastic price and any farmer would probably jump at it. I also told him that I have no intention of selling stock at these prices. I would like to see the prices here in Australia equivalent to those obtained in New Zealand.

So how are we going to get prices like this? I believe what we need to do is to base trophy stag sales on a price structure similar to the SCI scoring used in NZ and indeed around the world.

Recently, there has been a lot of interest around for trophy animals in Australia. With the reduction in deer farmer numbers, I believe we have a fantastic opportunity to establish a trophy stag market based on SCI scoring, especially now that the velvet prices are also looking very good. Instead of being price-takers we need to be price-makers. Outfitters need our deer to make their businesses work. They will pay the price for quality animals. I believe, there are only a relatively small number of farms that can consistently supply quality deer. If these deer were sold to trophy outfitters based on SCI scores like those in NZ, it would ensure farmers receive good, reliable and consistent prices based on the trophy value of the animal.

The good prices in NZ are strongly linked to credible, professionally-run game outfitters and safari park operations. These operators are usually members of the NZ Association of Game Estates. This organization is committed to establishing standards in all aspects of safari park operations and hunting protocols. In Australia, we don't have any such organisation. Maybe we need to concentrate on supplying our deer to the better outfitters and encourage them to establish a similar organization in Australia.

Two other important points we need to consider is the hunting industry is not infinite and requires considerable attention to detail. From a farmer's perspective, breeding deer with good scoring trophy heads does not require a commitment to breeding and management of hard antler production. Not all good velveters will turn out to be good trophy animals. If a farmer selects certain traits that may be desired in hunting, it could be to the detriment of producing good quality, stylish velvet. However, if you are very selective in your breeding and select the traits you desire, it is possible to produce quality dual purpose trophy/velvet stags.

The SCI scoring structure used in NZ seems to work well for them and if we start using it here we should have a level playing field. If you think about it, we have used a grading and sales structure similar to NZ for our velvet, so it would be fair to assume that similar comparisons could be made when marketing trophy antlers. We could set up a hard antler system on the "Douglas score" or the European CIC scoring system. However, it will depend on the market your safari outfitter is aiming at and the requirements of their clients. For simplicity, I believe that we should follow NZ and use the SCI system. If you have a niche market in another scoring system which suits the type of antler you breed, you should then try to set a similar price range for the market you are aiming at.

If you take the price examples I have given above and allow for the difference in the dollar, a bit more for the distance the Australian outfitter has to move deer and even allow a little so they can retain a competitive pricing edge, I believe Australian farmers should be asking the following price range (\$) for trophy animals:

Red Stags

Up to SCI 329	\$1,000 - \$1,300
SCI 330-349	\$1,300 - \$2,000
SCI 350-379	\$2,000 - \$3,500
SCI 380-399	\$3,500 - \$5,000
SCI 400-479	\$5,000 - \$15,000
SCI 480-499	\$15,000 - \$20,000
Over SCI 500	negotiate

Red Bulls

Up to SCI 349	\$3,000 - \$4,000
SCI 350-399	\$4,000 - \$6,000
SCI 400-419	\$6,000 - \$10,000
Over SCI 420	negotiate

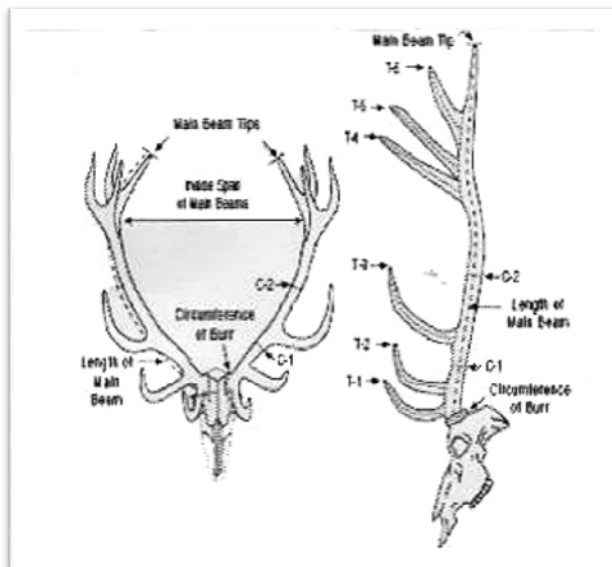
Fallow Bucks

Up to SCI 219	\$500 - \$1,000
Over SCI 220	\$1,000 - \$2,000 +

If you ask for these prices and stick to them, your hunting outfitter may go away. If they cannot get them anywhere else for less, they will return to you and pay the going rate!!

Yes these prices are possible in Australia. I have run them past some Australian hunting outfitters and they believe that these prices are in the ballpark. If you can produce animals that score in this range they would look at purchasing them.

The following are Safari Club International (SCI) grading sheets for Red Deer, Typical Elk, Non-Typical Elk and Fallow Deer. Measurements are taken in inches at the various points indicated for each species. The total of these measurements gives you the SCI score. These scoring sheets have been reproduced with the kind permission of Mr. Doug Luger, Trophy Records and World Hunting Awards Manager at SCI. See the SCI website if you require further information: <http://www.safariclub.org>



SCI Red Deer Scoring Method

The diagram left outlines the steps required to measure a Red deer head. All measurements are done in inches to an accuracy of one-eighth of an inch. All points under this system are to be taken into account for Red deer and related deer, which include Bukharan deer, Yarkand deer, Hangul, Tibetan deer, Shou, McNeil deer and Gansu deer. In these deer all tines will count in the score regardless of whether they are typical or non-typical.

Other information is required on the Entry Form and for further information please go to the SCI website and follow the links <http://www.safariclub.org/TrophyRecords/MeasuringForms/Method20.pdf> It may also be useful to check out the rest of the site if you are interested in finding out more about the SCI.

SCI POINTS TALLY

I. Length of Main Beam L _____/8 R _____/8

II. Length of Typical Tines on Lower Main Beam
 T-1 L _____/8 R _____/8
 T-2 L _____/8 R _____/8
 T-3 L _____/8 R _____/8

III. Length of Non-Typical Tines on Lower Main Beam, if any
 NT-1 L _____/8 R _____/8
 NT-2 L _____/8 R _____/8
(Use back of form for additional tines)

IV. Length of All Other Tines
(Use back of form for additional tines)
 T-4 L _____/8 R _____/8
 T-5 L _____/8 R _____/8
 T-6 L _____/8 R _____/8
 T-7 L _____/8 R _____/8
 T-8 L _____/8 R _____/8
 T-9 L _____/8 R _____/8
 T-10 L _____/8 R _____/8
 T-11 L _____/8 R _____/8
 Subtotal L _____/8 R _____/8

V. Circumference of Burr L _____/8 R _____/8

VI. Circumference of Main Beam
 C-1 L _____/8 R _____/8
 C-2 L _____/8 R _____/8
 Subtotal L _____/8 R _____/8

VII. Inside Span of Main Beams _____/8

VIII. Total Score _____/8

Supplemental Information

Total Number of Points L _____ R _____
(All tines plus beam tip)