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## **DISCUSSION PAPER ON GUIDELINES FOR ENCLOSED PRIVATE GAME RESERVES IN NSW**

**By Andy Cowan**

Recently, Bob McComb, of Dongdale Deer Park and Stud, put forward a discussion paper aiming to highlight the requirements of establishing private game reserves in New South Wales. As it is currently illegal to hunt animals in confined areas in NSW, Bob is trying to include all potential stakeholders in the project and is wanting feed-back from hunters (professional, meat and trophy), hunting guides, deer farmers, landholders and hunting organizations – including recreational, professional and cultural groups. The complete document can be found on the web by googling “Dongdale Deer Park” in Australia and Bob can be contacted on 0428 601 592.

Mr McComb is hoping to establish a Professional Hunting Association which is pivotal to the project’s long term success. This hunting association will aim to maintain the highest ethics in regards to animal welfare and in maintaining fair chase conditions. The Regulatory Authorities approached so far include the Department of Primary Industries, The Game Council, National Parks and Wildlife Service, Department of Environment and Climate Change, Rural Lands Protection Board, RSPCA, the AWAC and the Australian Veterinary Association.

There are two levels of responsibility involved with the project. First, the overall industry Code of Practice and secondly, the individual reserve requirements. The industry Code of Practice may include recommendations for minimum size or reserves, fencing, habitat management objectives, accurate record keeping, stock management, infrastructure and accommodation requirements. If animals are to be transported to the reserve from existing deer farms, there will have to be quarantine facilities depending on the health status of the area that the stock came from. All State Laws pertaining to the National Livestock Identification Scheme will need to be adhered to.

There will be many requirements for individual reserve operators to adhere to if the project is to go ahead. Management of enclosed Private Game Reserves cannot exist without good monitoring. The better the monitoring, the better the management and the better the reserve will be. Every 3 months the Game manager will be required to take an index of abundance on both the game animals and the habitat. This may include photographs. The management of the actual hunters is critical. There will be no unguided hunting in private game reserves. The professional hunter is to be in-control of the client and is responsible for ensuring that hunting is undertaken ethically, humanely and under fair chase conditions. The Game Manager must be able to provide the Owner and Professional Hunter with projected harvest quotas several years in advance. The Landowner, the Game Manager and the Professional Hunter may well be the same individual.

So why should we, as deer farmers, be involved? Hunting wild animals will always be a divisive issue throughout a society generally. If such an industry can be regulated and seen to be responsible for every action of its members, this has to be a good thing. Some of us are already involved in other State’s game reserves and we supply older stags to them. If you take time to appreciate how much money goes through New Zealand Game Parks, there does seem to be potential for another outlet for deer farmers here in Australia. Apart from selling our stock to such businesses, we may also be able to sell our expertise. What interested me most when talking to Mr McComb was that he is somewhat of a purist when it comes to deer antler. He is more interested in the Douglas method of scoring heads, simple and uniform, rather than the more complicated SCI system. Give him a call.