

Deer Control Program 2023-2024 Report



Victorian Deer Control Program

Working together to minimise the impact of deer in Victoria

In Victoria, deer are impacting our state's biodiversity, water quality, public safety, agriculture, and Aboriginal cultural heritage.

The [Victorian Deer Control Program](#) aims to minimise the impact of deer in Victoria. We are working with and supporting key stakeholders to help undertake an integrated deer control program.

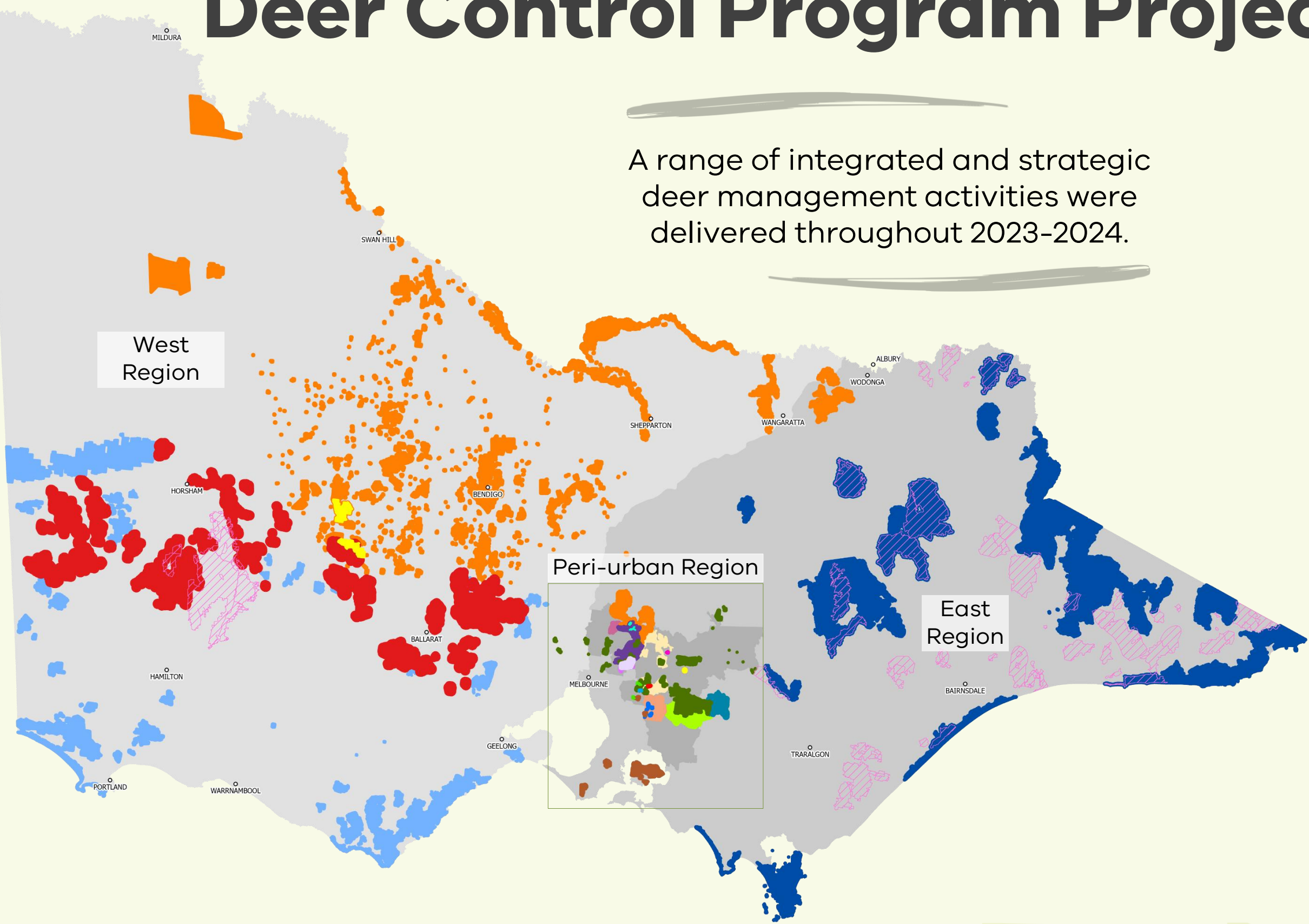
The Deer Control Program delivers the Victorian Deer Control Strategy and 3 regional deer control plans.
















The Strategy was released in 2020 as the first step toward providing a clear and coordinated approach to deer control in Victoria.



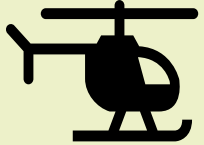





Deer Control Program Projects 2023-2024

A range of integrated and strategic deer management activities were delivered throughout 2023-2024.



			Managing emerging populations and biodiversity hotspots
			Dit Dit Djina (hard-hooved animals) Management Program
			Grampians Region Deer Management Program
			Western Victoria Deer Control Program
			East Region Deer Control Program
			Protecting Biodiversity Deer Control Projects

Activity legend:

					
Aerial Control	Ground Control	Fencing OFFICIAL	Engagement Events	Research	Monitoring

Deer Project Activities 2023-2024

Whipstick Westringia (*Westringia crassifolia*)
Credit: Viridans Biological Database



Volunteers at Barmah NP
Credit: Parks Victoria

Phantom Wattle, Burrowa Pine NP
(*Acacia phasmoides*)
Credit: Alan Gibb



Deer Control Program

- Aerial Shoot
- Ground Shoot
- Assessment
- ▲ Research / Monitoring
- ⊕ Education / Events
- ∩ Fencing

Protecting Biodiversity Program

- Aerial Shoot
- Ground Shoot



Dunes and waterways of Croajinolong NP
Credit: Parks Victoria



Mellblom's Spider-orchid
(*Caladenia hastata*)
Credit: Andrew Pritchard



Otway Black Snail (*Victaphanta compacta*)
Credit: Trust For Nature



Eastern Ground Parrot
(*Pezoporus wallicus*)
Source: Wikimedia Commons
Credit: PotMart186



Alpine Tree Frog
(*Litoria verreauxii alpina*)
Credit: David Paul

Integrated strategic deer management activities delivered through the Deer Control Program and Protecting Biodiversity are protecting our precious habitats and wildlife.

Deer Control Program 2023-2024 Achievements



\$2.744 million co-investment from project partners, other agencies and grants from State and Commonwealth Governments



20 on-ground project delivery partners *plus* accredited volunteer shooters from Australian Deer Association and Sporting Shooters' Association of Australia



20 staff and contractors employed and *contributing over 12,000* hours of project management and on-ground delivery



210 volunteers involved and *contributing 2,695* hours of monitoring, engagement, education and project facilitation



Focus on knowledge-building, with large-scale thermal camera and drone surveys and sharing knowledge with staff and community.

26 Statewide Projects* , **9** peri-urban community projects, and **2** Traditional Owner led projects

400,000 hectares of aerial and **428,000** hectares of ground control of deer

76,826 hectares of thermal drone and camera deer monitoring

Over 30 Community engagement events with over **700** attendees



* Merged into 13 key landscape-scale projects in 2024

Partnering and engaging with Traditional Owners

13 Traditional Owner Groups engaged in deer control projects

DJAARA (Dja Dja Wurrung Clans Aboriginal Corporation)

Dit-Dit Djina Management Project

This exciting project included the first ground shooting program to be fully coordinated and delivered on Country by Traditional Owners.

Djandak staff and community also partnered with ARI to learn and implement deer monitoring techniques to estimate populations of deer and other hard-hooved animals.

The project was located in the Pyrenees State Forest and Kara Kara National Park.

Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation

Protecting Nunganala Cultural and Ecological Values from Deer

This Peri-urban Community Deer project in Healesville constructed and repaired deer fencing surrounding the group's bushland property and installed monitoring cameras to assist with the protection of cultural and ecological values by identifying locations of deer incursions.

All projects funded through the Deer Control Program must engage with Traditional Owners in the development of on-ground and research projects. This enables groups to incorporate cultural knowledge and practice into our western approaches to environmental management.



Deer Fencing at Nunganala

Credit: Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation

Partnering and engaging with traditional owners

Gunditj Mirring Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (GMTOC)

Budj Bim Invasive Herbivore Control Project

A partnership which began following the 2019 bushfires sees DEECA and Parks Victoria working collaboratively with local traditional owners to protect a culturally significant landscape in Western Victoria.

Ongoing ground and aerial control of deer across the Budj Bim Cultural Landscape - both the National Park and the Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs) – aims to protect the regenerating Manna Gums, which provide critical habitat for koalas.



















GMTOC worked with the Arthur Rylah Institute for Environmental Research (ARI) to monitor the effects of removing large herbivores on the recovery of the trees.

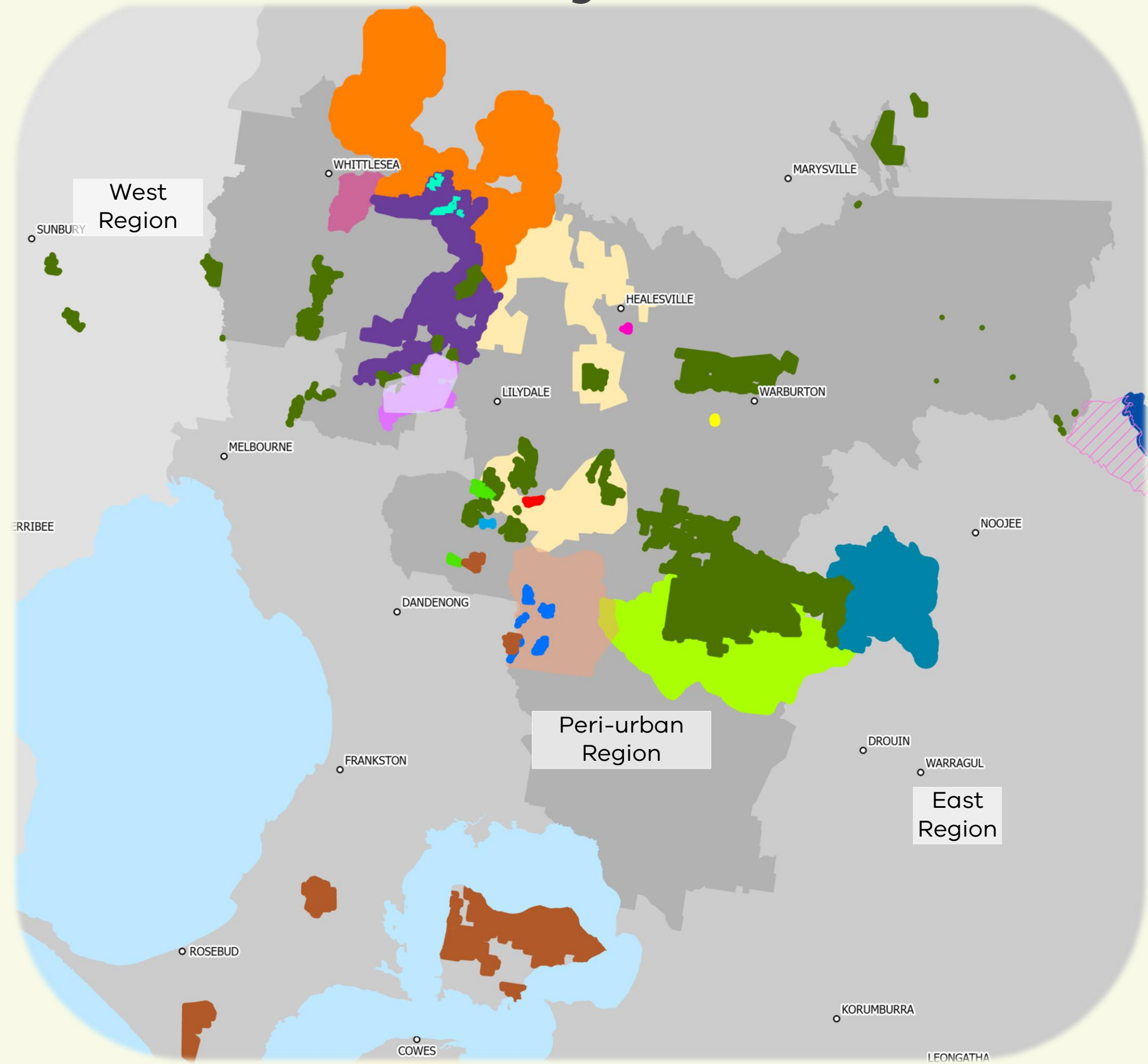



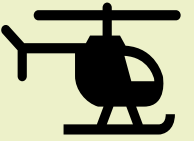





ARI Manna Gum surveys in Budj Bim National Park and IPAs
Credit: DEECA Barwon South West

Damaged sapling.
Credit: M Hanslow

Peri-urban Projects 2023-2024

- 
Managing emerging populations and biodiversity hotspots
- 
Yan Yean Deer Control
- 
Strathewen Community Deer Control Program
- 
Nillumbik Deer Control
- 
Deer Neighbour – Building community capacity in Yarra Ranges
- 
Protecting Nunganala Cultural and Ecological Values From Deer
- 
Outsmart Deer and Reduce Their Impact on the Environment
- 
Protecting Manningham’s biodiversity values through strategic deer control
- 
ECOSS Deer Fence
- 
Deer Control in Emerald Creek Properties
- 
Deer Control in Upwey Corridor
- 
Knox Deer Control
- 
Cardinia Creek Deer Partnership Project
- 
Cardinia Creek Catchment Community Outreach and Deer Control Program
- 
Melbourne Region Deer Control Program
- 
Central Highlands Eden – Tarago Catchment Deer Management
- 
Cannibal Creek Catchment Community Deer Awareness Project
- 
Southern and Maritime Region Deer Control



- 
Ground Control
- 
Aerial Control
- 
Fencing
- 
Engagement Events
- 
Monitoring
- 
Research
- 
Protecting Biodiversity Deer Control Projects

Peri-urban Activities 2023-2024



Brush-tailed Phascogale (*Phascogale tapoatafa*)
Credit: Geoff Park



Matted Flax-lily (*Dianella amoena*)
Credit: Marilyn Bull



Plenty Gorge Park
Credit: Parks Victoria



Southern Brown Bandicoot (*Isodon obesulus obesulus*)
Credit: Peter Menkhorst



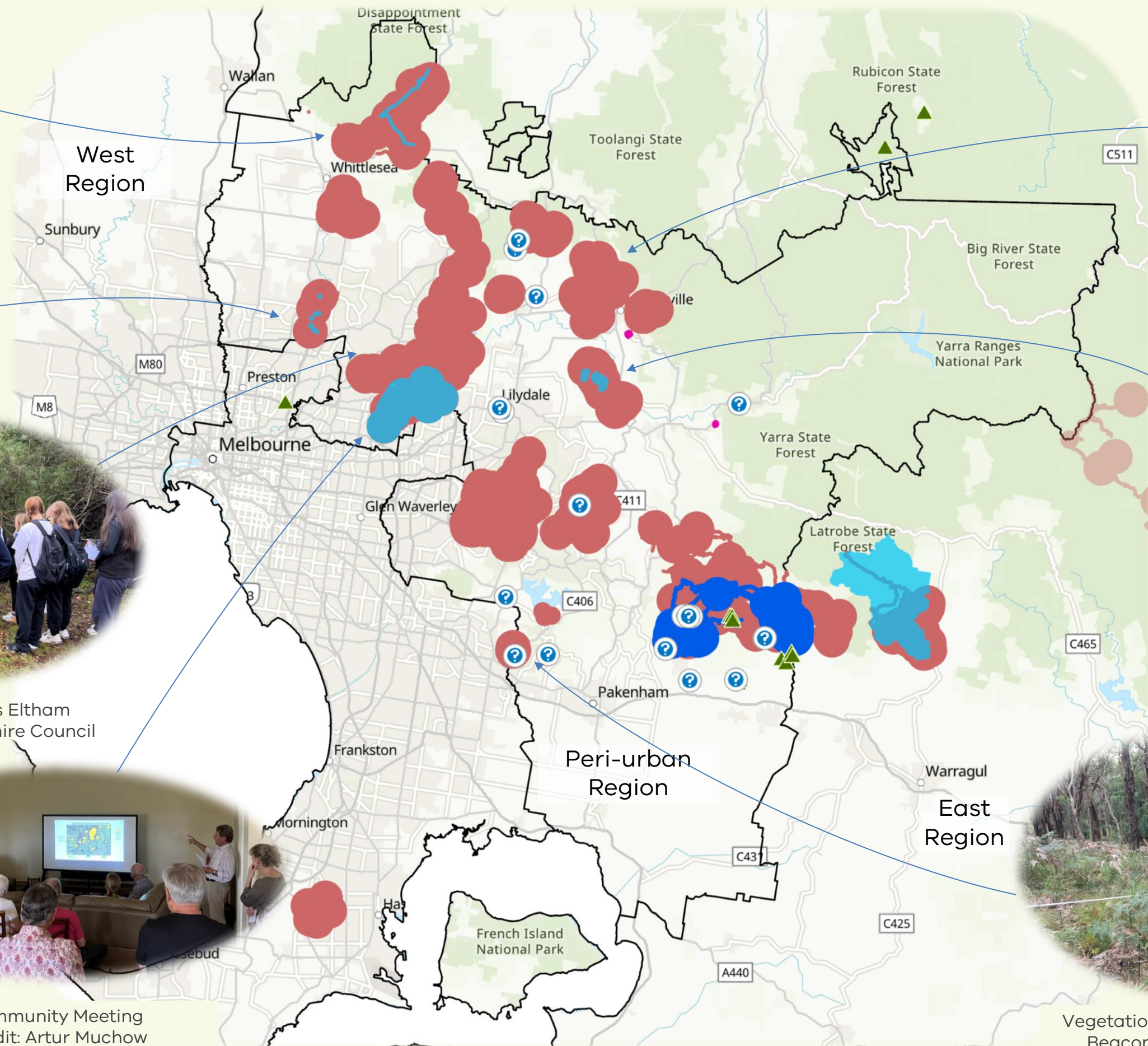
School field days Eltham
Credit: Nillumbik Shire Council



Community Meeting
Credit: Artur Muchow



Vegetation Impact Survey in Beaconsfield Reservoir
Credit: Cameron Rock CDMC



Deer Control Program

- Aerial Shoot
- Ground Shoot
- Assessment
- Research / Monitoring
- ? Education / Events
- Fencing

Protecting Biodiversity Program

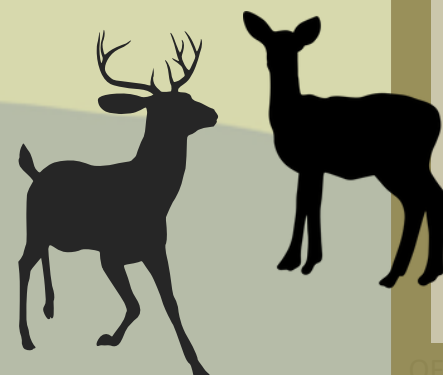
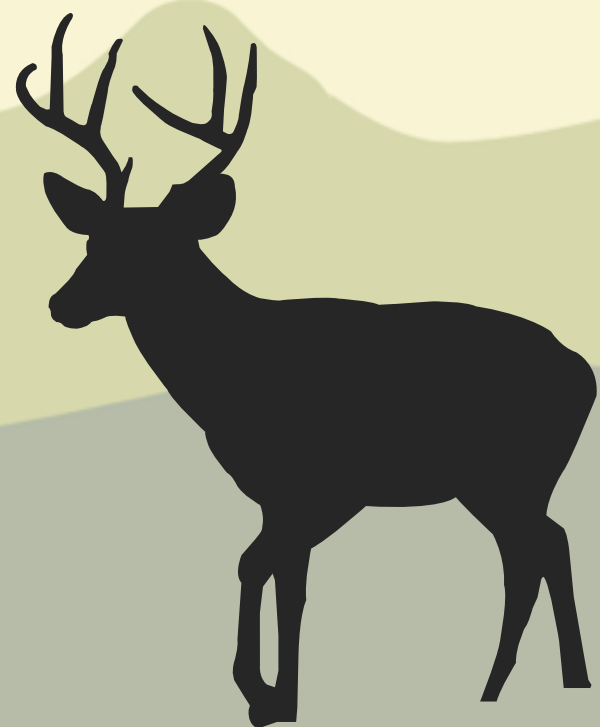
- Aerial Shoot
- Ground Shoot

Peri-urban Deer Control Plan Progress

Sambar deer in Alphington house
Credit: Alexander Hill



Fallow Deer
Credit: Knox City Council



Peri-urban deer control continues to be a critical activity to protect threatened species, agriculture, home gardens, aboriginal cultural values and drinking water supplies, as well as reducing deer-related road accidents.

Sambar, Fallow and Red Deer are well-established in Melbourne's peri-urban areas, and control can be more challenging for landholders, due to requirements for special permits to use firearms in built-up areas.

Control requires a well-coordinated approach across the landscape, ensuring involvement and participation of both private and public land managers.

Councils, Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water, DEECA, landholders and community groups such as Landcare have all actively been involved in delivery of both on-ground control and monitoring across 2023-24.

Anecdotal community and contractor reports and results from monitoring have noted improvements to vegetation recovery and reduced soil impacts in some locations, with some community reporting that they are seeing fewer deer.

Research by Melbourne Water has recorded a decrease in deer numbers in water catchment areas following sequential years of intensive ground control.

New incursions of deer have been identified through deer surveillance and monitoring activities, including deer sightings as well as vegetation and soil damage along the Yarra River in sensitive billabong areas. Planning to address these impacts is already underway.

Key Results 2023-2024: Peri-urban Area

Extensive on-ground shooting programs on private and public land removed **1,300 deer** across **182,000 hectares (156,400 hectares in priority areas)**, an increase from the 2022-23 results – 1,079 deer across 83,600 hectares.

Fallow deer have almost been eradicated from Plenty Gorge.

Ground control by accredited volunteers from Australian Deer Association and Sporting Shooters Association of Australia.

The first aerial control program was undertaken in 2024 in Bunyip State Park and Kurth Kiln Regional Park, removing **207 deer** over **10,800 hectares**, a much higher result than is typically delivered through on-ground control.

Melbourne Water have undertaken intensive control within fenced and open water catchments, with rigorous monitoring programs of deer populations and vegetation impacts, providing critical information on the impacts of deer on local vegetation.

Strategic deer control has been demonstrated to benefit revegetation projects. Yarra Ranges Council facilitated targeted deer control at a failing revegetation site adjoining Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve. Regular control efforts dispersed and reduced deer numbers, enabling successful establishment of the plantings.

A Peri-urban Community Deer Control grant program was delivered, with fencing, engagement and education and professional deer control undertaken. **21 engagement and training events** were attended by **394 people**.

Peri-urban Community Grants

\$250,000 for community grants was awarded to 9 community groups in Melbourne's peri-urban area in 2023-24, to build capacity & understanding of deer, impacts and management options.

Projects successfully delivered deer exclusion-fencing, citizen-science monitoring, community engagement, field days and webinars for education and on-ground control using professional controllers.

Funding also enabled purchase of trail cameras for deer surveillance and specialised equipment, including thermal monoculars and scopes, to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of community-based volunteer deer controllers.



Deer fencing interpretative signage. Credit: YV ECOS

Peri-urban Deer Control – A Success Story

Control zone boundary. Credit: Rhyl Shaw



Sambar Deer on the Plenty River

Credit: Anonymous



The Parklands - The Peri-urban Deer Control Plan lists Plenty Gorge Parklands as a priority area for deer control. Extending for 1,350 hectares along the Plenty River from Mernda to Bundoora, these parklands represent one of the largest areas of native vegetation remaining in northern Melbourne. The park supports several vulnerable or endangered native flora species as well as threatened EVCs, including Valley Grassy Forest and Escarpment shrubland.

The Problem - A resident Fallow deer population (the result of a private property release in the 1980's) had been gradually increasing, with more sightings reported more often. Sambar are also occasionally sighted. Government funding provided an opportunity to attempt to eradicate these deer populations, to prevent numbers increasing and causing damage to both vegetation and a public safety risk on surrounding busy roads.

Challenges to Overcome - A small 336-hectare section of the Parklands was initially chosen in which to undertake control. This section had the most deer sightings, offered safe shoot zones, and had 'only' 40 public access points to close. It also involved notifications to 'only' 300 adjoining neighbours (approximately). Additional challenges included the tightly-packed suburban housing surrounding much of the park boundaries, and the presence of a large resident kangaroo population.

Solutions for Success - Funding from both DEECA and Melbourne Water enabled the program to include a drone for security, to address safety concerns for visitors ignoring warning signage at control zone entrances. The drone could cover a 3km radius within 10 minutes, enabling controllers to immediately locate anyone entering the closed area.

Collaboration and co-operation with Manningham and Nillumbik Shire Councils enabled all adjoining neighbours to be notified of the control, whilst local Parks Victoria staff helped erect signage at every entrance for every shooting pulse (this process would take 4 hours).

A drone was also used for locating the deer and every deer removed was harvested for pet food or human consumption.

Results - 29 Fallow deer were removed in the first year of this program, but no Sambar were sighted. For the last 6 nights of the program only 2 Fallow were sighted and removed. The size of the control area was increased in the program's second year, and 6 Sambar were removed. Although 2 Fallow deer were sighted, they were not able to be targeted.

It has been an incredibly successful program, and Parks Victoria believe there may be only 2 Fallow deer remaining.

Future Opportunities - Further funding will enable continuation of a small number of control nights each year until confident that the Fallow population has been removed, and to keep a check on the Sambar moving in, to contain their numbers and spread.

East Victoria Deer Control Plan Progress



Boat operation set-up for Croajingolong NP and Gippsland Lakes deer control.
Credit: Parks Victoria

Deer control in the east of Victoria in 2023-24 was coordinated and delivered by both **Parks Victoria and DEECA** with funding under the Deer Control Program and the [Protecting Biodiversity Program](#).

Deer control in eastern Victoria takes an asset-based approach and is strongly focused on alpine and coastal regions to protect sensitive vegetation, including alpine bogs and peatlands, rainforest sites of significance (RFSOS) and coastal marshes.

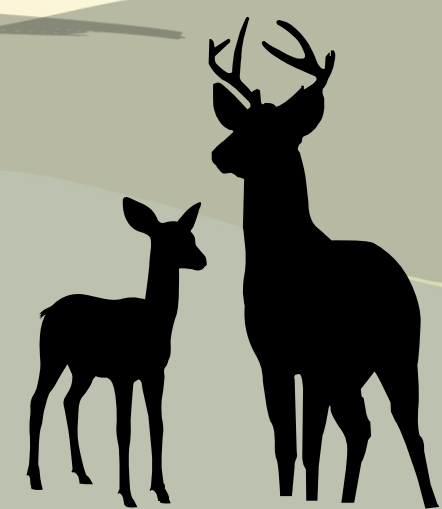
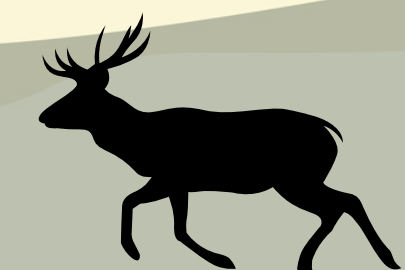
Remote operational areas and difficult terrain mean that harvesting is often not possible due to the logistics of removal and transport of the deer to a licensed meat processing facility. Commercial harvesting of deer is undertaken where it is feasible and cost-efficient.

106 aerial missions were flown across Wilsons Promontory, Alpine, Snowy River, Upper Murray, and Croajingolong National Parks. Aerial works were coordinated across tenure with DEECA's ground control program. Some areas in the Snowy River and Croajingolong National Parks and Gippsland Lakes were accessed by boat.

Ground control has been critical in Croajingolong National Park, with contractors treating Special Protection Zones and RFSOS which are unsuitable for aerial shooting due to canopy regrowth.



Community engagement event in Gippsland.
Credit: Parks Victoria



Key Results: East Victoria

Over **80,340 hectares** of ground control and nearly **595,000 hectares** of aerial control was successfully and safely delivered.

Parks Victoria continues to collect data to monitor the effectiveness and efficiency of delivery of aerial control operations, noting that aerial control is less effective in some forests recovering after the 2019 bushfires, with the vegetation too thick to see deer. These programs may need to switch to ground control operations.

More communities creating local deer action groups, with Landcare groups reaching out to DEECA, the **Victorian Deer Control Community Network**, and the **South Gippsland Landcare Network** for advice on delivering effective community-based control. e.g. Strathbogie's Plateau to Plains project, Mitchell Shire, in West Gippsland (La Trobe Catchment) and residents adjoining the Tallarook State Forest.

Monitoring of alpine bogs and peatlands has shown that these are beginning to recover, with deer wallows decreasing in size and use, thanks to ongoing deer control in the alpine areas.

Surveillance and monitoring programs have observed Hog deer outside their current range, including on Gabo Island.



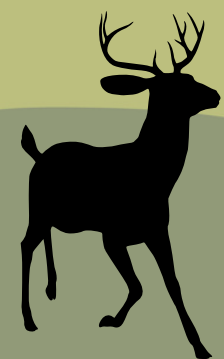
West Victoria Deer Control Plan Progress

Deer control west of the Hume Highway is quite different than in eastern Victoria where deer have been established in the landscape at higher densities for a long time. In west Victoria, there are opportunities for prevention and early intervention to eradicate small or isolated deer populations, and to prevent their spread to new areas. Despite this, there are some areas where deer have been present for some time, and a containment or asset-based approach is taken, targeting our sites with the highest biodiversity values.

Aerial control continues to be the most cost-effective control method over large areas. Control at Budj Bim National Park and surrounding Indigenous Protected Areas has been successful in reducing deer numbers and impacts, removing significant numbers of deer.

Community acceptance of deer control is improving, with engagement and education programs helping to build understanding of the potential risks of allowing deer populations to establish or expand into new areas.

The large project areas in the west and north of Victoria have provided flexibility for Parks Victoria and DEECA staff to respond quickly to new deer incursions, with Parks Victoria also building the capability and capacity of local staff to be able to undertake both monitoring and control programs.



Fallow deer incursion, southern goldfields. Credit: Parks Victoria



Deer in the Otways. Credit: Conservation Ecology Centre

Key Results: West Victoria

Over **254,000 hectares** of ground control and **5,333 hectares** of aerial control.

Engagement of a Yorta Yorta person as project officer for control in Barmah National Park, and opportunities for Yorta Yorta rangers to lead ground shooting in the area.

5 engagement and training events were attended by **215 attendees** – indicating a high degree of interest in deer issues and management options.

Deer have nearly been eradicated from Little Desert with a large-scale search effort by SSAA accredited volunteers removing 2 deer and sighting few others.

Red Deer near Lerderderg State Park.
Credit: Parks Victoria



Tree Rub, Barmah NP.
Credit: Parks Victoria





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Energy,
Environment
and Climate Action