

Executive Committee Report

Here in the hills of Taihape we are still waiting for spring to arrive. Wet soil conditions combined with cool cloudy days have meant feed levels are certainly not getting ahead of demand. With fine days at a premium, keeping ahead of the workload has certainly been a challenge.

While spring may be cooler for many, the discussions surrounding the velvet season ahead have been far from that. The recent grading changes and lack of pricing details attached at this stage has created some apprehension amongst farmers. Three NZDFA branches either have or are about to run velvet grading meetings to help ensure their farmers have the best information available to assist with timing of cutting to meet the new grading criteria. I want to thank the branches and the buyers who are supporting these events and working with farmers in their areas to better understand the changes for the season ahead. These are the take home messages we have at hand in an attempt to keep us all on the same page:

- There are no confirmed prices at this point.
- Recent grading changes are an attempt to reflect a preference from the market for early cut and rounded top velvet. This has been a growing trend over the past two to three seasons.

- The pricing differential between the new and existing grades is currently unknown.
- Stay informed and connected with your trusted buyers and other farmers. There are some buyers who thrive in an environment of early season price uncertainty. Don't let your bottom line be the casualty from a lack of up-to-date information.
- There has always been variation in buyer preferences. Ensure what you are producing is well aligned with what your buyer's requirements are this season.

We recently had our annual branch chairs meeting in Wellington. This year it was held on 17 & 18 September to reflect the feedback received of avoiding velvetting and school holidays. This resulted in excellent attendance to discuss the topical issues we face as deer farmers. While it did clash for some with pre-existing commitments, the success of the date change allows us to plan well in advance around those dates for next year.

The value of having all the NZDFA representatives together each year has never been higher given the changes and challenges we are facing. Connecting the grassroots messaging with all parts of our industry and beyond provides the necessary information for balanced and informed decisions to be made that have real world consequences for us deer farmers. Many of the topics discussed will be covered in other articles in this edition of

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Stagline and the next edition of Deer Industry News, so will not look to duplicate those discussions.

Finally, I want to wish you and your families well for the busy season ahead. Please stay informed and connected as we navigate the season ahead.

Mark McCoard

NZDFA Executive Committee Chair

Velvet Export Licensing – Status Update

By Damon Paling, DINZ Trade Strategy Manager

There's been plenty of healthy chatter about export licensing lately, so here's a quick update.

The Export Licensing Working Group is steadily advancing its evaluation. The clear goal is no new compliance costs or audits for farmers, and no costs sneaking back on farm.

Enforcement sits squarely at the point of export. That means your daily work on farm remains unchanged.

What's the upside? Export licensing can give us an edge in crowded markets. Take China, where consumers are spoilt for choice in the wellbeing aisle – velvet is just one of many options. To stand out, commercial buyers need real confidence in the systems and organisations behind our product before they're willing to invest in new product development, sales and marketing.

Export licensing aids in delivering that confidence. It provides an extra layer of assurance and transparency, showing overseas partners that our velvet is backed by solid systems and organisations. That makes it easier for them to commit, invest, and grow the category.

The benefits flow back home: more investment offshore builds out the demand curve, which can ultimately create stronger returns for farmers.

The principle is straightforward: the benefits of export licensing must outweigh the costs. Export licensing should strengthen our market position offshore, without adding any unnecessary red tape or hidden expenses at home.

It's still an ambitious goal to have export licensing "go live" for the 2026/27 season – but that's the target. For now, rest easy knowing the focus is on designing an effective system and strengthening assurance with our international customers.

Velvet Season Reminders – NVSB

The National Velveting Standards Body Newsletter went out last month. Some key reminders are:

Supervisory visits are to be completed and NVSB notified by 15 December. Remember that it is your responsibility to ensure that your supervisory visit is completed. Please contact your vet if a visit has not been arranged.

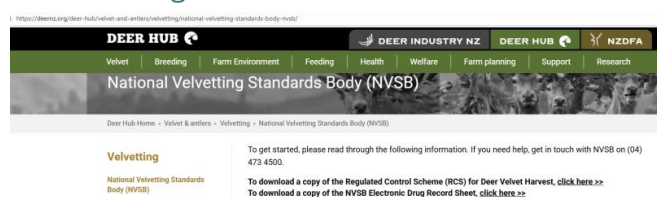
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Complete your velvet record book and return to your supervisory veterinarian by 31 March 2026. Local anaesthetic and Xylazine should also be returned by this date.

Electronic drug reconciliation can be done via the [following link >>](#)



Velvet seasonal declarations are valid for 180 days. [Click here for more information >>](#)
(Information for Farmers)

VSD flowchart: With seasonal declarations now in effect for the current season, DINZ has put together the attached flow diagram outlining the declaration and traceability process. [VSD traceability process diagram >>](#)
The main point of possible confusion comes in Step 4: VSD document generation. The traceability information component (Part 2) remains unchanged, while it is the farmer declaration (Part 1) that is affected by the shift to seasonal VSDs, valid for 180 days.

Branch Chairs – developments

The annual Branch Chairs meeting in Wellington was held on 17 & 18 September this year. It was reported in the [DINZ eNews on 25 September](#).

Although this was only three weeks ago, there have been some more developments since then.

TB Review

The NZDFA will be submitting on the TB Plan Review (it will be sent to OSPRI shortly after this issue of DFA Stagline has gone out). [The submission can be viewed here from next week >>](#) (go to the “Submissions” section). In short:

NZDFA generally supports the intent of the TB Plan Review proposal to eradicate TB in both livestock and possums by 2040.

For the plan to be successful:

Access to land for vector control is essential. The Biosecurity Act provisions should be used as required.

NZDFA is willing to assist in upskilling TB testers in working with farmed deer.

Improved and meaningful engagement with local TB Free Committees is required.

Suitable support and compensation for farmers within breakdown areas should be provided. Including a plan to quickly reduce the risk status from the farm.

Improved testing/detection regimes at both the herd and DSP levels are in place.

Transport QA Standards

After robust consultation and discussion, the 2025 Transport QA Standards have been confirmed and are now available on the [DINZ website >>](#)

The change to note is with regards to stags being trucked to slaughter (nothing to do with sires and trophy animals which are covered with a separate standard). The new standard reads as below:

4.8 Transport of Stags

4.8.1 Stags (3yrs +) MUST not be sent to slaughter after 14 February or before 14 July.

4.8.2 2yr stags may move to slaughter between 14 February to 1 March

4.8.3 Only stags under 2 years of age can be transported to DSPs during the roar.

Recommendation

With consideration to the date change above, allowance has been made for the 2026 year to allow stags (3yrs+) to move to slaughter up to and including 21 February 2026.

Note

Mixed age stags can show the effects of the roar through to button drop. The greatest care must be exercised when transporting this type of animal.

A deer's birth date is recognised as 1 December.

Large Antler

Three farmer meetings were held across New Zealand during July. Invitations were extended to trophy producers, outfitters and other parties considered to be involved with the farming/ management of large antlered stags. All three meetings brought together a good turnout of farmers and discussion was positive and informative. At the conclusion of each

meeting there was an overwhelming agreement to establish a working group and to look to develop a set of industry guidelines.

There was a clear message from each of the farmer meetings was that there needs to be greater awareness in this space and a need to ensure that there is not "overreach" in dictating to farmers about how they must farm. There was also agreement, in principle, that the format of this working group aligned with the development of the NVSB and that it made sense to work closely with this group and utilize their knowledge and learnings.

From the three farmer meetings expressions of interest were called for representatives to form a working group to represent farmers and industry. The group of 11 brought together a wealth of industry knowledge and experience. The working group met on 14 August and draft guidelines were created.

The large antler guidelines will be made available to farmers who grow large antlered stags. This is another tool to support NZ Deer farmers to be successful. The initiative of the NZ Deer Industry being proactive is also supported by MPI.

Velvet grading guidelines visual addendum

In response to a request raised at the September Branch Chairs meeting, this link provides a visual supplement to the recently released Addendum to the velvet grading guidelines for the 2025/26 season.

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[2025/26 Velvet grading guidelines Addendum –
visual supplement](#)

Wild Animal Management

DINZ is Helping Tackle Pest Pressure Across New Zealand

Deer Industry New Zealand (DINZ) is a member of the Wild Animals Management National Coordination Group, a high-level forum to bring together diverse interests to manage wild deer, goats, pigs, tahr, and chamois for control, use, and recreational hunting.

Who's Involved?

This group includes representatives from government agencies: Director-General of Conservation (via the Director responsible for wild animals), Ministry for Primary Industries, Land Information New Zealand (LINZ), New Zealand Conservation Authority, and the Game Animal Council. Also, Environmental NGOs, Industry groups, Science and research representatives: Manaaki Whenua – Landcare Research and NIWA – Earth Sciences NZ, the Hunting sector, Te Tiriti partners and a few Regional council representatives.

Update to workplans

Luka Jansen, representing DINZ, has attended quarterly meetings for the past two years. Recently, members of the group have been asked to submit feedback to DOC on the group's revised workplan and Terms of Reference. Luka notes "This group is incredibly valuable—it brings together the right people to tackle a complex issue. But we still lack a truly coordinated national strategy for pest control. Too many organisations are working in silos,

and that fragmentation is holding us back. If we want to protect both our environment and our agricultural sector, we must align our efforts and work together more effectively."

Also, DINZ's feedback emphasised the need for a greater focus on the risks wild animals pose to agriculture. A clearer reflection of the Crown's statutory responsibility to protect both the environment and the economy is needed within the group's terms of reference.

The next meeting will be held on Thursday in Wellington, where feedback on the workplan will be discussed.

DINZ's Broader Role in Pest Management

DINZ is also actively involved in the TB Plan Review Governance Group, which targets possum hotspots to eliminate TB in livestock—including deer—by 2040. The TB free programme, supported by a \$60 million annual budget (60% funded by farmer levies, including deer farmers, and 40% by the Crown), reflects the shared responsibility in biosecurity and disease management.

Current Nationwide Initiative

The 2025 National Wild Goat Hunting Competition is currently underway and runs until 26 November. Wild goats are a serious threat to both agriculture and conservation. This nationwide initiative, led by DOC and the NZDA, is a practical and rewarding way to reduce wild goat numbers.

With over \$70,000 in prizes up for grabs—including gear from Hunting & Fishing NZ,

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Bushnell, and NZ Hunter—there’s never been a better time to get involved.

About the Competition

There are multiple ways to participate:

Hunters: Submit wild goat tails or heads to enter prize draws.

Landowners: Register to be matched with vetted NZDA hunters and be in to win over \$3,200 in prizes.

Categories include: “Got Your Goat”, “Great Goat Round Up”, “G.O.A.T. (Greatest of All Time)” and Junior divisions. Visit

www.doc.govt.nz/wild-goat-hunting-competition for full entry details.

Participating in this competition is about protecting both farmland and the environment. By joining forces through initiatives like this and supporting coordinated pest control strategies, we can control pests more efficiently and effectively across New Zealand.

Feedback for DINZ

If you’re involved in a pest control initiative in your area, Luka would love to hear about it. She’s also happy to raise any local/regional issues deer farmers are facing at the upcoming group meeting next Thursday in Wellington.

Get in touch: luka.jansen@deernz.org

We’d love to see your photos too! Here’s one of Luka’s family—her father, two children, and husband—out on the weekend doing their bit for sustainable land management and pest

control, removing 53 wild animals from a farm in the central North Island.



Life Member Certificates

Shortly we’ll be sending out printed certificates to all national life members of the NZDFA. A small gesture of our appreciation for your service to the NZDFA.

Branch life members will also receive a similar certificate from your branch committee.



LIFE MEMBERSHIP
of the
New Zealand Deer Farmers' Association

is awarded to

<<RECIPIENT NAME>>

<<DFA branch>>

In recognition of their outstanding commitment
and service to the NZDFA and to the wider NZ
deer farming industry.

Our sincere and warmest thanks
NZDFA Executive Committee

<<date>>



The field day was organised by B+LNZ, DINZ and NZDFA Hawkes Bay branch. Around 70 people turned up to a warm and sunny day (the night before being a howling nor'wester) and a picture-perfect farm (the scars of cyclone Gabrielle notwithstanding). Matt Carroll (from BakerAg) presented some compelling financial analysis that showed gross revenue from farms with mixed species - and with returns over time showing less risk of market fluctuations. The bankers in attendance were taking copious notes in this session.

Longbrook is a challenging farm: steep hill to rolling land and very little area for cropping. Soils range from volcanic to clay with tomos a widespread feature. An advantage is that it is considered summer safe for rainfall. Stocking ratios are 42% sheep: 16% cattle: 42% deer (run as a breeding, finishing and velvet farm). Yet Keith and Josh's economic analysis run by BakerAg showed some impressive performance measures: The farm was comfortably ahead of similar farms that aren't diversified. It was recognized that high gross revenue and strict cost management created an impressive Economic Farm Surplus.

Farming's Full House: the benefits of diversifying with sheep, beef, and deer

Following on from the successful Canterbury mixed species field day at Tom MacFarlane's farm in May (see DFA Stagline, Issue 210, June 2025), the concept was revisited in the North Island earlier this week at Keith, Sue, Josh and Meg Burden's farm, Longbrook, in the Hawkes Bay.



After lunch the group visited a couple of sites to see first hand how the farm is managed and how stock classes are matched to land use classes, feed production and animal health. Farming cattle and deer separately (no co-grazing) was a practice to minimise risk of exposure to TB (sheep and deer are run together and if TB wasn't a threat the cattle would be as well).

A few other tips on the day:

Vineyard posts are better for top up fencing than new battens

Due to deer being browsers, don't have hinds following ewes

Stock deer at 80% to manage risk

Swedes are better than kale (allows inter species grazing and has less wastage and mess to clean up)



Back at the hall FirstLight, Duncan and Silver Fern Farms gave their venison market outlooks. There were plenty of questions in the final

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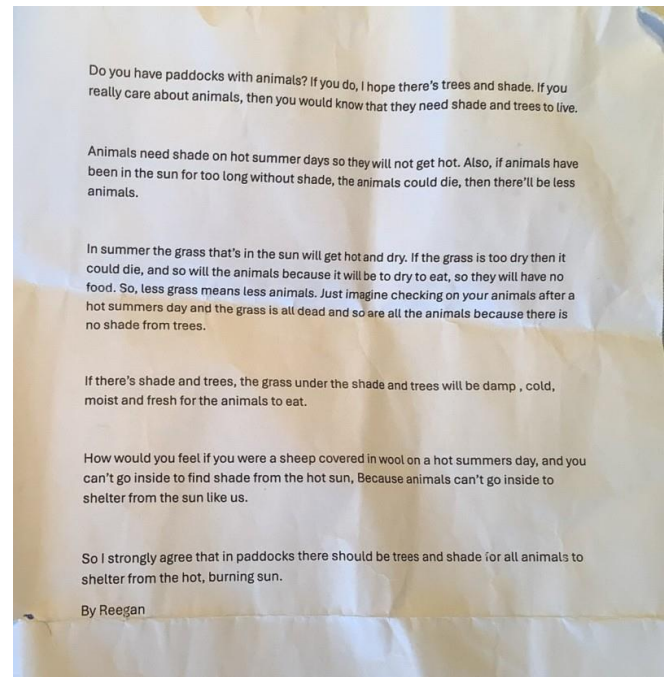
session and lots of engagement from the attendees.

A good and informative day out and pleasing to see such a well-run and well-presented farm.

A similar field day is planned for the Manawatu on 11 November – please tell your sheep and beef neighbours about it. This is a great opportunity to de-mystify deer farming and show how deer help smooth out volatility of returns, help better utilise feed production and improve animal health management (parasites).

Out of the mouths of babes...

One of our industry stalwarts has forwarded a school speech from his 9-year-old granddaughter. She chose the topic herself without any prompting. Maybe our next, next generation deer farmer?



Noticeboard

Work required

My partner and I are currently traveling in New Zealand and are looking for farm work opportunities. We have previous experience working on farms in Australia and really enjoyed it, so we would love the chance to do it again here.

We are available to start immediately and are highly motivated and hardworking.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,

Emma and Taho

emma.larretche@gmail.com

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Work experience

I'm Amelia, a vet student. I'm looking to go into rural practice so I would love to get some experience on a deer farm.

I'm wondering if you are able to share details of any deer farms which are willing to take on students for two weeks of work experience?

My home is in Maungakaramaea, just out of Whangarei in Northland. So a deer farm located near there, or near Palmerston North would be ideal.

The placement would need to be between November and mid February.

I'm in my 30's and have my own lifestyle block, so I have enough experience and maturity to be a reliable and responsible worker and make myself genuinely useful to the farm, as well as being there to learn.

Please let me know if there are any farmers you know of who I could reach out to.

Thank you,

Amelia Darby
ameliarosed@gmail.com
021537895

DINZ Board Observer applications open for 2026

DINZ is currently taking applications for the Board Observer role for 2026. A board observer typically sits in on board meetings and provides input but does not have the voting rights of a board director.

The role would suit someone who is interested in leadership/governance opportunities in the New Zealand deer industry; has experience or interest in the deer industry in some capacity; can add value to discussions and topics for deliberation; is available to attend the five annual DINZ Board meetings, along with some out-of-session meetings; and can demonstrate a career progression that would indicate a commitment to further career development.

Applications close 14 November 2025, with the selection process then leading to the successful candidate inducted to the DINZ Board in February 2026.

For more information: [Notification of vacancy – DINZ Board Observer](#)

Markets webinar

DINZ will be hosting a “special edition” webinar, outside of our usual bi-monthly cycle, now that some DINZ representatives have returned from various markets. Join DINZ CEO Rhys Griffiths, Board Directors Tony Cochrane and Rob Kidd, Trade and Strategy Manager Damon Paling, and Market Activation Manager Virginia Connell for all the latest info from our major venison and velvet markets.

Registration is required to attend the webinar. You can sign up to attend the webinar here: [DINZ market update webinar](#)

Joke of the month

A man is driving down a country road when he notices a sign that says, “\$5 for talking dog, take next left.”

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The man decides to investigate, believing it to be a joke. So the man turns left onto a farm, and a farmer emerges.

Man: "Does the dog actually talk?"

Farmer: "Absolutely, come here and I'll show you."

The man and farmer proceed to the garage, where a dog is resting on a dog bed. It notices them and approaches them.

Farmer: "Go ahead and ask him anything."

Man: "OK, dog, tell me about yourself."

To the man's surprise, the dog begins to speak, clearly and with proper words.

Dog: "Well, ever since I was a puppy, I've wanted to serve my country. So, as soon as I could, I enlisted as a sniffer dog with airport security. I was also very good at my job, earning a few promotions and turning some heads. Eventually, the army hired me as a bomb-sniffing dog, and I helped prevent tragedies all over the country and around the world. After a while, I retired, met a nice girl, had a few puppies, and eventually came to this farm to spend my golden years."

The man is taken aback.

Man: "Holy cow, farmer! You were correct! Why are you asking only \$5 for this dog?"

Farmer: "Because he lies! He's never done any of those things!"

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Or anything else you want to showcase, we have the platform to help you reach your audience.

Don't miss this opportunity to get noticed. Contact us today to book your spot!

Events

- Pāmu Farm Open Day at Eweburn Station - Te Anau, 30 October 2025 >>
- Diversified Farm Field Day - Pohangina, 11 November 2025 >>
- North Island Velvet Competition - Te Awamutu, 29 November 2025 >>
- 2025 National Velvet Competition and Awards Night - Invercargill, 11 December 2025 >>

If you have an event that would be of interest to the deer farming industry, please email info@deernz.org with details.

Visit the deernz.org website to view information about these events.