



Results of 2016 Balloted Hunting at
Blond Bay State Game Reserve and Boole Poole Peninsula

Harvest summary report

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Published by Game Management Authority October 2016.
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Authorised by Game Management Authority
121 Lonsdale Street, Melbourne 3000

ISBN 978-1-76047-344-0 (print)
ISBN 978-1-76047-345-7 (pdf/online)

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Balloted hunting for Hog Deer has occurred in Blond Bay State Game Reserve and Boole Poole Peninsula within Gippsland Lakes Coastal Park for twenty-eight years. The ballot is administered by the Blond Bay Hog Deer Advisory Group (BBHDAG), with annual ballot periods recommended to the Game Management Authority (GMA).

Ballot periods can occur between February and May with permitted hunting periods being restricted to weekdays (Monday to Friday) and excluding public holidays. When recommending ballot periods, the BBHDAG considers, but not limited to, factors such as hunting pressure, historic hunter success trends, potential impacts of other public land user groups and localised Hog Deer populations.

Balloted hunting gives hunters the opportunity to hunt areas that are normally closed to Hog Deer hunting and hunt outside the prescribed Hog Deer one-month hunting season of April. For public land hunting, balloted hunting has historically offered the most successful hunting opportunities.

For 2016, Blond Bay State Game Reserve accommodated five ballot periods. Three periods occurred before the commencement of the Hog Deer season and two periods occurred during the season. Boole Poole Peninsula had three balloted periods which occurred before the Hog Deer open season. Four hunters are permitted for each balloted period.

In 2016, there were 32 hunter opportunities for balloted hunting, 20 for Blond Bay and 12 for Boole Poole. 1,016 hunters entered the ballot and 52 names were drawn to fill the 32 available hunting spots and provide an additional 20 reserve hunters. From the reserve hunters drawn, five were utilised for the 2016 season.

Ballot periods

Periods	Dates	Balloted Areas
First Period	15 th – 19 th February	Blond Bay and Boole Poole
Second Period	29 th February – 4 th March	Blond Bay and Boole Poole
Third Period	14 th – 18 th March	Blond Bay and Boole Poole
Fourth Period	4 th – 8 th April	Blond Bay Only
Fifth Period	18 th – 22 nd April	Blond Bay Only

All hunters drawn from the ballot (including reserves) were invited to an education weekend – hosted by the Australian Deer Association Gippsland Branch occurring in the last weekend of January 2016. In addition, all hunters are required to attend an information session the Monday of their period to receive information regarding the areas, laws and expected behaviours. Participating hunters are asked to fill in a 'Balloted Hog Deer Hunter Report'. Sixty percent of balloted hunters returned the form. The following is a summary of the returned hunter reports

Hunter Effort and Success:

Parameters	Blond Bay	Boole Poole
Number of Respondents	12/20 (60%)	8/12 (66.7%)
Total Stags	18	9
Total Hind	49	3
Total deer seen	67	12
Stags harvested	4	1
Hinds harvested	3	0
Total deer harvested	7	1
Hunter effort stags per day	0.41	0.28
Hunter effort hinds per day	1	0.09
Total hunter effort per day	1.41	0.38

Hunter Satisfaction:

Satisfaction rating	Blond Bay	Boole Poole
Very Satisfied	6 (54.5%)	2 (25%)
Satisfied	4 (36.4)	3 (37.5%)
Neutral	1 (9.1%)	1 (12.5%)
Dissatisfied		2 (25%)

Comment:

There was a low hunting report return from the balloted hunters (55%). This should be addressed into the future as it is difficult to make informed management decisions with low hunter reports. These reports provide critical information on not just hunter success and effort but also population indices and trends of Hog Deer. Making the hunter return mandatory may address this.

The education weekend held in January, two-weeks before the first balloted period started was successful with 30 hunters participating. This included a number of reserve hunters, that although they did not get to hunt, they valued the information and knowledge received on Hog Deer hunting and deer hunting in general. The GMA continued to have a presence at this weekend with two staff members presenting information.

According to balloted hunter satisfaction, Boole Poole Peninsula provided lower hunter satisfaction than that of Blond Bay State Game Reserve. This may be attributed to reported change and increase in vegetation density causing unfavourable hunting conditions and possibly decreasing deer population density. Anecdotal reports state that the Boole Poole Peninsula had the higher success rate of the two balloted areas when the ballot was in its infancy. Parks Victoria, the responsible land manager, is currently assessing the hunting areas with a view to expanding these too areas with a lower vegetation density. Parks Victoria has also indicated that there is a potential to conduct a fuel reduction burn on the Boole Poole Peninsula.

There was some concern with the age of the stags taken during the ballot. Only one stag was harvested from the Boole Poole Peninsula, the stag was immature and was the only opportunity presented to take a deer during the ballot. At Blond Bay State Game Reserve, the only mature stag harvested was taken by a hunter who already had taken a hind. The other three stags harvested from Blond Bay State Game Reserve were all aged at 1.5 years (spikers). Each of the hunters who harvested stags from Blond Bay State Game Reserve had the opportunity to take hinds, however, decisions were made to take stags only. If this trend continues, it could be a concern as based from this year's hunter returns; there is already an approximate herd ratio of 3:1 (hinds:stags). This ratio was taken from the 2016 balloted hunter return form; more investigation is required to determine whether this is indicative of the Victorian Hog Deer population. Harvesting young stags diminishes the chance to harvest mature stags in future ballot seasons. Specific information on the importance of harvesting an equal sex ratio and taking hinds is included at the hunter education weekend and also at the required pre-briefings each hunter has to undertake.

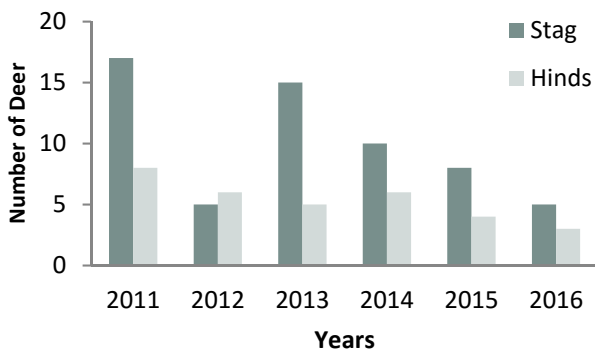


Figure 1: Total harvest of Hog Deer through the balloted over the last six years

Figure 1 shows a distinct downward trend of Hog Deer being taken during the ballot throughout time. The downward trend is much stronger with stags; hind harvest numbers have declined slightly during the past two years. This downward trend is not representative of the overall normal April season Hog Deer harvest which shows an increasing trend.

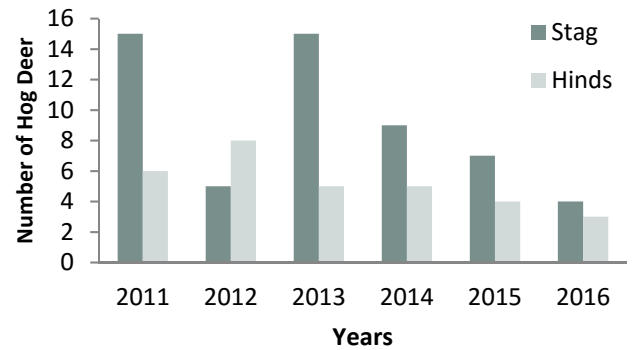


Figure 2: Blond Bay State Game Reserve balloted harvest over the last six years

Excluding 2012, the Blond Bay State Game Reserve harvest has decreased. The small decrease in hind harvest may be explained by hunters selecting to shoot stags first. Where opportunities to harvest stags are limited, hunters favouring stags first may run out of time to harvest any deer. Historically, ballot conditions required hunters to harvest a hind first before they could harvest a stag. This was to address unbalanced sex ratios.

The significant reduction in stag harvest could be a result of environmental conditions. 2011 and 2013 saw the highest harvest of stags over the last five years. This period corresponds with the breaking of drought conditions across Victoria leading to strong growing seasons. These conditions could affect hunting opportunities for Hog Deer in two ways. First deer were no longer concentrated around water and/or food supplies allowing them to disperse and possibly spending more time in open areas within the reserve. Compared against drier years where deer may spend more time on private land where there is better feed and permanent water. The second affect may be that a combination of wet years produce good vegetation growth, which impacts and changes the habitat preferences of Hog Deer. An increase in richer vegetation produces more favourable cover that the deer use for bedding/sleeping while inversely reducing optimal feeding opportunities. This would impact on hunting opportunities if deer were bedded down in thicker cover or moving to private land for better feed.

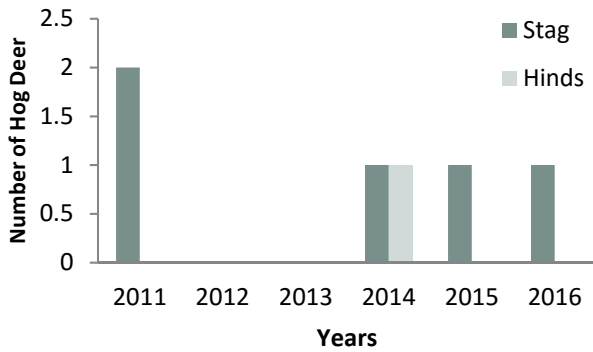


Figure 3: Boole Poole Peninsula balloted harvest over the last six years

For the last six years Boole Poole Peninsula has had very few Hog Deer harvested (6.5%). This is likely due to the habitat on the Boole Poole Peninsula being very dense coastal scrub making conditions unsuitable for hunting with the vegetation only being used the deer to bed and sleep in. This has led to a decrease in deer numbers and reduced ability to encounter deer while hunting. Originally when Hog Deer hunting was introduced to Boole Poole Peninsula, the peninsula was recovering from the effects of intensive sheep grazing. As a result, vegetation cover was immature and deer were more easily located. However, with little vegetation manipulation or management in recent years, it is now mature and dense.

