

Executive Committee Report

For all the positives of the season so far with good beef, lamb and venison pricing, a good drop of rain wouldn't go amiss for a lot of the country.

The elephant in the room is still velvet pricing but at least we are having some pricing emerge now, and at levels higher than previously indicated thankfully. As these prices are emerging there seems to be a slight upward trend so holding out is paying off.

Last week the DFA executive had a meeting in Invercargill which included a catch up with the Southland branch of the DFA and Elk Wapiti society to discuss improvements and solutions that are in progress and to address going forward, largely focused on velvet. As an exec we value the coordinated, pragmatic feedback to be able to advocate on our farmers behalf.

While in Invercargill we also got to attend the National velvet and hard antler awards. I'd like to congratulate all entrants and winners for some incredible velvet on display. It's a credit to the industry and the individual farmers on the progress being made. I'd also like to congratulate the organising committee and Southland Branch on an extremely well run, slick event.

The first of the venison sales last week started off on a positive note with good clearances and prices across all. This reinforces the confidence in farming and deer as a viable diversification option in amongst sheep and

beef. I have witnessed this increased confidence in my travels across the country and is no doubt aided by high sheep, beef and venison pricing. With the outlook good for the near to medium term, let's hope it allows us all to get some runs on the board after a tough couple of years. As far as this season goes, schedules appear set to hold through summer months, reinforcing returns for those that can continue to keep animals growing through summer and benefitting the industry by increasing average carcass weights.

Velvet and trophy sire sales start this week. Although cashflow is a challenge for some in that space I have a firm belief that most farmers understand the value of genetics and a long term strategy for their business and therefore they'll still be investing in animals even if it is slightly scaled back on what they'd like.

Wishing you all a Merry Christmas and happy New Year. Remember to take a break and keep the mind fresh and enjoy time with family and friends. Hopefully the weather helps that with providing just what you all require to set up the rest of the season.

Tom MacFarlane

NZDFA Executive Committee

NZDFA Velvet Season Letter

Mark McCoard

NZDFA Velvet Pathway Ahead

The NZDFA Executive Committee has fielded numerous calls from concerned farmers and recently held an online meeting with the Branch Chairs. This forum allowed for some venting of frustrations but also sharing of farmer feedback from within each of the individual branches. The consensus was to put our frustrations aside and begin to focus on solutions ahead.

It was agreed we will require short-, medium- and longer-term solutions to deliver durable and lasting results for farmer confidence and profitability. The points below have been driven by collective farmer feedback. These will form the NZDFA's starting point for discussions with DINZ and appropriate parties to ensure velvet is returned to being a profitable farming income stream quickly. It is acknowledged some of these are actions already being undertaken by DINZ, while others are ideas to create discussion to find solutions.

Grading Guidelines

Create a grading guidelines committee which includes producers. Any changes are made with appropriate time for feedback.

Facilitate appropriate process to deliver the outcome decided above.

Investigate the viability of technology in enhancing consistency in grading between buyers and ensure uptake.

Make provision for the use of above technology in any framework developed in the future or already existing.

Utilise any appropriate scientific research to validate decisions or answer questions that arise from changes to guidelines.

Data and Statistics

Provide accurate data at regular intervals to aid farmers in future business planning.

Requires determining what this data is and where it will come from, e.g. numbers of MA stags killed.

Levels of annual global velvet consumption versus velvet production and the total production NZ feeds into this.

Assessment of the tonnage of velvet in reserve at the start of the season both onshore and off.

An average velvet price received per kg across all grades, derived from a subgroup of farmers to illustrate long term trends.

Explore mechanisms to manage volume.

DFA STAGLINE



Issue 216 | December 2025

Markets

Explore the publishing of seasonal pricing before and during the season (i.e. equivalent to venison schedule pricing).

Continue to develop alternative markets to Korea and China to create competitive tension.

Explore alternative uses for OG and NT2 to further enhance NZ velvets reputation as a premium product.

Remind foreign partners that NZ farmers have alternative options if long term sustainability of the velvet industry is not supported.

Strategic use of velvet marketing budget.

Remain open-minded to alternative uses for velvet in general.

Raise the minimum price on velvet that attracts a DINZ levy from \$15 to \$30.

Quality Assurance and Protocols

Develop and deliver Export Licencing Initiative.

Ensure terms and conditions of Veltrak are being adhered to by all parties.

Have fit-for-purpose QA systems with significant consequences for noncompliance.

Facilitate constructive dialogue between all stakeholders.

Maintain and stay ahead of any potential animal welfare issues.

Since March the NZDFA Executive Committee has attempted to communicate the changes as they have unfolded and to offer practical solutions for farmers to consider within their farming business. No two operations are the same, but low returns affect us all. For lasting change to become a reality we need farmer support to deliver a well-coordinated grassroots response and support DINZ on the delivery of agreed initiatives for farmers. While the points above are an intended starting point, we would encourage you all to become part of the solution as the pioneers and innovators before us have done. As discussions progress, we will keep you informed.

Yours sincerely

Mark McCoard (Chair)

On behalf of the NZDFA Executive Committee

Velvet Export Licensing Update Damon Paling

DINZ and the Export Licensing Working Group (ELWG) continue to progress the export licensing initiative designed to strengthen discipline, transparency, and long-term value creation across the velvet supply chain. The model under consideration remains a licensing framework under the Horticultural Export Authority Act — keeping commercial autonomy intact while lifting standards at the point of export and protecting the integrity of New Zealand velvet in key Asian markets.

MPI has now commenced a targeted round of stakeholder outreach, with discussions underway across selected velvet sector participants. This engagement is expected to conclude by mid-December, and we extend our thanks to all who have contributed their time and perspectives.

The current goal within MPI is to submit a policy paper to Minister McClay before year end, subject to internal processes and wider legislative pressures. DINZ will continue to maintain close contact with MPI through December to ensure industry views remain well-reflected.

Although timelines have shifted and implementation for the 2026/27 season is now more challenging, the foundational work undertaken this year remains critical. The objective is to secure a durable, bipartisan pathway that supports long-term integrity and confidence in New Zealand velvet exports.

DINZ will provide a further update once MPI's policy position becomes clearer.

Is DINZ The Same As The DFA?

Reprint from September 2024

The New Zealand deer farming story is unique and quite special as the country's youngest pastoral industry creating value from what was formerly a wild animal and "noxious pest". A great short history is provided in the Encyclopaedia of New Zealand (Te Ara: <https://teara.govt.nz/en/deer-and-deer-farming>).

Page 3 outlines how deer farming started with the first licence to farm being granted in 1969 and the formation of the New Zealand Deer Farmers' Association (NZDFA) in 1975 with 25 founding members.

Issue 216 | December 2025

Some ten years later after lobbying from the NZDFA and deer researchers at Invermay the Game Industry Board was established by the government under the Game Industry Board Regulations 1985. Deer Industry New Zealand (DINZ) succeeded the Game Industry Board with the introduction of the Deer Industry New Zealand Regulations 2004.

However, even today many people within the industry are still unclear as to what are the differences between NZDFA and DINZ or even if they aren't the same organisation.

Put simply NZDFA is first and foremost an organisation that represents deer farmers and its income is derived from membership subscriptions. DINZ on the other hand is an organisation that is set up under government regulation as a statutory marketing authority that represents farmers and processors (venison and velvet). The NZDFA use to collect a commodity levy but with the creation of DINZ this was set to zero with an understanding that DINZ would provide the Producer Manager role to support the running of the NZDFA and be a conduit between the two organisations. This support is outlined by a Service Agreement between DINZ and the NZDFA.

So, it is quite understandable that there is a lot of common ground between both organisations that seek to represent deer farmers' interests.

Common ground is good – it means that the organisations can work together towards a shared goal or vision, and it can also mean that deer farmers may get more opportunity to have their views represented (with NZDFA and DINZ providing input or representation in pan-industry groups). However sometimes it is important for the farmer voice to strongly emphasise an opinion or approach that might be more muted at an industry-wide level. A recent example of this is where NZDFA supported a DINZ submission on greenhouse gas emission reduction targets but further emphasised the disproportionate impact this would have on deer farmers and their local communities.

One other point of difference is the method of governance. DINZ has a board whose composition is set in the regulations (four directors appointed by the NZDFA, three directors appointed venison processors and marketers, and one director appointed by velvet and co-product processors and marketers). NZDFA has a 16 branch network and a national Executive Committee (four members elected by all full NZDFA members as specified in the NZDFA Constitution). The Executive Committee is required to consult with the branch network and report back on issues or actions.

Issue 216 | December 2025

NZDFA operates as a grass-roots farmer-led organisation and thus provides DINZ with a valuable and authentic view of farmer sentiment, priorities and concerns.

Otago Field Day 2026

Another Deer2Succeed DFA field day is set for 2026. This time it's Otago DFA's turn and the focus will be on research as the AgResearch Invermay Research Centre will host the day.

The day will kick off with a BBQ lunch (venison of course). Aptly the next course will cover feeding nutrition for velvet stags and updates on the research on velvet regrowth and haemostasis.

Second course is a tour of the research farm looking at the Tomorrow's Deer herd and an update on environmental research including a catchment study on the farm.

Velvet Competitions

Déjà vu

"This year it seems that numbers of entries were down in many of the competitions held so far, but on the flip side the quality of velvet has never been better" – DFA Stagline, December 2024.

Despite the uncertainty with velvet prices this season the entries on display were outstanding

and a real reminder of the quality of the product and the skill of the producers. This was not lost on the Chinese and Korean customer delegations that visited the North Island and South Canterbury-North Otago competitions.

Thanks to all the organisers and entrants for another year of successful competitions. All those who attended enjoyed catching up and taking time off farm from a busy time of year.

Results shall be posted on the website as they come in.



for more photos, please head to the online version of Stagline.

Noticeboard

DINZ Board Observer applications open for 2026

DINZ is currently taking applications for the Board Observer role for 2026. A board observer

Issue 216 | December 2025

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

2026 Elections and Appointments

Next year several NZDFA positions will be vacant by rotation:

Two Executive Committee members

Two Selection and Appointments Panel (SAP) members

One DINZ Board director

Key dates are as follows:

12 February: Nominations for positions open (published in DFA Stagline, eNews, Deer Industry News)

2 April: Nominations close

21 April - 5 May: Voting period for Executive Committee and SAP positions

13 May: Election results announced, DINZ Board candidates address the NZDFA AGM (5 minutes each)

9 and/or 10 June: DINZ Board candidate interviews. Successful candidate informed.

22 July: Successful appointee attends DINZ Board meeting

More information will be available in 2026.

Industry Conference 2026: 13 and 14 May - save the dates

Issue 216 | December 2025

Following on from this year's Queenstown conference, planning is underway for the 2026 conference with the North Island's turn to host.

The venue is the Awapuni Racecourse, Palmerston North – the same venue that hosted the DINZ Tech Expo a few years ago. As usual the conference format will follow:

Tuesday 12 May:

NZDFA Branch Chairs meeting

Wednesday 13 May:

NZDFA AGM

Industry Conference

Awards Dinner (photo competition, Matushcka and Deer Industry awards)

Thursday 14 May:

Central Regions DFA Field Trip

International Deer Biology Conference 2026

For the second time in 43 years, Dunedin will host the International Deer Biology Congress in 2026, attracting international deer researchers and professionals. Themed 'Your Deer Here' the conference will take place in 10-13 February 2026 at the University of Otago,

bringing together biologists, ecologists veterinarians, geneticists, wildlife managers, conservationists, food, health and production researchers to discuss the diverse aspects of deer management and biology from various perspectives globally.

To support knowledge sharing in the local deer industry, we are making two-day registrations, for Tuesday 10 February and Wednesday 11 February which includes two field trips, available to New Zealand deer farmers for a reduced rate of \$375 until the end of 2025. More details about the congress can be found at <https://www.ivvy.com.au/event/IDBC26/>

These registrations are coordinated through DINZ and DFA, so if you want to take advantage of this opportunity to hear from some of the world's experts on all things deer please look out for the sign up link in eNews or on the website.

Looking to buy a Fawn.

William Ferguson from Otago/Southland would like to purchase a Fawn his contact number is 027 337 2356

Acknowledgement for John Barber

On behalf of the Canterbury–West Coast deer farmers, we want to pay tribute to John Barber who passed Sunday 7th with family a true pioneer and legend, one of the founding figures of New Zealand's deer industry.

DFA STAGLINE



Issue 216 | December 2025

John's forward thinking helped shape deer farming in NZ. As a director of the North American Elk Breeders Society, he built international connections long before it was easy to do so, and he shared his knowledge generously with farmers on both sides of the world.

Those who knew John remember his sharp mind, generous spirit, and belief in the potential of deer farming for NZ.

John was one of the good guys.

Joke of the month

How much does it cost Santa to park his sleigh and reindeer?

Nothing! It's on the house!

Events

- Freshwater Farm Planning workshop - various locations from 21 Jan - 25 Feb
- Stag Sale Season! Check the website for dates!

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.