

Game Hunting in Victoria

Possession and use of spotlights and firearms

Series No 14

The illegal spotlighting of deer has been a significant problem for a number of years despite it being illegal to:

- Hunt deer at night.
- Hunt deer with the use of artificial light.
- Carry a loaded firearm in a vehicle.
- Use a spotlight from a vehicle on a public road.
- Possess a loaded firearm or discharge a firearm on or across a public road or thoroughfare.

The spotlighting of deer is not only illegal, it is dangerous, unethical and reduces recreational hunting opportunities for law-abiding hunters.

In 2000, the Government introduced a new law to address the illegal spotlighting of deer. The law states that it is illegal to possess a **regulated spotlight** and a firearm in **recognised deer habitat** during the hours between sunset and sunrise. However, this does not apply when a firearm is unloaded and **secured** in a vehicle and the regulated spotlight is not in use.

It was necessary to make this law as strict as possible to close any loopholes commonly used by spotlighters while not unfairly restricting legitimate hunters.

The following document details hunters' requirements when in possession of a firearm and spotlight when in recognised deer habitat.



Photo: Scott Lawrence

What is a "regulated" spotlight?

A regulated spotlight is any artificial light with a power source of greater than 4.5 volts.

The laws do not apply to lights with a power source of 4.5 volts or less. It is quite legal to carry these lights when in possession of a firearm in recognised deer habitat during the hours between sunset and sunrise as they are not considered sufficient to be used to spotlight deer.

This means that deer hunters can carry torches of 4.5 volts or less for safety purposes.

How do I calculate the voltage of an artificial light?

To calculate the voltage of an artificial light, simply add together the voltage of each battery powering the light. If the total exceeds 4.5 volts, then that light source falls under the definition of a regulated spotlight and cannot be used when in possession of a firearm in recognised deer habitat between the hours of sunset and sunrise.

For example, if your light source has two D cell batteries of 1.5 volts, the total voltage of the light is 3 volts. It is legal to carry this light when in possession of a firearm in recognised deer habitat during the hours between sunset and sunrise.

What does "secured" mean?

Where a firearm is in a vehicle, to be "secured", the firearm must be unloaded and stored in a closed case or container (eg. gun case or bag) and stowed in the boot or storage area of a sedan/dual cab/wagon.

For a ute or single cab, the unloaded firearm must be stored in a closed case or container and stowed in a part of the vehicle not readily accessible by any occupants (eg. box on the tray).

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What is "recognised deer habitat"?

Recognised deer habitat is defined as all areas of Crown land in the following Victorian Municipalities:

Alpine	Murrindindi
Ararat Rural City	Northern Grampians
Baw Baw	Pyrenees
Benalla Rural City	Rural City of Wangaratta
Cardinia	South Gippsland
Colac-Otway	Southern Grampians
Corangamite	Strathbogie
East Gippsland	Towong
Glenelg	Wellington
Horsham Rural City	Whittlesea City
Mansfield	Yarra Ranges.

How do the regulations apply in the field?

Hunters in vehicles

For hunters travelling in vehicles at night in recognised deer habitat, and are in possession of a firearm and a regulated spotlight, the firearm must be unloaded and stored in a closed gun case or container (eg. gun bag) that is locked in the boot or storage area of a sedan, dual cab or wagon.

For utes or single cabs, the firearm should be unloaded and stored in a closed case or container and stowed in a part of the vehicle not readily accessible by any occupant of the vehicle. Also, any regulated spotlight must not be in use.

The same storage requirements for firearms also apply to any ammunition and magazines, but they must not be stored in the glove box.

Hunters on foot

Hunters on foot in recognised deer habitat between the hours of sunset and sunrise must not be in possession of a firearm and a regulated spotlight.

However, you can carry an artificial light (eg. torch or headlamp) with a power source of 4.5 volts or less for safety purposes or to assist you when finding your way back to your camp or vehicle at night (eg. returning to camp at night after completing hunting for the day).

Are there any exemptions to the new spotlighting regulations?

Yes, exemptions may be given to landowners/managers and/or their agents who are using a spotlight for the purposes of controlling pest animals to a distance of 500 metres outside the boundary of their freehold land, in the municipalities affected by the regulations.

Vehicle headlights, lights used for domestic purposes around the camp and lights used in emergencies are also exempt from the regulations, as long as they are not used to spotlight deer.

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