



Aerial control culls record numbers of feral pigs

An aerial feral pig cull was held in the northern agricultural zone in mid-west Western Australia from 27 February to 4 March 2022. This 5-day community program was organised and coordinated by Marieke Jansen, Northern Biosecurity Group's (NBG) Executive Officer. It was supported by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD), the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA), Northern Agricultural Catchments Council (NACC), and the NBG's Licensed Pest Management Technician (LPMT).

Increasing participation in the aerial control operation by multiple neighbouring properties was achieved due to Marieke and Wayne's efforts to work closely with the community to build trust and provide pest management support. This year over 40 hours of flying destroyed 2282 pigs, along with 22 foxes, 4 cats and 2 deer. The record number of pigs shot this year, coming off the back of a bumper cropping season and the inclusion of new areas, emphasised the importance of, and need for, combinations of control methods applied by land managers who are working together.

On ground activities coordinated by DPIRD investigated the feral pig population response to coordinated control in region. Samples were collected from 238 feral pigs (~10% of the pigs shot). Dr Narelle Dybing, National Feral Pig Action Plan's Program Support Officer, assisted in the collection of feral pig samples with Dr Peter Adams, Dr Stuart Dawson and Wayne Heal (LPMT). Throughout the week, representatives from DBCA and NACC also supported these activities. This teamwork highlights the importance of a collaborative, multi-jurisdictional approach to feral pig control and the efforts needed to mitigate their impacts.

Summary of key results:

- 2282 pigs were shot
- 238 pigs were sampled
 - 120 females with an average of 31kg (2.2-99.2kg) and 8 months old
 - 117 males with an average weight of 43kg (3.0-123.3kg) and 11 months old
- 69% of pigs sampled were less than 1 year old highlighting the high breeding rate of pigs, especially following the good harvest year in 2021-22
- 75% of sexually mature females were pregnant or had young with a total of 205 unborn

This is the fifth time that the NBG has conducted a coordinated aerial cull in the region. The NBG aims to improve the effectiveness of control programs by encouraging landholders to conduct follow-up on ground control activities such as baiting and trapping.

Narelle and Marieke met with several landholders experiencing problems with feral pigs first hand. Bridget Pullella and family discussed damage to water troughs and losses of over 40% of their wheat harvest due to feral pigs destroying and flattening the crop. In an effort to minimise the damage caused by feral pigs, another producer, Daniel Gill, has installed a pig-proof Gallagher fence along his boundary with an adjacent bush block.

Landholders are very concerned about the presence of feral pig faeces in their crops. This was noted by Craig Scott who has a piggery in the region. Feral pig faeces could contaminate the crop intended to feed his pigs and spread unwanted and potentially deadly pathogens. Landholders would like the NBG to assist landowners with having traps available to borrow and obtain assistance to fence out invasive animals.

The NBG aims to replicate this program in the near future to suppress growth in feral pig populations in the region. The results from the wild dog and feral pig surveillance program may help to inform future control strategies.



Field team photo- back row left to right, Narelle Dybing (NFPAP), Annabelle Garrett and Jarna Kendle (NACC), Damien Swain (DPIRD), Riley Mole and Michael Raykos (DBCA), Marieke Jansen (NBG), Mike Jones and Stuart Dawson (DPIRD). Front row left to right Wayne Heal (LPMT) and Peter Adams (DPIRD)

