



Whitsunday Regional Council's aerial shooting program for feral pigs has been shown to return \$18.83 to agriculture and the environment for every dollar spent on their management

Estimated impacts of feral pigs in the Whitsunday Regional Council area:

- Total cost to agriculture of \$12.5 million/year equating to \$663 / feral pig / year
- Total cost to environment of \$28 million/year, equating to \$1473 / feral pig / year

The Council's aerial shooting program for feral pigs commenced in 2012 to mitigate their destructive impacts, with strong involvement from local landholders. Over the past ten years, over 130 flights have been conducted, removing 12,303 feral pigs from the local area. This is in addition to those removed through coordinated on-ground baiting and trapping programs by landholder groups.

In 2020/21, the aerial shooting program was expanded to include four adjoining regional councils (Burdekin, Charters Towers, Isaac and Mackay) to widen the coordinated and collaborative approaches required to tackle feral pig populations.

These control programs are conducted to protect both agricultural and environmental assets in the region from feral pig impacts. The final report by Synergies Economic Consulting Pty Ltd. detailing economic losses of \$12.5 million from feral pigs to livestock, horticulture and sugar cane production was completed in 2020.

Environmental impacts

The Whitsunday Regional Council area includes 13 wetland areas, covering a total of 58,380 ha, with an additional 82,000 ha dedicated to National Park and Conservation Parks.

Feral pig control in wetlands within the Council's area benefit the environment through reductions in vegetation destruction, water turbidity, disease spread and predation of native animals.

The value and replacement costs of habitat areas caused by feral pigs for ecosystems present in the Whitsunday was estimated using the Queensland Government regional ecosystem financial values. The possible representative regional ecosystems (RE) as described within the legislation are:

- Wetlands (RE 8.3.6) - \$80,000/ha
- Floodplains – south (RE 8.3.6) - \$80,000/ha
- Floodplains – north (RE 11.2.32) - \$8,000/ha
- Inland (RE 11.12.3) - \$8,000/ha
- National Parks (RE 8.12.3) - \$80,000/ha

Feral pigs mainly affect the soil, vegetative ground layer and fauna. To determine costs, the density and population of feral pigs in the different ecosystems were estimated. It was assumed that feral animals damaged 0.5% of the land and impacted 30% of soil, ground resources and waterways where these animals are present.

Feral pigs were estimated to cause \$28 million per year in environmental damage to the Whitsunday region using Queensland Government ecosystem values.

Return on investment estimates

In 2020/21, based on annual estimated costs of each feral pig to agriculture and the environment of \$663 and \$1,473, the program returned \$4.2 million to the local region by removing 1990 feral pigs via aerial control at a cost to the five Councils of \$225,000. This represents a return on investment of over 1800 per cent.

The impacts of not controlling feral pigs was also estimated. For every additional 1000 feral pigs in the landscape, estimated annual losses to agriculture were \$662,000 and those to the environment were \$1,317,380.

This work provides confidence to local governments and landholders of the value being involved and financially supporting integrated feral pig control activities throughout the region. It also demonstrates the importance of a collaborative, integrated management program to reduce the impacts and costs of feral pigs.

Notably, the Council is providing leadership in quantifying impacts of feral pigs to both agricultural and environmental assets in its area.

For more information: contact [Scott Hardy, Coordinator, Natural Resources Management and Climate](#)

Visit the [Whitsunday Demonstration site webpage](#).