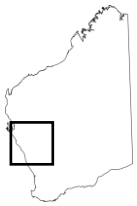
NATIONAL FERAL PIG ACTION PLAN

Benefits of being involved in coordinated community-led groups: producer perspectives from MidWest WA



These case studies briefly describe the issues and challenges faced by three producers with feral pigs, how they are applying best practice management and the benefits of being involved in Northern Biosecurity Group's coordinated activities.

Each producer undertakes proactive feral pig control with support from the Northern Biosecurity Group's (NBG) Licenced Pest Management Technician (LPMT), Wayne Heale.

Case Study 1:

Joe runs a mixed livestock and cropping enterprise in the Northampton region, and is being impacted by feral pigs, as well as kangaroos, on his property. Damage caused by feral pigs is mainly to infrastructure, including fencing and water troughs, and to crops. Environmentally, feral pigs are digging up creek lines, and causing soil erosion. Trapping and HOGGONE baiting are being used as part of Joe's feral pig management program. NBG's LPMT, Wayne, assists Joe with trapping and monitoring - trail cameras are firstly set up to identify how many pigs were present and then a trap is erected. This technique resulted in 100% trap success, with all of the pigs identified by camera being caught in the trap. Joe has tried the HOGGONE baiting system but the timing wasn't right – it was difficult to attract them to the bait station due to plenty of alternate food still being available. Joe also regularly contacts his neighbours to discuss where the pigs are coming from and coordinate and time their activities. His property is also part of the aerial shooting program coordinated by the NBG. Joe is happy to participate as he has observed that feral pig activity afterwards is much quieter.

One of the biggest hurdles that Joe faces with feral pig control is the time needed for pre-feeding. One of the helpful tools that the LPMT uses on Joe's property is an automatic self-feeder. The feeder holds a few days' worth of feed and is set to automatically feed daily. This provides several advantages – producers don't need to worry about putting out the free-feed on a daily basis, and it also allows the trap site to remain clear of human presence and smell which may affect feral pigs interacting with the trap.

Case Study 2:

This producer from the Ellendale region runs cattle and grows crops to feed livestock. Feral pigs, foxes, rabbits and kangaroos have all been seen on the property, with feral pigs drinking from stock troughs and around feed. Feral pigs in this region have been observed to be moving between the reserve, the river and multiple neighbouring properties. Whilst there are no visible impacts from feral pigs on this property due to exclusion fencing and heavy rotational grazing used to manage large numbers of cattle, proactive feral pig control is still conducted. The fencing has a live bottom wire which helps to prevent pigs from easily entering the property. However, feral pigs may still be entering under gates or fencing during rain periods when the ground is washed out.

This producer works collaboratively with their neighbour to conduct feral pig trapping with Wayne's assistance, near the interface between the two properties. The neighbour provides the pre-feed and bait, and the trap is set up on this property. Trapping has been very successful, with reasonable numbers being caught over the last two years; 30 last year and 24 so far this year. This producer is finding that a self/auto-feeder is very helpful as it can be hard to find time to put bait out daily. On such large properties, cameras, with a Wi-Fi signal that send images to a mobile phone or computer when the camera is activated, are being used to reduce the time and pressure involved in checking traps, manually retrieving SD cards, and knowing how many pigs are present in the area.

MBG Midlands Biosecurity Group

CWBA Central Wheatbelt Biosecurity Association Inc

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Case Study 3:

This producer, from the Greenough region, has a mixed sheep and cropping property and is experiencing significant damage from feral pigs on his property, with neighbouring reserve also affected. Feral pigs are damaging fencing and reticulated water supply infrastructure as well as crops from their rooting and wallowing behaviour and damaging the sown seeds. They also disrupt lambing and chase sheep, with some feral pigs observed belly-flopping over the fence to access the property! Numbers have increased significantly in the reserve, likely due to the illegal release of pigs, resulting in land disturbance from diggings and increased water turbidity in dams from wallowing along the edges of creeks. The incidence of native yams in the reserve are also decreasing due to feral pig activity, and native mammals, such as echidnas, are now very difficult to find.

Strong exclusion fencing, with barbed wire at the bottom, has been installed to exclude feral pigs. Feral pigs are now not being seen as often, however, they are still entering the property using holes made by kangaroos or in periods of heavy rainfall. This producer has erected a strong fence to exclude feral pigs with barbed wire at the bottom. Since erecting the fence, pigs are not seen as often however when kangaroos dig under the fences, the feral pigs follow through the hole or when there are heavy rains and it's then washed out underneath. With this fence now in place, on-ground feral pig control is now more responsive as to when feral pigs are observed getting through the fence and/or when aerial shooting is being conducted in the area to try and remove flushed-out animals.

Through the NBG, Wayne has assisted this producer with trapping and baiting using HOGGONE on the property. HOGGONE was very successful when it was first used, due to timing activities for there was limited feed available elsewhere. This producer also uses a drone to monitor the area, when feral pigs are harder to track, to determine numbers of feral pigs present.. Importantly, eight of their neighbouring properties are in constant communication and get involved in communal bait days.

Conclusion

The advantages of using multiple feral pig strategies to control feral pigs, neighbours working together and participating in a local biosecurity group are proving to be effective. Feral pigs are not just one person's problems.

Each producer is benefiting from participating in NBG's coordinated feral pig management programs, including the ability to access the services of the NBG's LPMT to support their on-ground feral pig management activities. The value of the assistance provided by the LPMT is reflected in their desire to have another LPMT in the region to share the load! Trespassing onto private property by hunters in the region is an increasing issue. This is resulting in damage to gates and fences, disruption to pre-existing feral pig control work and dispersal of mobs.