

Demonstration site – New measures for Eastern Cape York bring excellent results



The Eastern Cape York Turtle Protection Partnership is one of two pig control programs contained in the Cape York Demonstration Site for the National Feral Pig Action Plan.

The other is the highly successful Western Cape Turtle Threat Abatement Alliance (WCTTAA). [See www.feralpigs.com.au/capeyorkfnq/]

More than 365,000 hectares of Cape York Peninsula's east coast was included in two aerial feral pig control assignments for the Eastern Cape York Turtle Protection Partnership.

Approximately 1,220 feral pigs were culled as part of a project which aims to monitor and reduce the impacts of feral pigs on nesting turtles and wetland values for the region.

The results are the first for the Partnership which was created in 2021 through Cape York NRM, supported by the Australian Government.

Its members include Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service (QPWS), Lama Lama, Wuthathi, Rinyirru, Cape Melville and Flinders Howick Islands.

"We are pretty happy with these initial results coming through," Cape York NRM's Coastal Ecosystems Coordinator David Preece said.

"The two culls were carried out in November-December 2021 and February-March 2022; before and during turtle nesting seasons. Evidence of turtle nest predation was detected during the latter control program.

This gives us a measure to see whether the nests in the next season have less predation events following the culls."

The project aims to develop an ongoing monitoring program, with training provided to Traditional Owner ranger groups, on-ground nest protection, and air observation and pig control.

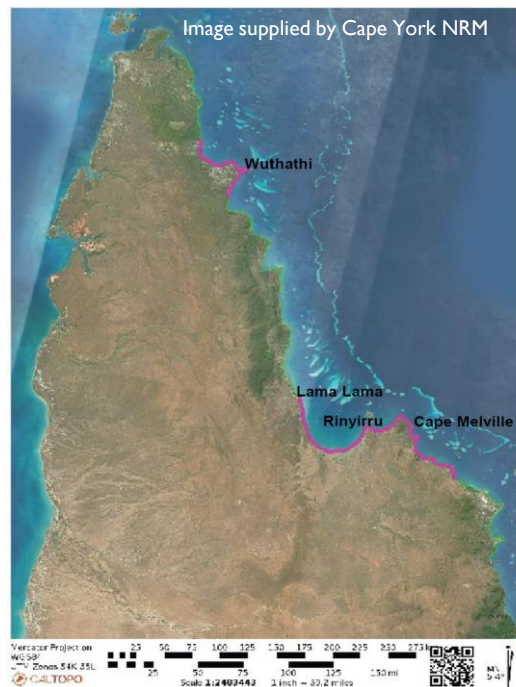
"Over 80% of eastern Cape York is Indigenous-owned land, including National Parks jointly managed with QPWS," Dave said.

"QPWS has been carrying out feral pig control operations throughout Cape York for many years. This Partnership enhances their work through the extension of the control area and by increasing the understanding and capacity of landholders. We are aiming to see a coordinated approach similar to WCTTAA in the coming years."

The Western Cape alliance was formed in 2013 and forms the other arm of the NFPAP Demonstration Site. Its members include:

- Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council Apudthama Rangers
- Mapoon Land and Sea Rangers
- Nanum Wungthim Rangers, Napranum
- Pormpuraaw Land and Sea Management
- Kowanyama Rangers
- Aak Puul Ngantam (APN) Rangers, Aurukun

The alliance has been undertaking monitoring and data collection as well as on-ground protection, for example, feral pig control and nest "caging". Predation rates for the Olive Ridley and Flatback nests have reduced from approximately 90 per cent in 2001, to under 30 per cent in 2021, with some areas achieving only 10 percent lost to predation.



Cape York
Natural Resource Management

The Eastern Cape partnership hopes to similarly improve the survival rate of endangered turtles and their clutches on the coast, as well as protect the high value wetlands, floodplains and coastal vegetation found in these control areas.

Outcomes from feral pig aerial control activities

18-20 November and 1-4 December 2021 results:

A report by the QPWS further broke down results for the two aerial shooting culls conducted on 18 to 20 November and 1 to 4 December 2021, during which 937 feral pigs were removed.

- North East sector of the Cape: 10 pigs
- South East sector:
 - Lama Lama and Running Creek Nature Refuge - 66 pigs
 - Cape Melville - 140 pigs
 - Rinyirru - 721 pigs

The operation conducted in the North East nearly exclusively targeted individual pigs actively foraging along the coastline, explaining the low numbers of feral pigs despatched.

“The benefits of removing these pigs are significant. This northern section of coast has been preferential for nesting turtles on the east coast and as such the nest density is greater, exposing many nests to predation by feral pigs. It appears nest predation is a learnt behaviour most commonly by large boars. Removing these specific animals can create an extended period of reduced impacts.”

22-24 February and 8-10 March 2022 results:

A second, more recent QPWS report summarised results from aerial programs conducted in February-March 2022 over 202,000 ha.

- 22-24 February - North East sector: 9 pigs
- 8-10 March - South East sector:
 - Lama Lama - 131 pigs
 - Cape Melville - 63 pigs
 - Rinyirru - 86 pigs

“In the Northern control sector, three destroyed turtle nests were observed in very close proximity to one another. This is a high value nesting area. Two pigs were dispatched in this area during the control. This was the same location that numerous destroyed nests were observed during the November 2021 survey, but no pigs were located at the time. It remains to be seen whether further pig impacts will occur early in the coming nesting season or if the pigs were solely responsible,” the report said.

“Overall, the control effort was a great result considering that no pigs were controlled in the Northern sector during the hatchling season the previous year – Feb 2020.”

Of the 280 pigs controlled in the South Cape control sector, a number of these animals were in the vicinity of the beaches. This was an “excellent result” for the project, the report said.

The Partnership will conduct further culls in late 2022.

