# Graziers form clusters to combat exploding numbers of feral pigs

Across the Burdekin region of north Queensland, feral pigs cause extensive damage to agricultural and environmental assets, and pose a high risk for the spread of pathogens such as Foot and mouth disease (FMD), African swine fever (ASF), and Japanese encephalitis virus (JEV).

Significant rainfall in 2021-2022 has resulted in increased feral pig populations in both the Barcaldine and Isaac regions due to abundant food and water. Feral pig control is now an increasingly important matter for land managers in the region, who are primarily beef producers.

With assistance from the jointly funded Commonwealth-State *Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements: Environmental Recovery Package: Weeds and Pest Management Program*, NQ Dry Tropics is working with Barcaldine and Isaac Regional Councils, with support from Whitsunday Regional Council, to undertake collaborative feral pig management.

NQ Dry Tropics are facilitating and coordinating the development of syndicates in the Barcaldine and Isaac local government region. These local councils are coordinating the control program and managing administrative details of the project.

These councils are all committee members of the Burdekin Dry Tropics Regional Pest Management Group (RPMG) established in 2008 to strengthen broad-scale, collaborative pest management practices. The RPMG is coordinated by NQ Dry Tropics and is currently chaired by Biosecurity Queensland.

Effective management of feral pigs requires collective and collaborative stakeholder planning and implementation.

The application and benefits of syndicate-based approaches to feral pig management have been demonstrated by Whitsundays Regional Council and is supported and recommended at a national level by the National Feral Pig Action Plan. In this project, landholders are being encouraged to come together to form syndicates (or cluster groups) in three areas.

Workshops have been held for land managers, covering topics including:

- damage caused to agriculture and the environment by feral pigs,
- the importance and benefits of undertaking collaborative action across the landscape;
- practical monitoring that can be done by landholders (e.g. identifying feral pig rooting near waterways; tracking the costs of infrastructure damage and repair; reporting feral pig activities to the group);
- determining the appropriate timing of control operations across members of the syndicate; and
- why long-term commitment to the program by land holders is necessary.

Each syndicate guides where and when the aerial control operations (funded by the project) will take place in their area, along with providing permissions from all landholders to enable the aerial control work to be conducted across a large area.

Across two years of the project, four three-day aerial programs will be conducted across an area of 750,000ha. The number and locations of feral pigs culled, along with data for any other pest species removed during the operations, are recorded and reported to the syndicate.

A total of 800 feral pigs and 26 wild dogs were removed from the landscape from the first cull. It is important to note that this cull was conducted under challenging environmental conditions, with feral pigs spread across the landscape due to the wet conditions.

Once the final aerial cull has been conducted, a final round of workshops will be conducted to evaluate the success, reinforce the benefits of the program, and secure support for the ongoing commitment of the landholders to participate in the syndicates. This is needed to establish a legacy that will continue past the completion of the Project.

For more information about the project contact:

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