

September 2023

Feral pig management

Management principles and control techniques

Feral pigs pose a significant biosecurity risk, spreading disease, parasites and negatively impacting agricultural production and the environment.

Control is most effective if applied when environmental conditions cause resource stress, such as when there is lack of food, water or shelter for feral pigs.

Large ongoing coordinated, broadscale and integrated management programs provide the best means of managing feral pig populations.

Feral pigs breed rapidly and populations can increase quickly after control programs. To keep numbers low, control programs should aim to remove at least 70% of the population each year.

Baiting and aerial shooting are the best control options to manage large populations of feral pigs. These techniques can be supported by trapping and ground shooting.

Control options

Baiting

Effective free feeding prior to baiting is essential to enable successful control.

Sodium fluoroacetate (1080)

Baiting feral pigs with 1080 is a cost efficient and effective way to control feral pigs and is particularly useful for reducing large populations.

1080 is a restricted chemical product. Private landholders can access 1080 bait products from a Local Land Services Authorised Control Officer.

Sodium nitrite (Hoggone®)

Hoggone® meSN is a commercially produced feral pig bait containing micro-encapsulated sodium nitrite as its active ingredient. Hoggone® is a Schedule 6 poison and is available through rural retailers in NSW. It is supplied as a peanut-based paste in a foil tray and must be used in a pig-specific feeder.

As with 1080 baiting and trapping, effective free feeding is essential for effective baiting with Hoggone.

Shooting

Aerial shooting

Shooting feral pigs from helicopters can be a very effective method for achieving an initial population knockdown or can be used as a follow-up control method after baiting. Aerial shooting is species-specific and can be used in areas that are inaccessible from the ground or when pigs are heavily concentrated due to drought or flood.

Aerial shooting can be expensive over a short period of time; however, due to the rapid population reduction it can achieve, it can often be a very financially and temporally efficient control method.

Aerial shooting is most effective in reducing feral pig populations following baiting programs (where accessible) and when feral pig densities are low enough (through seasonal conditions or baiting) that 1000 hectares can be covered in 2-3 hours of aircraft time. To further reduce populations and prevent regrowth of feral pig populations, follow-up aerial shooting programs are recommended within four months.

Aerial shooting can be a valuable tool for controlling feral pigs in tall standing crops and when feed sources are plentiful and therefore baiting is less effective.

Like most control methods, it is important to have coordination and cooperation across land tenure boundaries to increase effectiveness.

In NSW, aerial shooting is undertaken by both private contractors (who hold necessary CASA and firearms endorsements) and the NSW Government. NSW Government shooters are a part of the Feral Animal Aerial Shooting Team (FAAST) which is made up of National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and LLS staff. FAAST shooting is carried out under strict controls and procedures.

Ground shooting

Ground shooting should not be conducted prior to, or during, any other program of control, as it disrupts normal feral pig activity and may cause feral pigs to break into smaller groups and move to other areas.

Ground shooting and recreational hunting is a less effective technique for feral pig control, especially in areas of high feral pig populations.

Shooting feral pigs from the ground is a method normally used opportunistically to follow up and maintain low numbers after a primary control program such as baiting and aerial shooting has occurred.

Ground shooting is often conducted using dogs to locate feral pigs. Hunters must ensure both the dogs and the pigs are treated in a humane manner.

Trapping

Trapping of feral pigs is an effective technique to use:

- as a follow-up after an initial knockdown of a population using baiting or aerial shooting
- as an ongoing maintenance technique to prevent numbers from building back up
- where baiting cannot be undertaken due to risk to non-target animals or distance requirements.

Trapping is flexible, as most traps can be easily moved to where pig activity is current, such as:

- at watering points
- where pigs are moving regularly, e.g., under a hole in a fence, near a water source, into a crop or other feeding area.

As with baiting, to be effective traps must use free feeding in the trap until all the pigs in the area are entering the trap. This means that the door mechanism needs to be disarmed and pigs are free to enter and exit the trap.

Free feeding prior to trapping is essential to enable successful control.

Some patience is required as wary pigs or new additions to a group may take 10-14 days to enter the trap.

Traps should always be sited in a location where they can be partially shaded because of pigs' poor ability to dissipate body heat.

Fencing

Fencing is sometimes used to protect valuable crops or environmental assets. Effective pig-proof fences have been designed but need to be thoroughly maintained to sustain their effectiveness.

More information

NSW

NSW Vertebrate Pesticide Manual:

<https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/biosecurity/vertebrate-pests/publications/nsw-vertebrate-pesticide-manual>

NSW Code of Practice and Standard Operating procedures for the Effective and Humane Management of Feral Pigs:

https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/1394648/Code-of-Practice-and-Standard-Operating-Procedures-for-the-Effective-and-Humane-Management-of-feral-pigs.pdf

Local Land Services feral pig advice:

<https://www.lls.nsw.gov.au/help-and-advice/pests,-weeds-and-diseases/pest-control/pest-species-control/feral-pigs>

Regional Strategic Pest Animal Management Plans:

<https://www.lls.nsw.gov.au/help-and-advice/pests,-weeds-and-diseases/pest-control/pest-species-control>

National

PestSMART:

<https://pestsmart.org.au/>

National Feral Pig Action Plan:

<https://feralpigs.com.au/>

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