



# The Cape York Weeds and Feral Animals Project

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NEWSLETTER

WET 2003

## Dry Weather Creates Pig Control Opportunity



**Rutland Plains Station**, on the western side of Cape York Peninsula, recently completed an integrated control program to greatly reduce feral pig numbers on about 350 square kilometres of the western marine plains section of the property.

Mr Alexander McDonald, owner of Rutland Plains, sought the assistance of the Cape York Weeds and Feral Animals Project to aerial shoot 3,700 pigs in May 2002. This was then followed up with another aerial shoot in October 2002, together with 1080 baiting to clean up the remaining population.

"It was an excellent campaign," Mr McDonald said. "It eradicated 95% of the feral pigs in the control area."

The control area covered a marine plain which had the highest density of feral pigs on the property.

"Usually the wetlands are totally rooted-up by May, but this year because of the aerial shoot, the pastures remained good until October. The extra shoot and baiting later in the year took advantage of the dry season when the animals congregated near water and this greatly helped in being able to clean up the remaining few," Mr McDonald explained.

"We suffered no non-target damage from the shooting or the baiting and can certainly recommend this method of control to other landholders who want to significantly reduce pig numbers quickly," he said.

Mr Jamie Molyneaux, Feral Animals Officer with the Cape York Weeds and Feral Animals Project, said that the control program on Rutland Plains was part of an integrated approach to pest management. "The program took advantage of seasonally dry conditions to reduce pig numbers to very low levels by following up an aerial shooting campaign with a baiting program," he said. "The extended dry period has concentrated the feral pigs around the remaining water points resulting in more efficient bait uptake and a much more effective program".

"The significant reduction in pig numbers is not only good for station management because waters remain clean, but is also good news for the environment because predation of native animals and disturbance to fauna habitat is greatly reduced," Mr Molyneaux said.

The Department of Natural Resources' Land Protection Officer for CYP, Shaun Seymour, undertook a survey to determine off-target bait up-take during the control campaign on Rutland Plain. He reported no evidence of damage to any native wildlife.

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Mr Molyneaux encouraged other landholders to consider the success of this campaign and carry out similar programs on their properties.

Project Manager for the Cape York Weeds and Feral Animals Project, Peter James, said assistance and advice on weed and feral animal control was provided through the CYWAFAP to all landholders on the Cape.

**Any landholders who wish to take advantage of the services provided by the Project should contact the Project Office in Cooktown on 40695020.**

## Hopevale Pest Management Plan

After several meetings, weed mapping, sausage sizzles and much discussion with local residents of the DoGIT, the Draft Hopevale Council Pest Management Plan is ready for presentation to the Hopevale Council. As soon as the Council accept the Draft Plan it will be circulated to interested stakeholders, along with a short feedback questionnaire. CYWAFAP staff – Marty and Clive – will visit key stakeholders and seek their comments on the Draft Plan.

**A big thanks to Di Ward for facilitating the process and our other staff for their involvement – Peter, Marty, Clive and Russell.**

# A Note from our Project Manager

**Chair of CYPAC:** Readers may know that Robin Maxwell, the Chair of CYPAC, has taken up a position with the Torres Strait Regional Authority on Thursday Island. While Robin would like to remain in the position of Chair, her workload may prohibit her from doing so. Robin will advise us when she makes her decision. Robin is currently on leave until January 14, 2003.

**Funding for CYWAFAP:** The initial Cape York Weeds and Feral Animals Project commenced in 1998 and concluded in August 2002. We have been successful in obtaining part (\$650,000) of one funding (total \$1,984,700) for a second project. The funding already acquired will enable us to further our goals in the areas of community capacity building and empowering local landholders to be self-sustaining in pest management matters. This will involve a stronger emphasis on developing pest management plans with all landholders on the Cape.

The remaining funding for the second project (\$1,334,700) is still required to fulfil all the objectives of our second project application which was outlined in the last newsletter. The CYPAC Chair and myself have had deputations and written extensively to the relevant State Minister, Stephen Robertson, and the Commonwealth Minister for the Environment, David Kemp. The outcomes from these meetings and communiqués were that, if we were able to satisfy two conditions, we would receive the remainder of the funding. The two conditions were a) a greater in-kind or cash

contribution from the State Government agencies for pest management in the Cape, and b) assurances that there would be an on-going project, albeit in some modified form, post-September 2003 when the second project is due for completion.

The most recent advice from Minister Kemp was that, while he believed the project is worthwhile, he required more information of the State's contribution to pest management on the Cape. This information has now been supplied to Minister Kemp's office. So we remain hopeful of the full year's funding becoming available. Any protracted delay in the approval of the additional requested funds will have a profound impact on the effectiveness of the project as we have set an ambitious schedule to achieve the project objectives by September 2003. Should we not hear anything definitive on the funding by early in the New Year there will have to be some serious decisions made on staffing and what projects have priority for implementation?

**Training for indigenous land management staff:** This topic has been a contentious and frustrating one for many communities on the Cape who need both formal and informal training for their ranger staff. The subject was again discussed at the workshop for Indigenous Land & Sea Management on Cape York Peninsula held in Cairns 21-22 October, 2002. Although CYWAFAP can only contribute partially to the training needed and has done so in the past for some communities, one outcome from the workshop was that the CYWAFAP

Feral Animals Officer, Jamie Molyneaux, initiated some informal training with Aurukun and Old Mapoon. More "informal" training will be provided in 2003.

Ron Billyard, Land and Sea Management Coordinator for Aurukun sub-region, was happy with the outcome. He wrote:

*"We were really pleased with Jamie Molyneaux's work with our Rangers this week. He worked extremely well with them and although we didn't have great success in pig capture, the Rangers learnt a great deal. This has set our staff up to continue on their own country, and is just what we required in the way of training delivery. Please give Jamie a pat on the back for this. I discussed with Jamie the possibility of further training in feral animal population counts, other control methods, and weed mapping late in the Wet Season, and will talk more to you about this in the New Year."*

**Next Meeting of CYPAC:** Due to the uncertainty with funding, we have held off having a meeting a CYPAC meeting for some months. However, a tentative date has now been set for the meeting - Thursday 20th February, 2003 in Cairns.

**The Technical Support & Stakeholder Liaison Officer:** This position was advertised and three people interviewed. Cathy Waldron was successful in obtaining the position. We will provide a profile of Cathy in the next newsletter.

**Happy New Year to all. Peter James, Project Manager, CYWAFAP.**

## Weed Control Work over the past 6 months and into the New Year

During the last 6 months the eastern crew have been concentrating on some of the woody weeds, namely Pond Apple and Bauhinia. Control on Bauhinia is on-going in the Endeavour Valley area with assistance from landholders in the form of their time to assist in the spraying and/or by supplying diesel. Pond Apple along the Annan River continues to be targeted, together with follow-up work on Thunbergia in Cooktown and Ayton.

Mapping the distribution of Hymenachne in waterways has been intensified, as control measures need to be instigated before the plant spreads further.

In early 2003, the crew will be concentrating on roadside spraying of Sicklepod from Wujul Wujul to the north of Starecke.

## Spotlight on Sicklepod – control period fast approaching Best practice sicklepod control in CYP

1. **Prevent seed production by spraying from early seedling stage until well before flowering. Spray with Grazon (a selective herbicide which still allows grass to regenerate and recapture the treated site) early in the growing season (at seedling stage or young plants to 30 cm tall) for easier control. The CYWAFAP uses Grazon DS (Picloram and Triclopyr) at 1:500 water + wetting agent with, generally, Agral as the wetting agent. Follow-up to ensure no seeding for up to 10 years as seed may remain viable in the soil for this long.**
2. **Maintain sound pasture management practices to outcompete sicklepod seedlings, or introduce a crop to the area.**
3. **If sicklepod is mature, slash with blunt blades to reduce plants to a manageable size when plants are flowering, and follow up with spraying.**
4. **Ensure Sicklepod infestation on roadsides are controlled to prevent further spread.**



# A Case Study in Feral Pig Control – Rutland Plains

**By Jamie Molyneaux Feral Animals Officer Cape York Weeds and Feral Animals Project**

## Background

Rutland Plains station is located on the western side of Cape York Peninsula approximately 5 hours drive west from Mareeba. It is 263,046 hectares, and has the Nassau River on the southern boundary, Topsy Creek on the northern boundary and the Mitchell River on the western boundary.

The topography of the station consists of coastal marine plains with sand ridges on the western side giving way to open forests with more heavily timbered country through to the eastern boundary. The station has many swamps and natural watercourses running throughout, and also benefits from several artesian bores that supply water to the 20,000 Brahman cross cattle that are currently running there.

The watercourses and swamps on the marine plain at Rutland, together with the high average rainfall of the area, make this an ideal environment for feral pigs to breed successfully for most of the year.

Feral pig numbers have been consistently high over the years within this area and are a major concern to the landholder, not only due to the damage that they cause within the swamps and associated watercourses, but also the risk of disease that feral pigs have the ability to carry and spread.

With the aim of reducing pig numbers from within this area to a manageable level, CYWAFAP staff recently conducted a 1080 baiting campaign in a 350 sq km portion of marine plain and coastal sand ridge country on the north western side of Rutland Plains. This area was deemed by the landholder to be some of his most important land on Rutland, not only for cattle production but also for its environmental values.

In May this 2002, CYWAFAP staff, assisted by Northern Australian Quarantine Service, conducted an aerial shooting campaign on feral pigs in the same area (reported in our last newsletter). In just 3 days 3700 pigs were shot and pig numbers in the target area reduced by 68% of the overall population that were living on the marine plain.

## Methodology

The 1080 campaign started with the calibration of the plane to be used in the aerial survey of the target area to establish feral pig numbers remaining. Staff members then carried out a ground survey on the remaining waters in the target area to see if photo points could be set up to monitor feral pig activity, as well as assess pig numbers and condition over time. Only 4 pigs were sighted on this trip with signs around the troughs minimal due to the number of cattle that were watering there. The landholder suggested that there were in excess of 500 pigs remaining within the survey area.

The following morning at 6.30 am the first survey was flown using a Cessna 182 aircraft

supplied and flown by the landholder, with CYWAFAP staff members counting and recording feral pig sightings.

The transects were flown at a height of 300 feet and at a speed of 100 knots. Each one was 400 meters wide giving an overall sample rate of 24.6% of the total area selected.

A total of 34 pigs were seen during the first survey with the majority sighted near watering points.

Although this indicated a low number of pigs living within the area, the landholder assured CYWAFAP staff that a large number of pigs would be using the sand ridges for cover, coming out only to drink at the water points when they had to. It was very dry at Rutland during the exercise - no surface water remained on the marine plains.

After consultation with the landholder, CYWAFAP staff decided to bait 5 water points within the designated control area and 3 water points outside the area to stop potential reinvasion by pigs after the initial baiting had occurred.

CYWAFAP staff then injected 1250 kg of bait (meat from feral cattle) at pig strength (36mg/ml) and then distributed 450kg of bait around the selected watering points. The remaining bait was used by the landholder to bait in areas not covered by the control program.

**Water points that were baited for pig were as follows:**

- Coastal Springs 120 kg
- Ralph's Tank 120 kg
- Rankin's Well 30 kg
- Johnson's Bore 30 kg
- Nundah Dam 60 kg
- Blueys Tank 30kg
- Swan Hole 60 kg
- Diamond D bore 60 kg

Baiting densities around the watering points were decided after considering several factors: results from the aerial survey, landholder knowledge and talking to other property employees.

After the initial baiting was carried out, the sites were monitored for bait uptake, target species (dead or alive) and signs of secondary poisoning of non-target species. The baiting sites were checked at approximately the same time each day and any pigs that were seen were destroyed.

The amount of cattle that gathered around the water troughs during the day made reading pig signs difficult to say the least.

## Baiting Results

The morning after the initial baiting was carried out, the Project Supervisor was invited to accompany a station employee during a routine check of water points. This was carried out by helicopter due to the distances involved.

While on this flight, 6 dead pigs were noted around waters as well as 1 mob of 11 pigs at

Blueys Tank that were suffering the effects of 1080 poisoning. These effects included hyper-excitability and muscle spasms. All of these pigs were immediately destroyed. No sightings were made of live pigs during this flight.

A feral pig that died of 1080 poisoning was found 500 meters from where the baits were laid.

Five days after the initial survey and baiting a second aerial survey was carried out to assess pig numbers that remained within the control area. Only 1 pig was sighted during the flight and, being outside the transect width, could not be recorded.

Bait uptake was 100% around all sites except for Nundah Dam where around 40% of baits remained 5 days after the initial baiting. This showed that predation of the baits by non-target species was minimal in this area.

Numerous other sites that were baited by the landholder also showed good results with dead pigs noted around the waters of all sites. Bait uptake was also very good in these areas, with baits still active 4 days after being laid.

Employees that were working within the target area noted a large drop in pig sightings around water points where baits were laid. Where they would usually see in excess of 20 pigs per water point the station staff were reporting seeing only 1 or 2 pigs per water point.

Of particular note was the absence of pig tracks along the beach after the baiting had occurred. This indicated that pig numbers had declined substantially within the area and hopefully this will ease the pressure on turtle nesting sites.

## Recommendations

The use of 1080 for feral pigs is recommended by Cape York Weeds and Feral Animal Project as a low cost control method that gives excellent results when used correctly.

It is recommended that baits be laid as late in the day as possible to avoid possible primary poisoning of non-target species. As pigs are more active at night than during the day, bait uptake will increase over the first night with reduced chances of secondary poisoning.

High overall reductions in pig numbers can be achieved when feral pigs are congregated around watering points in the latter stages of the dry season. Bait uptake is higher at this time of year due to limited food opportunities for the pigs as watercourses and swamps dry up.

The use of 1080 is promoted to all Cape York land managers as an effective tool in feral animal control with possibilities for further reductions in pig numbers in areas of high conservation, such as turtle nesting sites with a co-ordinated baiting strategy in place.

**Cape York Weeds and Feral Animal Project continues to recommend integrated pest management for landholders who have feral animal problems within their land tenures.**

# Game Meat Processing Facility in CYP a goer?



*Preparing a pig for the pig box.*

The Cape York Weeds and Feral Animals project has now received the Draft Feasibility Study on a Game Meat Processing Facility for Cape York Peninsula from the Consultants for the Study – AEC group of Townsville/Brisbane. The report, titled Game Meat Processing Facility Feasibility Study, was presented to the Cape York Peninsula Pest Advisory Committee (CYPPAC) sub-committee recently. The CYPPAC sub-committee made some recommendations for changes and/or clarification and the consultant will now address these matters and finalise the report.

The report concludes that the commercial harvest and processing of feral pigs on Cape York into table ready wild boar meat would be a viable commercial enterprise within certain constraints.

The final report and how its findings can be progressed will be a topic for discussion at the next full CYPPAC meeting early in 2003.

Some interesting details of the draft report include:

- The processing facility examined in the report would have a maximum daily processing capacity of up to 700 pigs. This number would be supplied by 6 trapping teams.
- The harvest process is expected to yield approximately 57,000 carcasses per year for processing, and 1,460 tonnes of processed meat for export annually.

- The processing operation involves the cleaning and inspection of the carcass followed by the boning and butchering of the carcass into table-ready portions which are transported to port for export.
- The plant would require a labour pool of approximately 72 persons at peak production times.
- Critical infrastructure and other requirements for the processing facility include sufficient quantities of good quality water, three-phase power, the supply of skilled labour, and sufficient transport infrastructure links.
- The financial analysis indicates a return on owners' equity of between 28% and 42% during operation.
- The operation of the processing plant in the Far North Region will provide an annual economic impact to the regional economy of:
  - \$11.2 million gross output;
  - \$1.6 million in wages and salaries;
  - 59 full-time-equivalent employment positions and
  - \$4.4 million value added (gross regional product).

## Draft Cook Shire Pest Management Plan



**The Draft Cook Shire Pest Management Plan, November 2002, was approved for release for public consultation by Council at its November 2002 meeting. The**

**consultation period is 30 days.**

The Draft Plan was developed after 4 days of workshops involving Councillors, Council staff and interested community members. Strategies for best management of all pests were revised in the light of solid local experience over the past 5 years. The enormous increase in community awareness of the full range of pests over recent years was recognized, and suitable strategies to further develop community capacity for pest management were considered and included in the new draft strategy.

Please encourage your neighbours and other stakeholders to get a copy of the draft from Council or the CYWAFAP office and provide constructive input on the plan to Council - plans are only as good as the collective wisdom of ALL stakeholders providing their input. All landholders are bound to comply with the Final Pest Management Plan, so please have your say!

The first Cook Shire Pest Management Plan was developed in 1997 and became the direction for CYWAFAP's work in Cook Shire. In 2000, a stakeholder review of the 1997 plan was undertaken and the plan was updated to reflect work undertaken and a greater knowledge of the distribution and abundance of weeds and feral animals throughout the Shire. By late 2002, it was clear that a major revision of the original plan was required. Such a review accords with the requirements of the soon-to-be-proclaimed Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002 which states that local government pest management plans should have effect for no longer than 4 years before a renewed plan is commenced. The new Act will replace the current Rural Lands Protection Act (1985).

## Weed control in your own paddock

Some things to think about concerning your WEED CONTROL activities with the approaching WET

- Review your property pest management plan, if you don't have one and would like to develop one, please contact the CYWAFAP for assistance – review what you did last year;
- Develop priorities and timetable for active control programs immediately following the wet season – best time to apply herbicides is when plants are actively growing, not drooping and water stressed;
- Determine what resources will be required this season, ie people and equipment;
- Check spraying equipment to ensure that it is in good working order;
- Order herbicide – don't leave it to the last minute and find it's out of stock!;
- Survey your property for possible new areas of pest plant invasion. Has there been any new produce/stock purchased for the property (chook feed, hay or stock feeds which may have been contaminated with weed seeds), disturbed areas created, or vehicles which have come onto or moved cross-country since the last wet?
- Learn to identify pest plants described in the Cook Shire's Pest Management Plan that are in need of control, eg Parthenium Weed and Sicklepod – Identification books are available and Pestfacts which include control options can be obtained from the CYWAFAP office;
- **For assistance with any pest plant or pest animal control issues, please call the Cape York Weeds and Feral Animals Project on 4069 5020.**