

Kangaroo Island Feral Pig Eradication – An Update

Feral Pigs on KI

Feral pigs on KI cause severe impacts to primary producers through damage to pastures, fences, grain, and potato crops as well as killing and eating lambs. In the period between 2015-17, feral pigs cost KI farmers an estimated \$1.16 million.

Feral pigs also kill and eat native wildlife and plants, damage natural habitats and spread weeds and muddy streams. They are vectors of diseases that impact livestock and native wildlife and spread the root-rot fungus *Phytophthora*.

The 2019-20 bushfires burned most of the best feral pig habitat. The feral pig population pre-bushfire was estimated to be around 5,000 and was dramatically reduced by the fire.

The KI Feral Pig Eradication project was funded to take advantage of this one silver lining of the fires. The program is a collaboration between PIRSA, Kangaroo Island Landscape Board and KI National Parks and Wildlife Service working together with the KI community, including AgKI, Livestock SA, KI Plantation Timbers and KI Council.

The KI Feral Pig Eradication

Starting in September of 2021, the KI Feral Pig Eradication Program is now well into it's first year. So far, the program has culled over 350 pigs, building on earlier post-fire pig control carried out by the KI Landscape Board.

Control Tools

A range of modern technology is being used to eradicate feral pigs. All baiting to date has used the HOGGONE® Sodium Nitrite bait, no 1080 has been used as a part of the feral pig eradication. This recently developed bait is more humane, killing pigs quickly and efficiently. The bait is delivered in a bait box which excludes non-target animals, reducing risk to stock and wildlife, and is a Schedule 6 poison, making it easier and safer to use. To date the KI feral pig eradication has not had a single off-target death.



Feral pigs access bait in the Bait Boxes by lifting the heavy lids with their snouts (left), while a curious possum is excluded from accessing the bait by the design of the bait box (right)

The program is also utilising state-of-the-art satellite camera operated pig traps, allowing trap operators to see every animal that enters the trap, and remotely trigger the trap mechanism when feral pigs enter the trap. This technology eliminates the risk of traps being triggered by stock or wildlife.



Satellite remote control camera traps send text message photos to ground staff, who can text the camera to shut immediately if the camera has detected a mob of pigs (left), or to keep the trap open if it is set off by stock or wildlife (right).

Thermal Assisted Aerial Culling – March Trial

In March of 2021, the first ever Thermal Assisted Aerial Cull (TAAC) in Australia was conducted on Kangaroo Island, as part of the feral pig eradication project. The tender for the operation was secured by specialist thermal surveying company HeliSurveys.

TAAC uses military grade thermal cameras to scan the landscape for feral pigs, so that pigs can easily be seen at long distances, and through dense vegetation.

The flight team flew 36 hours over most of Flinders Chase and the Ravine des Casoars Wilderness Area, with KI Landscape Board marksman Brenton Florance. 126 pigs were destroyed, with only a few escapes. Over 99% of the feral pigs seen in the dense recovering scrub were spotted using the thermal camera, compared with just 1% spotted with the naked eye.



The HeliSurveys Thermal Assisted Aerial Cull (TAAC) team, with pilot, thermal camera operator and marksman (Brenton Florance) (left). Over 36 hours of flight time they covered most of the parks of the west end (Red lines on map, right).



Spot the pig. Thermal technology means feral pigs stand out, increasing the number of pigs seen and controlled on a flight. Same image with thermal (left) and standard camera (right), with a pig in the centre of the image.

Winter 2021 Thermal Aerial Assisted Cull

After the success of the March trial, PIRSA is now in the process of procuring further \$600,000 of TAAC services for an expanded aerial cull over western KI this coming winter. We expect this operation to fly over 200 hours over 2+ months.

We are aiming for this cull to fly over both parks and private lands. Logistically this will be much more difficult, as we will require permission from each private landholder across the western end of KI to cull on their property.

If you are a landholder on the western end of the Island, expect to be contacted in the coming months by the KI Feral Pig Eradication team seeking permission for aerial culling of feral pigs over your property.

Funders

The KI Feral Pig Eradication is funded by the South Australian and Australian Government Disaster Rebuilding and Resilience Program.

Further information

- Visit PIRSA website https://pir.sa.gov.au/biosecurity/introduced-pest-feral-animals/find_a_pest_animal/pigs/feral_pig_eradication_program_on_kangaroo_island
- If you would like to use any of the control tools mentioned here, or would like to report feral pig sightings, contact Matt Korcz, Kangaroo Island Feral Pig Coordinator, 08 8429 3560 or 0438 117 513 or email: Matt.Korcz@sa.gov.au