

PROFESSIONAL WILD DOG CONTROLLER PROGRAM

Newsletter



The Professional Wild Dog Controller Program is going from strength to strength. We have now removed more than 170 problem dogs, and have three Professional Controllers working across the Upper Hunter to support landholders in the removal of problem wild dogs.

The drought is unfortunately continuing to impact all communities across the district; however, dry weather can be an opportune time to target wild dogs as they take more risks to access depleting food and water supplies. As a result of the ongoing drought, fees to access the services of the Professional Controllers has again been waived for this financial year.

Our Controllers are available to undertake strategic and reactive programs. We are finding more and more that strategic programs are paying dividends, as we work - not just with local farmers, but some of the large landholders and public land managers in the district too - to target known hotspots.

If you think your property would suit a strategic program or you need to report wild dog sightings or stock losses, please contact Richard Ali or Jonathan Randle, your local Hunter Local Land Services Biosecurity Officers.

The more we work together, the more knock-down and positive impacts we will see on wild dog populations across the Upper Hunter. Thanks to the program's sponsors Australian Wool Innovation, Glencore, Bengalla, Yancoal, Forestry Corporation, National Parks and Wildlife Services, and FeralScan - without whom the program would not have the impacts and outcomes it is achieving for local farmers. To all of our producers and participants, we know it's been a really rough trot with the weather and a tough winter - hopefully things will be on the up soon.

Professional Controller Profile



Tim Booth grew up trapping pest animals at home in the New England region, but never thought it would become his career.

“It was something we always did for fun, and I had a real passion for it, and as I got older I started learning from a few local trappers how to do it properly, and all the different styles of trapping,” said Tim.

“There was a farmer near home who was losing a lot of sheep, so I started doing some shooting and trapping for him, and then from there I started helping out a few more farmers and realised that this is something I could actually do. Then it became my main way of helping my community locally.”

Tim has now been working as a Professional Controller full time, for six years.

“I have a mix of trapping styles and shooting, and I am a part-time member of the Australian Defence Force, so I am familiar with using night optics too, which are a really great tool that help with the amount of time we spend on ground.”

Tim has just completed his third winter with the Professional Wild Dog Controller Program in the Upper Hunter.

“It’s such a good program and I am proud to be part of it, such a great area to work in a wonderful community,” said Tim.

“100 per cent, it’s a fantastic way to deliver services, as it’s making a real difference for the farmers, but also so many agencies and industries working together is really important.

“I would hate to see how many more dog attacks there would have been during this drought if some of those really tough dogs were still getting about.”

Tim recognises there are still plenty more out there.

“It’s essential for the security of the local sheep and cattle industry that this program continues, as it is having a real knock-down on dog populations, although there are still some really old knowledgeable dogs that are proving hard to get,” said Tim.

“There’s one I am chasing in Brumlo, I really want to get him and am determined to keep tracking him!

“We are getting some significant dogs that we have chased for a long time and that’s a really good feeling—normally the killer dogs are harder to catch because they sneak around, but using the thermals, we are getting a few and that feels like a big win.”

Tim works on both reactive and strategic programs across the Upper Hunter, and has signed a full-time contract extension with the PWDC Program for the next 12 months.

Producer's perspective

Brian Hunt and his family know all too well the devastation of losing stock to wild dog attacks.

"For years, we never had a problem, then over the last 13 or so years we have been really badly affected by dog attacks," said Brian.

Last year, the Hunts participated in two strategic 10 day programs with Professional Controller Tim Booth.

Tim removed five dogs over the two programs, an outcome that Brian was overjoyed with.

"He's not just a top fella, Tim is a really good dog man and it was a wonderful result, and I think it's had a really good impact in our area."

This winter, Brian lost three lambs over a three week period.

Upper Hunter Biosecurity Officer Jonathan Randle waited out overnight for the dog and shot it when it came looking for more lambs.

"You know that last dog, he is still hanging on our gate, and I can't thank the team enough – 20 out of 10 is not a high enough score for what they have done, getting rid of those dogs," said Brian.

Brian is warning against complacency and encouraging more producers and property owners to get involved.

"There are plenty of active wild dog committee members in our area, but also lots of people who don't understand the impact wild dogs can have - it's important we all work together," said Brian.

"Based on sightings, they reckon our part of the valley up here near Murrurundi is the heaviest infected area in the Upper Hunter, so I think the effort needs to be maintained because we haven't eliminated the problem yet, there's still more work to do.

"But I can't thank Jonathan, Richard and Tim enough for what they have done. I don't think there's anyone about that could have done a better job for us, and we are very grateful for their ongoing work to get rid of these problem dogs."

Hunter LLS and AWI partner to fund four freezers for the PWDC Program area

Hunter LLS has partnered with AWI to purchase four 700 litre chest freezers to be seeded throughout the PWDC Program area so that local wild dog associations can retain any cull red meat though the year for utilisation as bait material for upcoming group baiting programs.

Underpinning the PWDC Program's success in the Upper Hunter region is the coordinated, large scale, aerial and ground baiting programs undertaken in both autumn and spring.

This large scale effort is best evidenced by the recent autumn program coordinated by Hunter LLS staff. This program saw a combined aerial and ground total of 43,650 baits laid on 620 holdings.

The autumn timing is designed to target a period where wild dogs are most susceptible to taking a bait. Adult dogs looking to mate are travelling further than they might usually, therefore, are vulnerable to a bait as a food source, and young, recently dispersed pups have not yet honed their hunting skills, so are quite likely to take a bait.

The PWDC Program results to date reflect the benefits of this targeted approach, with 85 per cent of the total dogs trapped being older in age, breeding pairs or bitches in pup, confirming the effectiveness of large scale, coordinated baiting on young wild dog populations.

Financial status of the PWDC Program – 2019/20 financial year commencement

Initially, the PWDC Program was designed to scale up on-ground works, from the modest levels being conducted under the predecessor "Funded Trapper Program" in years one and two. Year three was set as the year when our PWDC's were most active in control and a slight plateau in years four and five, post year three knock-down.

To date, the program is tracking exactly on budget for expenditure, with \$130,000 expended in year one and \$195,000 in year two. Projected annual expenditure for year three is \$240,000, with years four and five at \$200,000, respectively.

This strong financial position has allowed us to engage the three current program PWDCs on a three year contract.

These three year contracts provide program surety. Surety that landholders now have three high performing PWDCs to assist them for the next three years of the program, and surety of tenure for the PWDCs outside of the one year contracts they have been offered to date.

This strong financial position was further strengthened in the 2018/19 financial year by extra payments made by National Parks and Wildlife Services and Forestry Corporation. NPWS contributed a further \$50,000 and Forestry another \$10,000, on top of their annual contributions. These further payments were made in recognition of the vital role the PWDC Program is filling in wild dog control in the Upper Hunter.

Landholder PWDC contributions waived for the 2019/20 financial year

The PWDC Steering Committee has made a recommendation that the waiving of financial contributions required to access the PWDC Program be extended to cover the 2019/20 financial year.

In regular instances, the landholder wishing to access the program would commit to paying the PWDC wage for the first day of any 10 day program - this represents a \$500 contribution.

In 2018/19, this contribution was waived due to the substantive financial hardships being experienced by landholders in the Upper Hunter. In light of the ongoing drought, and given there has been little respite, the decision was made to extend this measure to be reconsidered at the beginning of the next financial year.



Yancoal Australia is a committed supporter of the strategic, four year PWDC Program focused on protecting land with high economic or environmental value. As a large landholder in the Central Hunter area, this program offers an opportunity to enhance existing wild dog management undertaken on Yancoal's biodiversity areas by utilising skilled trappers to control problem wild dogs and to participate in the coordination of activities across various tenures. The results, so far, have included the control of 19 wild dogs on Yancoal-owned land and an additional 23 wild dogs on surrounding properties. This is a positive outcome for neighbouring farms and the biodiversity values of the area.

*Jessica Blair, Environmental Advisor
Land Management, Yancoal*



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Contact us

Frank Bragg
Chairman
Hunter Valley Combined
Wild Dog Association
0429 827 479
rossgole2336@gmail.com

Richard Ali
Senior Biosecurity Officer
Hunter Local Land Services
0429 722 944
richard.ali@lls.nsw.gov.au

Jonathan Randle
Biosecurity Officer
Hunter Local Land Services
0429 342 995
jonathan.randle@lls.nsw.gov.au