

PROFESSIONAL WILD DOG CONTROLLER PROGRAM

Newsletter



The Professional Wild Dog Controller Program has two main aims - to help sheep and cattle producers in the Upper Hunter remove problem wild dogs that are attacking their livestock, and by removing wild dogs, help build confidence in the local sheep meat and wool industry to allow graziers to run more productive and profitable farms. The focus of the program is to control problem wild dogs, which are generally older and cause the majority of livestock losses.

The program builds on the foundation of:

- best practice wild dog management plans
- annual ground and aerial baiting programs and
- other control efforts by individual landholders.

The program is a unique partnership between the Hunter Valley Combined Wild Dog Association (HVCWDA) and local sheep and cattle producers in the Upper Hunter providing professional controllers to work with landholders on targeted strategic and reactive control programs. It's been made possible thanks to significant investment from Australian Wool Innovation, Glencore, Bengalla, Yancoal, and agencies including Hunter Local Land Services, National Parks and Wildlife Service and Forestry Corporation. Thanks to the significant financial support, landholders only have to pay 10 per cent of any program conducted on their property, up to a maximum \$500.

49 Problem wild dogs were removed from farms in the Upper Hunter in the first eight months of the Professional Wild Dog Controller Program (PWDCP). The program is worth \$1 million over the first four years and is delivering significant results for the local sheep and cattle industries. This is having direct benefits for local producers, working to grow their businesses and protect their livestock.

Drought conditions have severely impacted the region over the last 18 months, putting both local farmers and their animals under added stress. Removing problem wild dogs from known hotspots in the area assists landholders with their drought management.

This newsletter aims to update the landholders, investors and supporters of the program and will be issued every six months to keep you informed on progress of the program.

Progress so far;

- 3 controllers engaged
- 49 dogs controlled
- 10 properties involved in 10 day active trapping programs
- Three strategic 30 day programs in the Woolooma, Brumlo and Goulburn River areas involving 12 properties

A man wearing a brown cowboy hat, a blue and white plaid shirt, and blue jeans is riding a brown horse through a shallow stream. The horse's tail is splashing water. The background is a lush green landscape with trees and hills.

Controller Profile

It's not an easy job being on the trail of elusive, 'bush smart' problem wild dogs. Some can take years to finally catch, having had devastating impacts on livestock and native species.

The PWDCP has set very high standards for the professional controllers, that they are expected to maintain at all times. Although there were more than 40 applicants, just three controllers were selected to form the initial pool of controllers for landholders to use. They are Brett Aitchison, Ben Johnsen and Jim Booth.

Brett Aitchison specialises in strategic control programs. Brett has been trapping in mountain country in southern New South Wales all his life and is thrilled to be part of the PWDCP, delivering results to Upper Hunter landholders.

"I knew I could bring something different to the program, make an impact and a lot of time the real killer dogs are harder to catch, and that's what I specialise in and I wanted to give myself a challenge," said Brett.

"I think the program is working really well, all the producers I have worked with are happy to be involved, they listen and work with me really well, and I always give them a bit of a hand to identify key areas - like breeding zones, so they know where to bait or set traps in the future.

"The dog attacks really take a toll on these farmers, they have a double whammy being hit with dogs and the drought at the moment and us catching these dogs gives them something to be happy about it."

Brett uses horses and scent dogs and said his different method is part of what makes him successful controlling problem dogs.

"I do it a bit different to everyone else, because the horses, dogs and I move a lot slower it means we can catch a lot of them out," Brett said.

"I definitely think this program is needed because there are a lot of dogs out there that have bred up over many years, and it's a big problem to get on top of, so having us controllers out there constantly catching dogs is making a difference.

Landholder experience

Times are tough in the Upper Hunter as the drought continues across the district, and having wild dogs targeting stock that are already made vulnerable by challenging seasonal conditions has been stressful for local landholders.

Neville Hayne of "Castle Springs" can't recommend the program highly enough. He estimates wild dogs have killed 100 sheep on his property over the last twelve months.

In February Neville took part in a 10 day proactive trapping program. The result was eight wild dogs were removed from his property and adjoining national park.

"I 100 per cent couldn't recommend anything more positive to other producers affected by wild dogs," said Mr Hayne.

"I definitely plan to continue to participate with the program and I would like to assure other producers considering getting involved you will definitely get results if you use the trappers, I think the variety of methods they use really helps outsmart the dogs."

Mr Hayne has continued other control measures since February and has since removed another three wild dogs. He plans to participate in another program with professional controllers in the near future.

Neville's son Ross Hayne is part of the Mt Hungerford Wild Dog Association, he said the program is helping boost morale in the area.

"It's really been beneficial for us personally and our members are reporting really good results and are more positive," said Ross.

"It does need to be an ongoing effort though to really make an impact and keep the numbers down, so hopefully then we can get on top of them."



Wild Dog survey

Hunter Local Land Services has engaged ACIL Allen to complete an economic analysis of the program to determine its success over the initial four year period.

As part of this, they reached out to landholders in the program area, to survey their current experiences with wild dogs and managing livestock in the Upper Hunter.

There has been a strong response to the Upper Hunter wild dog survey with 296 landholders completing the survey online or by post. This means 17 per cent of landholders invited responded which is very good result for a survey of this nature and highlights the importance of wild dogs and interest in their control in the Upper Hunter.

The survey is part of ACIL Allen's independent evaluation of the Professional Wild Dog Control Program commissioned by Hunter Local Land Services. The aim of the evaluation is to establish a baseline that quantifies the impact of wild dogs and the benefits of controlling them in the Upper Hunter.

ACIL Allen will now analyse the survey results to:

- establish a baseline on the impact of wild dogs and how landholders are currently managing them to assist Hunter LLS implement the program
- complete a benefit-cost analysis to estimate benefits to landholders, industry and the community in the Upper Hunter
- develop guidelines on how they survey and benefit-cost analysis can be repeated at the end of the program to demonstrate what has been achieved.

The evaluation is scheduled to be completed by the end of July and the findings will be made available by Hunter Local Land Services soon after.



Hunter Local Land Services Strategic management

Hunter Local Land Services is progressing with new Wild Dog Management plans to cover the whole region. There are three plans for the Upper Hunter district – covering Central, Western and Upper. These have been developed in partnership with local Wild Dog Associations and other stakeholders including landholders, other government agencies, other companies that own offset land such as mining and defence.

The plans form the base for strategic work to be undertaken by professional controllers in the PWDCP. This has been made possible thanks to advice and consultation from the community, using historical data to focus on asset protection for local landholders. The aim is to move ahead of the problem instead of relying on reactive control.

This plan is a direct result of the NRC review into pest animal management in NSW. The plan is now available via <https://hunter.lls.nsw.gov.au/> and identifies priority pest animals and best practice control measures.

How can I take part in the PWDCP?

Contact your local Wild Dog Association or Hunter Local Land Services Biosecurity Officer for advice on your situation. If you are eligible for the Program, you will be provided with an application form. If you are not eligible, you will be offered alternative assistance and advice from a Hunter Local Land Services Biosecurity Officer.

Applications will be assessed by a sub-committee of the Hunter Valley Combined Wild Dog Association, against criteria applied by the Hunter Valley Combined Wild Dog Association.

Hunter Valley
Combined Wild Dog
Association

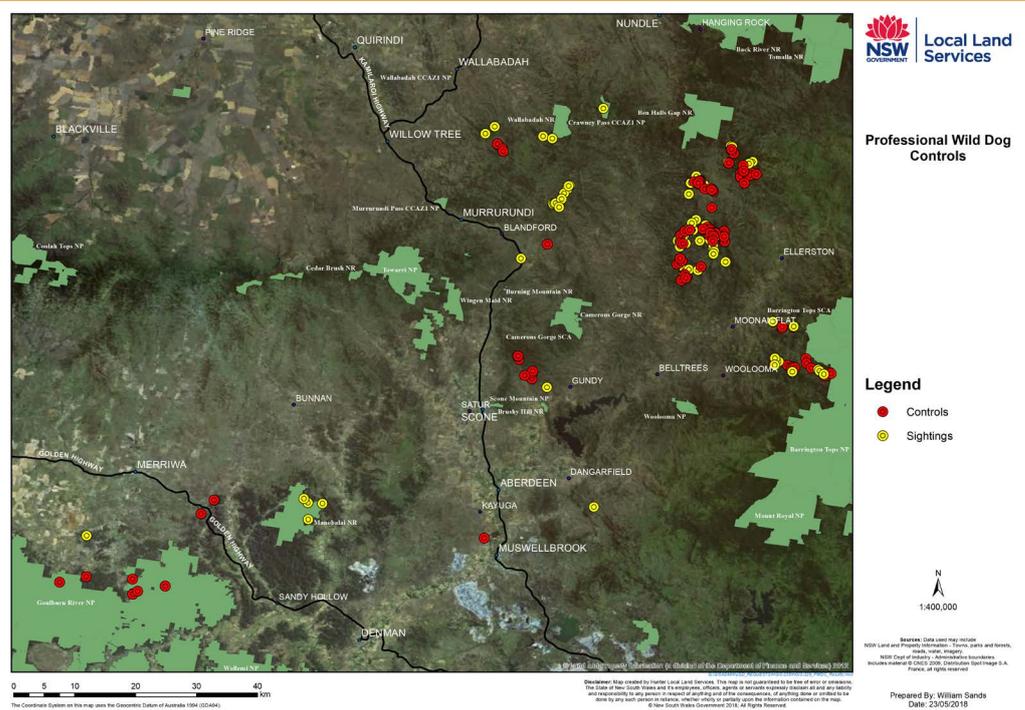
Upper Hunter
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GLENCORE



Wild Dog Controls and sightings



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