



PWDCP PROVING ITS WORTH IN STRONG SEASON FOR UPPER HUNTER PRODUCERS

As the Upper Hunter continues to enjoy both strong seasons and livestock markets on the back of the worst drought on record, the Professional Wild Dog Controller Program is proving its worth to local producers.

In it's fifth year, and now with extra hands on deck, producers continue to reach out to the program for assistance with strategic and reactive control measures to remove problem wild dogs from known hotspots impacting their herds.

Over the last 12 months, another 71 dogs have been removed from key sheep producing areas of the Upper Hunter. The team set 1040 traps over 23 programs, utilising new night-vision technology to track down elusive older dogs that had previously evaded capture.

Hunter Local Land Services Invasive Species Team Leader Luke Booth said the PWDCP has now become an intrinsic part of biosecurity programs for landholders and it has played a crucial role in the re-emergence of the local sheep industry.

“What we’ve seen as the drought ended and producers took stock of their farm business, is a realisation that much of the Upper Hunter is actually better suited to carrying sheep, rather than cattle, so producers have renewed efforts to restock with sheep, even though they were cautious about the dog problem” said Luke.

“Many producers have told us they had actively destocked sheep flocks because dog predation levels were making it untenable, but the drought showed them diversity was important to their business and managing their land according to seasonal conditions.”

“Some cautiously returned to sheep, and have actively engaged with the PWDCP and been pleasantly surprised at how the program has helped reduce dog numbers in their area.”

President of the Hunter Valley Combined Wild Dog Association, Frank Bragg, agrees the program has matured, and it will be crucial to maintain investment in the strategic works for longterm outcomes.

“We’ve come a long way from where we were with dog attacks, and producers are definitely feeling more confident about running sheep as the predation levels are dropping – the predation outcomes are as low now as they were many years ago, which is really good,” said Frank.

“It’s great to hear the positivity in the community towards this program, the success of the PWDCP long term relies on it continuing to be well-resourced, funded and managed so it can continue to deliver such strong results.”

Based on the success so far, the program has been extended beyond the initial five years and is currently fully funded for the next two years.

“We are seeing a new confidence among local producers, which on the back of big prices for stock and a great season, is fantastic,” said Luke.

“The PWDCP is demonstrating its worth to the local industry, and giving producers the faith to expand their flocks, as they know our help is just a phonecall away and we will work with them to find a solution for their problems.”

“The ongoing investment in this program by the corporate sponsors and other government agencies is creating real outcomes on the ground for industry, we’re proud to be part of it and hear such strong testimonials from our producers time and time again about the difference the PWDCP has made to their operation.”

The PWDCP has grown to now include four available Professional Controllers, who assist producers on strategic or reactive programs. Hunter Local Land Services Biosecurity team also work alongside producers to help them eliminate problem dogs from their properties. The PWDCP is just one of the strategies helping to protect sheep in the area. Many producers are actively involved in the annual autumn and spring ground and aerial baiting programs, as well as guardian animal programs that help protect flocks. Exclusion fencing involving netting and the use of electric fences is also proving to be an important management tool.



Frank Bragg and Hunter Local Land Services Biosecurity officer Richard Ali

“Having producers be proactive about pest control and recognising it is a multi-pronged and strategic task is key to our ongoing success as we try to reduce problem dog numbers in the Upper Hunter,” said Luke.

“The PWDCP compliments the onground work of the landholders and other land managers in the area, giving us overall a much better position to eliminate those problem dogs from the known hotspots, and in doing so creating a better environment for the livestock and also other native species that call these valleys home, and are threatened by these predatory dogs.”

Longterm program participant, Brian Hunt of Cougar West near Murrurundi, had another problem dog removed from his property in early November through a strategic program. He estimates more than 60 dogs have been removed from his place since they first appeared and began troubling his sheep in 2006. He says while his family have undertaken a lot of control works themselves, the program has definitely made a difference.

“The support we are getting now, we never ever had before, 5-6 years ago we were getting a lot of attacks, and while we are still not off the hook and can’t afford to stop, what the LLS and trappers have done has been unbelievable for us,” said Brian.

“Without this program, if it hadn’t started when it did, I reckon there would have been a question mark over whether we could have kept running sheep at all, even though we are sheep people and our country really only suits sheep.

“It’s definitely made improvements for us, and I hate to think what the situation would have been like without the program, things would have got so much worse – it’s made a hell of a difference for us, and we are grateful for all the support.”



WAVERLEY BACKING THE WOOL GAME AGAIN

Waverley Station

Gundy

5,700 ha

Currently running 1600 Soft Rolling Skin Merino ewes with lambs at foot

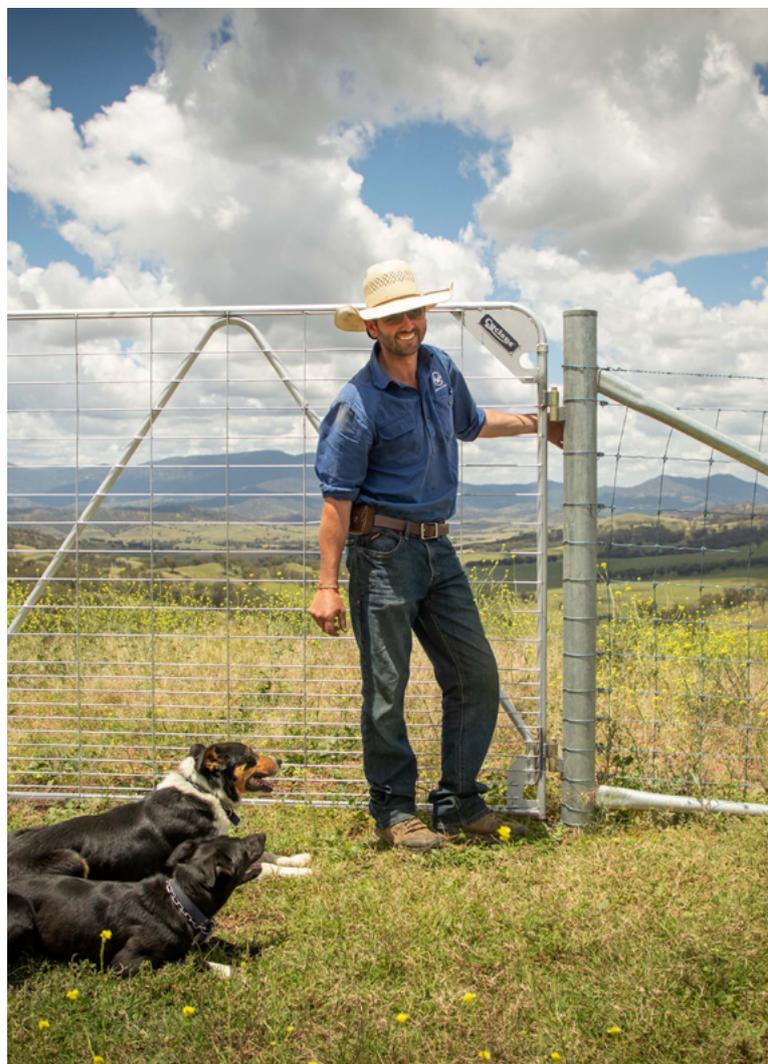
Plan to run 2500 ewes by end of 2022

Installed 11km exclusion fence

Participates in annual ground and aerial baiting programs

Waverley Station is one of the Upper Hunter's premier holdings with a proud history of prime cattle and wool production. About seven years ago, they got out of sheep altogether, as the predation levels on lambs was making it untenable. When the drought hit, it became evident parts of the property was better suited to sheep production and was unable to maintain as many cattle with available feed and water supplies as hoped.

"We got out of sheep because of the dogs," explains Operations Manager Heath Eslick.



“We were marking less than 50 per cent of lambs and losing up to 10-20% of our ewes, it wasn't worth it.”

When the drought hit, it became evident parts of the property were better suited to sheep production and the country was unable to maintain as many cattle with available feed and water supplies as hoped.

“We realised we needed to diversify, to reduce the risk to our business, but also utilise the available feed and water supplies, during what was an incredibly difficult time,” said Heath.

“Even though we didn't have sheep at the time we had kept up with participating in the baiting and trapping programs, so as to help our neighbours out, and we were seeing the impact the ongoing works, plus the strategic work of the Professional Wild Dog Controller Program was having.”

“We worked closely with the team at Hunter Local Land Services to devise a strategic plan for the property and installed an 11km exclusion fence, before we brought sheep back on the place.”

Heath is confident the PWDCP has made big inroads into dog predation in the area.

“We wouldn't have got back into them without the PWDCP and the proactive team at LLS, help is only a phonecall away, and they explore all avenues to eliminate problem dogs.”

“The team is so invested in the program and helping us get a good result, you would think they own the sheep themselves. It's given us the confidence to get back into sheep and build our herd back up.”

Waverley just completed their spring marking, recording a sensational 149% marking rate, and have plans to build the herd up to 2500 soft rolling skin merinos by the end of 2022.

Heath says they have only seen one dog on the place in the 12 months since bringing back the sheep.

“We can definitely vouch for ourselves, and I think my neighbours too, this program works so well because of the strategic planning, and if there is an issue, the team are so quick to act – it's really given us the confidence to build up our numbers again and get back into wool production at Waverley.”





Professional Controller Profile - Matt Beech

The PWDP has secured the services of an additional professional trapper for the new stage of the program.

Matt Beech has been working in pest control professionally for more than 13 years, hailing from north eastern Victoria.

"The terrain around the Upper Hunter is very similar actually to where I am from and have traditionally worked around," said Matt.

"I came up for one of the trapping schools run at Ellerston, and one thing led to another and now I am going to be an active participant in the program."

"I have heard really positive things about the inroads being made by the program and how it's coming together to benefit the local farmers, which is fantastic."

Matt describes his skills as a mix of old and new school, utilising modern technology such as night vision and cameras with traditional trapping methods.

"Sometimes it's hard to show on paper the effort and time, and value of taking out an old tricky dog,

when it's just one dog, but those old hard to catch dogs can do so much more damage than a young dog who doesn't know what it's doing, so it's worthwhile putting the time in to remove those problem dogs from the hierarchy," said Matt.

"A lot of time can be invested into just tracking down that one dog, but for us, as trappers, it can give you more satisfaction than taking out 20 young ones, when you remove those cagey dogs that are the hardest to catch."

Matt says recognising and understanding dog sign is so important to catching them out.

"You have to really learn to use the landscape, and it's so important to do the monitoring, have the cameras and use the technology as it's better to get onto things early than having to be reactive after they've caused a lot of problems."

GLENCORE

Over the past 10 years, Glencore has invested more than \$2million in key partnerships with Hunter Local Land Services.

This has supported a variety of land management and improvement programs in areas such as Wybong, Halls Creek and Glendon Brook.

Glencore has contributed \$150,000 to support the Professional Wild Dog Controller Program since its inception. This program is in addition to Glencore's own feral animal control program across its mine site, buffer and offset properties and is coordinated with local wild dog associations and other landholders.

"This collective approach is essential to managing this important issue to landholders in our region" Glencore's Community Investment Manager, Craig Strudwick said.

"We are a large landowner across the Hunter and we've seen first-hand the impact that wild dogs can have on livestock."

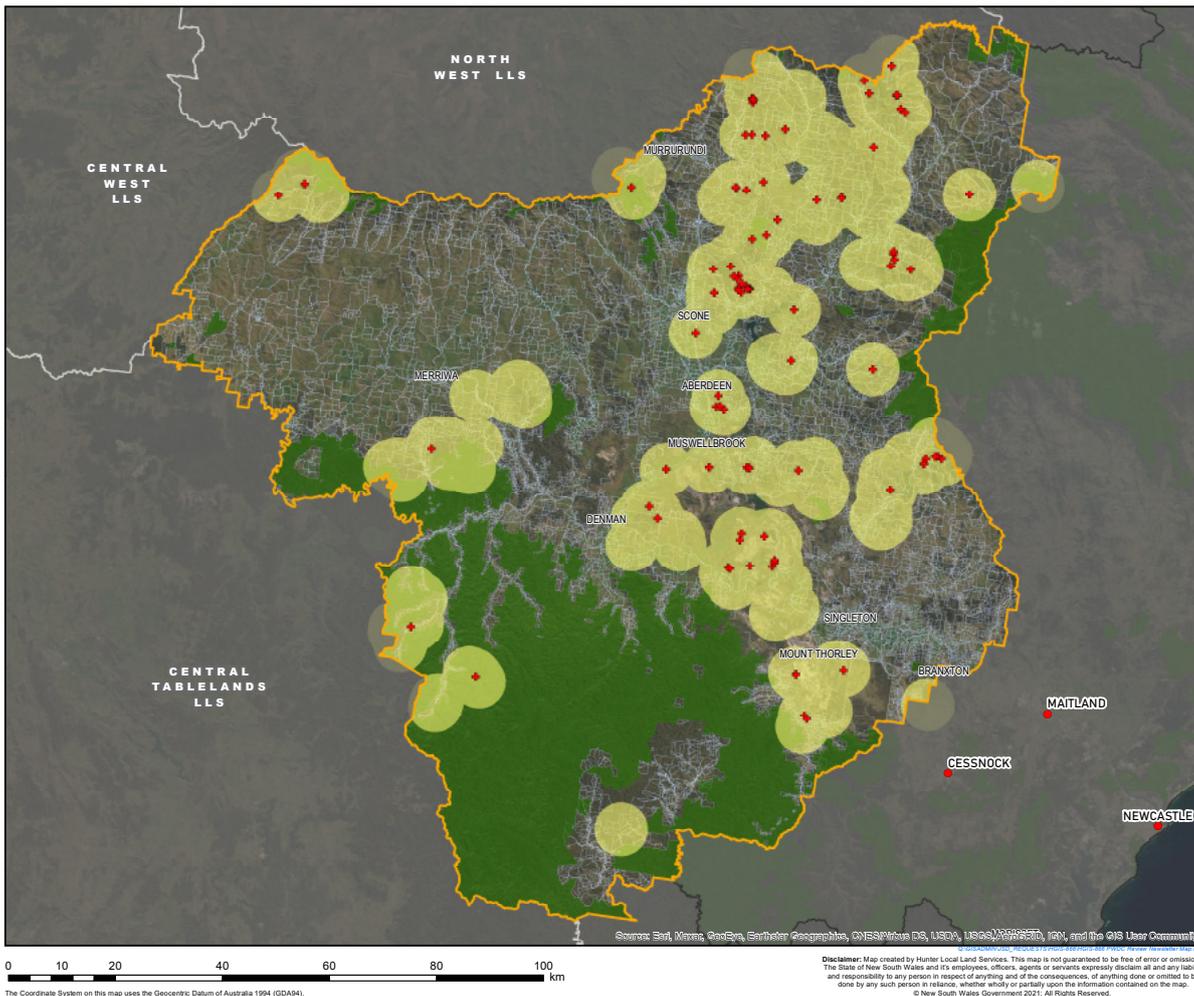
"Our partnership with LLS and other landholders in the Hunter is delivering a co-ordinated approach to wild dog control with some excellent results to date."



2020-2021 STATS



OVERALL STATS



HUNTER LOCAL LAND SERVICES

PROFESSIONAL WILD DOG CONTROL PROGRAM ACTIVITY 2021



Landholder contributions update

With the easing of drought conditions across the region, producer contributions to the program were reinstated as of 1 January 2021.

For the last two years, fees were waived as the committee recognised the strain of the ongoing drought on local farming families.

Producer's contribute up to \$500 towards the costs of each 10 day program.

Producer's must also be an active participant of their local Wild Dog Association and participate in control programs such as group or aerial baiting.

Sponsored by



HunterValley
Combined Wild Dog
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Upper Hunter
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MACHEnergy

Mount Pleasant Operation



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