

Feral pigs

Introduction

Feral pigs originated as domestic pigs (*Sus scrofa*) that arrived in Australia with the first fleet. Pigs at this time were kept unrestrained and in semi-feral conditions, hence, by the 1880's there were wild pigs in NSW.

Feral pigs are defined as all pigs born in the wild, running in the wild, or at any time, have run in the wild.

Today their distribution shows them right throughout NSW, ACT, Queensland and Northern Territory. There are isolated populations throughout the remainder of Australia.

Feral pigs live in moist areas that provide food, water and dense shelter, from rainforests and swamps to woodlands and forests, being most active in the cooler parts of the day.

Group size depends on season and habitat. Sows and piglets will run as a group with immature males and females also present. Males are more solitary, joining a group for mating or to feed.

Feral pigs are opportunistic omnivores, eating grass, fruit, grain and meat, including small mammals. They also eat underground plant material, such as roots and bulbs.

Feral pigs are polyestrous (able to breed all year round), with breeding success depending on resource availability. Females reach sexual maturity at around 25-30kg, males at 18 months of age. The average litter size is 5-6 piglets. Litters are weaned at 2-3 months, and mating will begin again at this time.

Feral pigs are an issue both environmentally and agriculturally. They devastate native vegetation and are vectors for a number of endemic parasites and diseases, which can be contracted to other animals and humans. For these reasons, it is imperative that feral pigs are removed.

What to look for

Feral pig activity around your property can be observed and monitored by looking out for evidence of pigs through:

- Sightings;
- Uprooting of earth;
- Disturbance to crop and pastures;
- Fence damage with mud and hair on the wire;
- Tracks;
- Faeces;
- Wallows along the edge of dams; and
- Rub marks on trees / posts.



Poisoning

- 1080 is the most common poison used to control pigs. It is regulated by a Pesticides Act and needs to be carried out under numerous restrictions;
- Restrictions include distance from neighbouring properties and houses, notification to neighbours, signage and a chemical users card (AQF III) or an LLS 1080/Pindone card;
- Especially effective when other food sources are scarce, showing best results in co-ordinated baiting programs involving the whole community;

- Poison can be distributed in either grain or pellets, or with manufactured bait PIGOUT;
- Bait stations are normally placed along tracks or in areas where pigs are known to feed; and
- Free feeding prior to poisoning is essential to attract as many feeding pigs as possible to the area. It also gives an estimate of how much bait will be required.



Trapping

- Traps are an effective method of catching large numbers of pigs all at once, removing danger from livestock;
- Livestock should still be removed from paddocks so they do not eat the free feed;
- Traps are generally made with firm mesh with steel posts securing them into the ground;
- To complete trapping successfully, free feeding should be done prior to setting up traps. Once pigs are feeding, traps are set up with an entry and exit with free feed inside so pigs can walk freely in and out. Eventually, the trap is set with no exit and a trigger to set the trap off when the pigs are inside, unless using a trigger cage setup trap;
- Traps should be set in areas where pigs frequent, for example along the tracks at holes in a fence;
- Traps need to be checked every 24 hours; and
- Pigs caught in traps need to be humanely destroyed. This can be done by shooting them.

Shooting

- Shooting can be effective as a follow up method when only a few pigs remain;
- Only effective when you are confident you will shoot all the pigs at once;

Caution

Care should be taken when dealing with pigs. They frighten easily and will be scared away from a sight if disturbed. Disturbance can be from hunters or shooters only killing some of the mob or simply through sighting humans.

If pigs are disturbed, they will only move onto a new sight and cause more damage.

Feral pigs are a declared pest under the Local Land Services Act 2013 and so are to be continually suppressed. It is illegal to keep or transport feral pigs.

It is also illegal to swill feed pigs, that is feeding pigs meat, meat products or anything that has been in contact with meat, as it may cause foot and mouth disease.



Further information

Central West Local Land Services staff can assist you with feral pig removal. Officers are available to provide you with professional advice on the best control options, hire of pig traps and preparation of poison feed.

To find out more about feral pig control, contact Central West Local Land Services on 1300 795 299 or scan the quick response code and visit our website: