



Western Australian Wild Dog Action Plan 2016-2021 Update

16 November 2020

In order to keep Western Australian Recognised Biosecurity Groups (RBGs) that manage wild dogs updated on the activities happening under the Wild Dog Action Plan, a quarterly update will be emailed out. There were significant delays in some projects due to COVID-19. This is the second instalment.

State Barrier Fence repair and replacement program

Prior to 2010 the State Barrier Fence (SBF) was solely an emu barrier, with gaping holes along its length that wild dogs could easily walk through. Since the initial SBF upgrades in 2010/2011, worth \$5.17 million and funded by the Royalties for Regions program, the entire 1200km SBF has been upgraded to wild dog standard and the 170km Yilgarn Gap has been closed. Various State Governments have spent many millions of dollars upgrading the SBF to a wild dog standard, at no cost to the farming community.

More recently, in December 2017, the Minister for Agriculture and Food facilitated a forum in Yalgoo to discuss the \$4.8 million in upgrades (plus an additional \$1 million allocated for 2020/21) to the SBF, with DPIRD creating a 12-member Aboriginal Fencing Contractor panel. Since May 2018, 10 of the Aboriginal businesses have been engaged by DPIRD to upgrade the 1200km SBF. Since the panel was formed the following has been achieved:

- 300km SBF replaced to date, with a further 54km contracted for replacement by 2021. This equates to over one quarter of the entire length of the SBF.
- 250km of grading and heavy earthworks completed to combat erosion issues along the fence
- 65km of lapwire replaced
- 55km of reposting completed
- 400km of herbicide treatment completed
- The entire 1200km inspected and maintained on a fortnightly basis
- More than 50 Aboriginal workers employed by contractors to complete the works.

Some of the Aboriginal businesses have now branched out to be contracted for other works with various government departments and private businesses, including Main Roads, Water Corp, Forest Products Commission (sandalwood) and the Murchison Regional Vermin Cell fence construction.

State Barrier Fence Access

With an increase in contractor maintenance on the SBF and other permitted travellers traversing the fence, Licenced Pest Management Technicians are reminded that trapping to control wild dogs is not to occur on the fence access track or actual fence line. Ongoing trapping on the bush line is still permitted.

People planning on travelling along the SBF are required to apply for permission by contacting SBF Manager, Craig Robins, on 9690 2195 or craig.robins@dpiird.wa.gov.au

In response to industry concerns about illegal travel along the SBF, DPIRD has:

1. updated its website to further emphasise warnings that public travel along the SBF is prohibited
2. issued media releases on illegal SBF travel, which have been picked up by popular recreational magazines such as Caravan World's October 2020 edition (below)
3. ensured signage at every entry and exit point along the SBF states that it is illegal to travel along the fence
4. The agency amalgamation has increased DPIRD's compliance capacity and we expect additional surveillance/compliance capacity in future. Current staff resourcing to patrol the fence is limited.



Taken from October 2020 edition of www.caravan.hemax.com

Restricted Chemical Product permit issue

The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) will renew the outstanding Restricted Chemical Product (RCP) permits for one year under the original arrangements i.e. the DBCA regional managers will be the applicants on the permits.

This is for the RBGs that urgently need their RCPs renewed (Central Wheatbelt BA, Goldfields Nullarbor RBA, Esperance BA, Carnarvon RBA, Southern BG).

This 12-month extension will be used by DBCA, DPIRD and Department of Health (DoH) to work on options for the longer term (i.e. reviewing the 1080 Code of Practice and the processes around permits for work on DBCA land). There will be a focussed effort to engage the RBGs in these discussions, to make sure that their needs are heard and met, along with the agencies.

This review process is a joint effort between the three agencies (DBCA, DPIRD and DoH), and the RBGs.

Action Plan funding update

RBGs provided comment on their funding priorities for the proposed WA Wild Dog Action Plan 2021-25 in August 2019. Unfortunately, due to COVID-19, the State budget processes were delayed. DPIRD resubmitted a business case to State Government in late October 2020 and awaits the outcome of that process.

We understand how this impacts your budget planning processes and RBGs will be advised as soon as any State funding decisions are made.

Australian Wool Innovation Funding update

Australian Wool Innovation Inc. (AWI) will contribute to the collaborative funding of wild dog and vertebrate pest animal control activities under the WA Wild Dog Action Plan. There is \$270,000 (ex GST) being offered; \$163,000 will be available in 2020/21 and \$107,000 in 2021/22. The funding outcomes and eligible activities AWI will fund (primarily training and capacity building of landholders) have been sent to the nine RBGs on the front line of wild dog control in WA.

DPIRD will administer these industry wool levy funds, free of charge, on behalf of AWI. Financial assistance agreements between DPIRD and relevant RBGs are being developed to release the funds.

Esperance extension to the State Barrier Fence

Since 23 May 2019, 63km of 660km SBF Esperance extension has been constructed. About half of the proposed fence line is located on Native Title determined lands. An Indigenous Land Use Agreement (ILUA) with Esperance Tjaltjraak Native Title Aboriginal Corporation (ETNTAC) is being negotiated and progressing well.

Almost all fence materials have now been purchased, and are on site in Esperance.

DPIRD is progressing tender documentation for full-scale construction with a split of construction opportunities to be offered through public tender processes and to registered Aboriginal businesses.

In the interim, a 12km contract extension for Esperance Tjaltjraak Services to continue fencing in the Cascades area where Native Title is not impacted is expected to commence in December. This will keep construction ticking over while ILUA negotiations and tender processes continue.

Rangelands Cell Fencing Program

The State Government allocated \$4.03 million through the WA Wild Dog Action Plan via a competitive grant system for the construction of up to four rangelands cell fences. An additional \$550,000 grant was awarded to the Murchison Regional Vermin Council Cell (MRVC) fence. Pastoralists are required to provide at least 50 per cent matching funds, either in cash or in-kind contribution. The cell fences are to serve as demonstration areas for the pastoral industry to look at long-term options to remove wild dogs from pastoral properties and for those properties to return to running sheep and/or goats. As part of the grant agreement, once cells are constructed pastoralists have three years to remove wild dogs from within the cells and commence restocking. The project will also provide an opportunity for DPIRD to carry out annual rangelands condition inspections and wild dog research.

Grants awarded

MRVC

\$1,144,000 grant. The six million-hectare cell fence is on track for completion in 2021. Once complete, the challenge for the MRVC and the Meekatharra Rangelands Biosecurity Association will be to remove the remaining wild dogs inside the cell and then start restocking with sheep.

Murchison Hub Cell Fence

\$450,000 grant. The 180km cell fence is approximately 75 per cent built and it is planned to be completed by March 2021. Pastoralists inside the cell are already noticing a decrease of wild dog activity inside the completed sections of the cell.

Carnarvon Rangelands Biosecurity Fence Cell

\$986,000 grant. The Minister for Agriculture and Food visited the Carnarvon cell fence on 11 September to inspect the commencement of the 362km cell construction. To date, 50km has been completed and a further 50km is being constructed. The cell group are working towards having the cell 50 per cent complete by March 2021.

Kalgoorlie Pastoral Alliance Cell Fence

\$2,000,000 grant. The Kalgoorlie Pastoral Alliance (KPA) originally sought a \$4 million grant, however were granted 50 per cent of their application to enable the funding of the other cell fences. By the end of 2020 it is anticipated that approximately 250km of the 950km cell fence will be completed. The KPA is working on a strategy to complete the cell fence, given there is currently not the funding to do so.

Licensed pest management technicians (doggers)

Funding of \$860,000 for doggers to work on government managed lands was extended to cover the 2020/21 financial year. The extension was provided while government considers new funding under the proposed WA Wild Dog Action Plan 2021-25. The following table summarises the Royalties for Regions-funded dogger payments to RBGs to work on government managed lands. The table does not include the Declared Pest Rate or other funding sources (e.g. Federal drought funds, AWI funds or other grants).

Table of Royalties for Regions funded LPMTs - for control on government lands					
	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	Group total
Carnarvon RBA (2 LPMTs)	\$ 187,500	\$ 187,500	\$ 187,500	\$ 187,500	\$ 750,000
Meekatharra RBA (2.5 LPMTs)	\$ 259,375	\$ 259,375	\$ 184,375	\$ 234,375	\$ 937,500
Esperance BA (1 LPMT)	\$ 93,750	\$ 93,750	\$ 93,750	\$ 93,750	\$ 375,000
Central Wheatbelt BA (0.5 LPMT)	\$ 60,000	\$ 40,313	\$ 40,312	\$ 66,875	\$ 207,500
Eastern Wheatbelt BG (1 LPMT)	\$ 93,750	\$ 93,750	\$ 93,750	\$ 93,750	\$ 375,000
Goldfields Nullarbor RBA (1 LPMT)	\$ 93,750	\$ 93,750	\$ 93,750	\$ 93,750	\$ 375,000
Northern BG				\$ 65,000	\$ 65,000
Midlands BG				\$ 25,000	\$ 25,000
Year Total	\$ 788,125	\$ 768,438	\$ 693,437	\$ 860,000	
Grand Total					\$3,110,000

Competitive research and development grants

In 2019, Murdoch University received two grants under the WA Wild Dog Action Plan 2021-25 to identify baits that are more attractive to wild dogs and alternative storage methods for baits. Both projects are underway and collecting data. We are undertaking research to understand why wild dogs are not eating more baits, given our previous work in the Murchison noted very little bait uptake by wild dogs. Five rounds of baiting work have been undertaken on three stations in the Murchison and Gascoyne region. Baits are laid with and without 1080 to determine if wild dogs can detect the poison within the baits. Watch this space for the upcoming results.

Many of the wild dog affected RBGs reading this newsletter will have been contacted about providing baits for the bait storage project. Baits will be left on the ground (in a secure cage) to evaluate the longevity of baits once they are deployed. Baits are also being stored in a freezer, onion bags, and a barrel to determine if the method of storage impacts the lethal dose within a bait. Bait collection is occurring now and results will be presented to the groups over the coming months.



Figure 1. Wild dog observed as part of the monitoring for identifying baits to be more attractive to the wild dogs project.

Canid pest ejector trial

Another outcome from the baiting work in 2016-2018 was the interference during baiting programs from non-target species in the Murchison. One method to combat non-targets is the use of canid pest ejectors (CPEs).

CPEs are a static bait that only the target species (i.e. wild dogs and foxes) have the power to 'eject' the poison from. Over two years, one hundred CPEs were deployed in two month bursts in the Murchison region. A range of lures were used including the kangaroo dried meat bait, smacko/PVC glue combination and a range of lures on a piece of felt zip lock-tied to the lure head, including vanilla essence, Government Call, animal fat, synthetic fermented egg, and horse hoof.

All the felt soaked lures worked very effectively to lure wild dogs into the CPEs and 'eject' the devices. Furthermore, non-targets did not interfere with the CPEs when using the felt soaked lure heads. Different methods for deploying CPEs into softer soil were trialled successfully. Analysis is underway at present to determine the level of population control that resulted. A CPE flyer will be available to landholders shortly.



Figure 2. Wild dogs attracted to CPEs

Future work by DPIRD will also investigate the level of wild dog bait uptake and CPE effectiveness in other regions of Western Australia.

Dingoes (wild dogs) and feral cats

The mesopredator release hypothesis has become popular in Australian ecology since it first appeared in scientific literature in the 1990s. This hypothesis suggests that the top order predator, the dingo/wild dog*, will suppress the abundance of feral cats directly through predation or by altering feral cat behaviour. Research over the last few years in Western Australia has noted that:

- dingo/wild dog and feral cat density and capture rate were unrelated
- capture rates of both predators had a minimal relation to environmental factors and the baiting program
- dingoes/wild dogs and feral cats generally don't spend time together or are active at the same place, but both predators are present across the landscape, and
- overall, dingoes/wild dogs do not suppress feral cats in the southern rangelands of Western Australia. Reducing our dingo/wild dog control efforts will not aid the conservation of native species.

For the full version of the published manuscript please visit

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352249620300331>

*Wild dogs are defined as dingoes, free-roaming dogs and their hybrids, all classified as the same species, *Canis familiaris*.

Ongoing wild dog research

In the next quarter's update we will provide information on the genetic analyses of the wild dog samples licensed pest management technicians have been providing over the past year. Another update of the funded competitive research and development project updates will also be provided. These projects are:

- Improving the animal welfare outcomes of wild dog management (GNRBA)
- Locating and tracking wild dogs using a remote piloted aircraft (MRBA) and
- Visual and electronic deterrents (Curtin University).

Farewell Baz!

Barry Davies started with the APB in 1995, based in his home town of Bencubbin. He managed the State Barrier Fence from 1998 to 2006. In that time he moved from the single person office in Bencubbin to Merredin, Northam and then Bunbury offices. In 2006 Barry was appointed to the Manager, Regional Biosecurity position, where he strengthened his long association with pastoralists and farmers, including the role of Executive Officer for the WA Wild Dog Management Advisory Committee. Barry was also the inaugural Chair of the National Wild Dog Management Advisory Group.

Barry took a six year break from WA in 2011, working for the Parks and Wildlife Service in Tasmania and managing the Victorian Wild Dog Program, before returning to WA in 2017. Barry has managed a number of projects under the WA Wild Dog Action Plan 2016-21.

Barry and his wife, Vicki, are hitting the road indefinitely in their caravan at Christmas and intend to spend a fair bit of time bushwalking, getting involved in volunteering (e.g. BlazeAid) and farm/station sits for farmers and pastoralists while they go on holidays.

DPIRD would like to thank Baz for his valuable contribution to WA's agricultural and pastoral sectors.



Barry Davies 1995 (APB) based in Bencubbin and on the State Barrier Fence in 2020.

Contacts

- For more information on the research happening under the plan please contact Tracey Kreplins at tracey.kreplins@dpird.wa.gov.au
- For all other Action Plan topics (e.g. State Barrier Fence and Licensed Pest Management Technicians) please contact Matt Stadler (matthew.stadler@dpird.wa.gov.au).
- Any matters arising around the SBF are to be reported to craig.robins@dpird.wa.gov.au with the relevant RBG Executive Officer included in correspondence.
- If you have suggestions on how to improve this newsletter, please contact Matt Stadler.

Important disclaimer

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