



PESTSMART



Glovebox Guide for Managing Feral Pigs

Kana Koichi and Damien Halliday

An Invasive Animals Cooperative
Research Centre Project



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1. About this guide

This *Glovebox Guide for Managing Feral Pigs* is a practical resource designed to assist Australian landholders (farmers, public land managers and indigenous groups) in the control of feral pigs.

A large part of tackling a feral pig problem depends on the landholder's awareness of the situation and their ability to make informed decisions about how best to take action to reduce feral pig damage. This guide aims to:

- enhance understanding of feral pig biology and ecology, where and how they live

- outline the options for control, advantages and disadvantages
- outline management tools and strategies
- assist in the development of a cost effective pig management plan.

Care has been taken to incorporate differences in practice that arise by region.

For further information about feral pigs and other pest animals in Australia, visit the website:

www.pestsmart.org.au/pest-animal-species/feral-pig/



Feral pig. Image: Nic Perkins



2. Feral pigs

Taxonomic name:

Sus scrofa

Common names:

feral pig, feral hog, feral swine, wild pig, wild boar



Feral pig
Image: Vanessa Macdonald

Ecology

Appearance

Feral pigs originate from escaped and released domestic pigs (*Sus scrofa*) that have adapted to survive and breed in the wild. After several generations in the wild, they look more like Eurasian wild boar - becoming taller, leaner and more muscular with sparse coarse hair than their domestic relatives. Feral pigs also have well developed necks and shoulders that taper to smaller and shorter hind quarters. Their ears are smaller, tail straighter and snout and tusks larger and longer than the domestic pig.

As a result of diverse source populations and interbreeding, feral pigs come in variety of colours and sizes. They are predominantly black, buff-coloured or black and white spotted. Piglets may be

striped, which is typical of the European wild boar. Generally, females are smaller and weigh less (50-60 kg) than males (80-100 kg). Feral pigs are highly social and intelligent animals and normally form groups, known as 'mobs' (or 'sounders' in the United States). These groups are usually less than 12 individuals although they can be as large as 400 in the right conditions. Feral pigs are generally shy and nocturnal - active from late afternoon to early morning.

Distribution

There are estimated to be 13.5 million feral pigs (95% confidence interval between 3.5 and 23.5 million) spread across about 45% of Australia. They are most common in the northern and eastern states on the mainland. Their distribution and abundance fluctuates widely according to availability of food, water

and environmental conditions. Feral pig populations continue to expand both naturally and by illegal translocations, particularly in Western Australia, South Australia and Victoria.

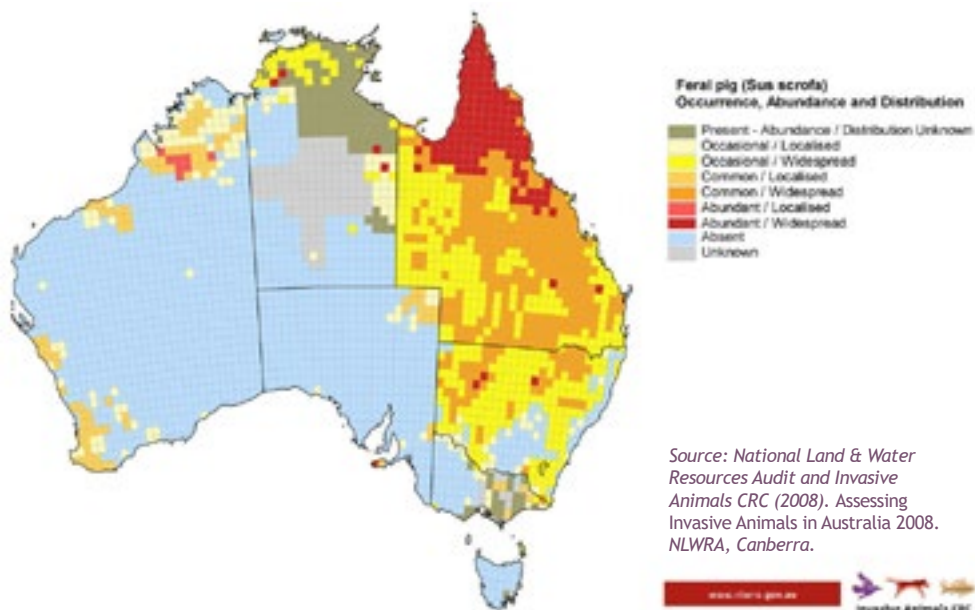
Habitat

Feral pigs are habitat generalists - they are highly adaptable and can tolerate a wide range of different climates. They can live almost anywhere if there is regular food, water and shelter. In Australia, feral pigs are found in a variety of habitats including agricultural grazing and cropping country, tropical rainforests, floodplains and wetlands. They are not usually found in desert or dry

inland areas because they need regular water, particularly in hotter conditions. Feral pigs tend to stay within defined home ranges, but will move in response to season or regular disturbance. Family groups of sows with piglets and juveniles tend to have more limited home ranges (2-20 km²) than boars, which are typically solitary and can have home ranges of between 8-50 km². Some boars have been genetically tracked, through siring young, over several hundred kilometres.

Diet

Feral pigs are opportunistic omnivores and have relatively high dietary requirements. They target abundant





food sources and eat green vegetation, animal matter, fruits and grains. Using their snout, feral pigs root up the ground for fungi, tubers, grubs and worms. They also consume the eggs of various animal species and prey upon lambs, turtles and frogs.

Reproduction

The reproductive potential of feral pigs is more similar to that of rabbits than other large mammals in Australia. Their fecundity often increases with age and body weight. Breeding is influenced by the availability of good quality food – under favourable conditions pigs can reproduce all year round. Sows can breed from about six months of age and may produce two litters of an average six piglets in a little over one year. This

means they can recover quickly from the effects of control or other setbacks (eg drought) in good conditions.

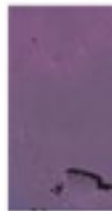
Weaknesses

Feral pigs are relatively heat intolerant because they lack sweat glands. Therefore, they need access to reliable water and shade to cool down in hot conditions. They also need high quality foods to raise their young. Feral pigs are most vulnerable to predation until they reach about 20 kg, thereafter, few predators pose a serious threat.

The size, strength and gregarious (social) feeding behaviour of feral pigs is also unique in the Australian landscape, and can be exploited in baiting operations.



Feral pig and piglets. Image: Jason Wishart



Impacts

Economic

Feral pigs have been estimated to cost Australian agriculture over \$100 million each year through predation of lambs, competition with livestock and damage to property and crops (McLeod 2004). Industries directly affected include wool, meat (cattle and sheep), grains, sugar and fruit. Feral pigs are also known carriers of at least 45 different parasites (external and internal) and diseases (bacterial and viral) that pose a threat to livestock as well as pets, wildlife, and in some cases, human health. An outbreak of Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD), which can be carried and spread by feral pigs, could reduce Australia's export revenue by more than \$9 billion. Feral pigs also cost \$5 million in management per annum.

Environmental

Feral pigs cause extensive damage to natural habitats when rooting for food. They also wallow and foul up water sources, trample and consume native vegetation and spread weeds. Ground-burrowing native fauna, such as frogs and turtles, are easy prey for digging pigs. About 40 threatened species are at risk of feral pig predation, habitat degradation, competition and disease transmission (EPBC Act 1999).

Social

Feral pigs can be a food and/or recreational resource for hunters and Aboriginal communities. However, feral pigs also have negative socio-cultural impacts as they cause damage to culturally significant Aboriginal sites and animals as well as to property and landscape.

Further information

PestSmart Factsheet [*FPFS1: Feral pig \(Sus scrofa\)*](#), Invasive Animals CRC (2011).

Choquenot D, McIlroy J and Korn T (1996). [*Managing Vertebrate Pests - Feral Pigs*](#). Bureau of Resource Sciences, Canberra.

McLeod R (2004). [*Counting the Cost: Impact of Invasive Animals in Australia, 2004*](#). Cooperative Research Centre for Pest Animal Control, Canberra.

Productivity Commission (2002). [*Impact of a Foot and Mouth Disease Outbreak on Australia*](#). Research Report, AusInfo, Canberra.

West P (2008). [*Assessing Invasive Animals in Australia 2008*](#). National Land & Water Resources Audit and Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre, Canberra.



3. Policy and Legislation

In 2002 feral pigs were listed as a ‘Key Threatening Process’ to endangered species and ecological communities under the Commonwealth Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 (EPBC Act). A national framework was developed to guide coordinated action to contain the spread of this threatening process - the [Threat Abatement Plan \(TAP\) for the predation, habitat degradation, competition and disease transmission by feral pigs](#) (under review, July 2015). The key objectives of the feral pig TAP are:

1. To prevent feral pigs from establishing in areas where they currently do not occur or are in low eradicable numbers, and where they are likely to pose a threat to biodiversity; especially where they would impact on nationally listed threatened species and ecological communities
2. To integrate feral pig management plans and their implementation into natural resource planning and investment at the regional, state and territory, and national level through consultation and liaison with key stakeholders
3. To increase awareness and understanding of land managers and the general community about the damage that feral pigs cause and management options
4. To quantify the impacts feral pigs have on biodiversity (especially nationally listed threatened species and ecological communities) and determine the relationship between feral pig density and the level of damage
5. To improve the effectiveness, efficiency and humaneness of techniques and strategies for managing the environmental damage due to feral pigs.

Pigs are also declared as a pest animal in Queensland, New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, Victoria and Western Australia. Refer to Table 1 for a summary of state and territory legislation on feral pig management.



Pig damage in Lakefield National Park, Cape York, Queensland. Image: Steven lapidge

Table 1: Feral pig control legislation

State	Legislation	Declared pest animal	Landholders legal responsibility to control	Agency responsible
ACT	<u>Pest Plants and Animals Act 2005</u>	✓	X*	Dept of Territory and Municipal Services (TAMS) <u>www.tams.act.gov.au</u>
NSW	<u>Local Land Services Act 2013</u>	✓	✓	Dept of Primary Industries (DPI) <u>www.dpi.nsw.gov.au</u> Local Land Services (LLS) <u>www.lls.nsw.gov.au</u>
NT	<u>Territory Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 2006</u>	X (feral)	X	Dept of Land Resource Management <u>lrm.nt.gov.au/</u>
QLD	<u>Land Protection (Pest & Stock Route Management) Act 2002</u>	✓	✓	Dept of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry (DAFF) <u>www.daf.qld.gov.au/</u> Biosecurity Queensland
SA	<u>Natural Resources Management Act 2004</u>	✓	X	Primary Industries and Regions SA (PIRSA) <u>www.pir.sa.gov.au/</u> Biosecurity SA Dept of Environment, Water and natural resources (DEWNR) <u>www.environment.sa.gov.au</u>
TAS	<u>Vermin Control Act 2000</u>	X (feral)	X	Dept of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE) <u>www.dpipwe.tas.gov.au</u>
VIC	<u>Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994 (Amendment Act 2006)</u>	✓	✓	Dept of Environmen, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) <u>delwp.vic.gov.au/</u>
WA	<u>Agriculture and Related Resources Protection Act 1976</u>	✓	✓	Dept of Agriculture and Food Western Australia (DAFWA) <u>www.agric.wa.gov.au</u>

* Unless the Minister prepares a Pest Animal Management Plan (PAMP) and directs landholders to control pigs - at present, there are no PAMPs in place in the ACT under the Pest Plants and Animals Act 2005.



4. Management strategies

Feral pigs are difficult to manage as they can breed back quickly and change their movement patterns and behaviour in response to control.

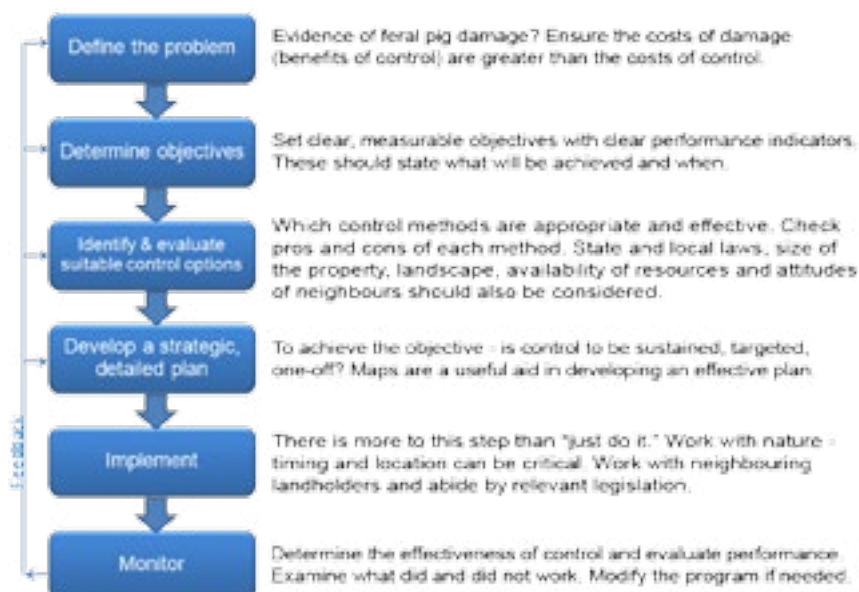
Effective pig control requires population reduction of at least 50% to 70% every year. Relying on just one control method is unlikely to have a lasting effect. Overseas studies have shown that sport hunting, for instance, only removes about 20% of feral pig populations on an annual basis.

Best practice management

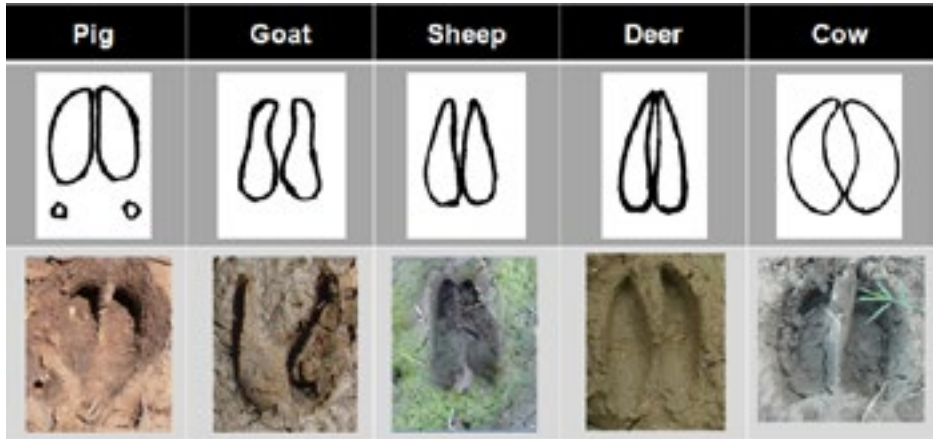
Best practice management must be structured and consistent to achieve long term and cost-effective outcomes. This typically involves integrated pest management, whereby a combination of control techniques are employed to maximise program effectiveness.

The following steps are essential for developing a successful pig management program (also see flowchart below).

Best practice feral pig management flowchart



Based on Choquenot et al (1996) and Braysher and Saunders (2003)



Tracks of pigs and other domestic animals. Pigs have four toes but only the middle two have well-developed hooves - only these two toes are evident. The dew claws can be seen in very soft ground. A pig track is square in shape with similar length and width. Goat and sheep have similar tracks to pigs but pig tracks are more square and robust. Goat, sheep and deer tracks are often heart-shaped when not splayed (with the front imprint tapers to a sharp point and the back being rounded). Cow tracks show only the edge of the cattle hooves in hard substrate (Moseby et al 2009) (images: Kana Koichi, Jason Wishart and Pip Masters).

a) Detect feral pig presence

There are a number of signs that indicate if pigs have moved into an area, including tracks, rooting, wallows, nests or beds, travel pads, dung, holes in fences, crop damage, tusking and tree and post rubs. The series of photographs on pages 12-13 illustrate many of these field signs.

Rooting (from pigs turning over soil or the ground cover with their snout in search of invertebrates, roots and tubers) is one of the most common and recognisable signs. Another common sign is the wallows they create to cool down and reduce parasite itch. They also leave mud rubs on trees,

fence posts and utility poles to remove excess mud and external parasites from their coats after wallowing.

Be careful to not mistake pig tracks for other ungulates' tracks and vice versa, such as sheep, goat, deer and cows. Pig tracks are more rounded at the tips of the hooves and have a more widely spread dew claws (see diagram above for comparisons of animal footprints).



Ground rooting caused by pigs. Image: Sue Braid



Riverbank wallows. Image: Jason Wishart

Look for these field signs that indicate feral pigs have moved into an area.



*Lamb predation by feral pigs
Image: Bureau of Rural Sciences*



Hole in fence. Image: Jason Wishart



*Pig dung - appearance can vary depending on food
Image: Jason Wishart*



Travel pad path. Image: Jason Wishart



Mud rub marks on a tree. Image: NSW DPI



*Crop damage caused by feral pigs
Image: Jason Wishart*

b) Define the problem - are pigs an issue?

Measure the harmful impact (eg percentage loss of a crop or lambs) and ensure that the level of management is appropriate to the impact. The presence of pigs does not always mean there is a significant problem. Control costs can sometimes be greater than the costs of damage mitigation. In such cases control may not seem worthwhile, but there may still be 'hidden' costs associated with feral pigs such as disease risk. Either way, it is often better to be proactive rather than reactive.

c) Set objectives

Feral pig control should be aimed at damage management rather than eradication. Eradication is often a best-case scenario, but is unlikely except at a local level or on offshore islands. Set realistic, measurable outcomes within achievable time frames. DO NOT use pig numbers as a benchmark for the outcome of control because pig numbers and the extent of damage do not always correlate. An appropriate objective may be to "Increase lamb-making rates by 20% in one year after control".

d) Identify and evaluate suitable control techniques

The usefulness of certain control techniques can depend greatly on the situation and may be affected by factors



such as landscape type and season (eg habitat conditions and food abundance). They may also be subjected to different laws and regulations. A combination of techniques usually provides the best results, starting with the least intrusive so as not to alarm the population you are trying to control.

e) Develop a strategic, detailed plan

Carefully plan and coordinate control to achieve objectives rather than simply setting out to kill as many pigs as possible. When local eradication is not practical, strategic management is the best option. This may be one-off control (eg erecting fences), sustained control (eg an initial knockdown followed by periodic maintenance control to slow/prevent recovery), or targeted control (eg conducting control only at critical times when damage is most severe).

Control should be constant, sustained and integrated because pig numbers can recover quickly.

When developing a plan, try to prioritise and break large areas up into suitable management units. Maps can be useful for setting locations for control and visually identifying potential holes in the target area where pigs may not be exposed to your control effort.

f) Implement the plan

i. Work with nature

Understanding the biology and behavioural traits of feral pigs can aid their control. Three important things to consider are water, food and cover. As a general rule, you should implement control (eg set bait stations or traps) when it is hot and dry. It is easier to target pigs in these conditions as they may congregate around permanent water points and more readily eat baits when food is scarce. Successful control programs can be undertaken year round, but they may require more time and effort.

ii. Work with people

Feral pig control is most successful when people work together. Pigs are highly mobile and can reproduce quickly, so



Image: Jessica Marsh



they can reinvade fast if the control area is too small. Their home ranges can be large and pigs do not respect tenure boundaries. Landholders in one area are likely to be affected by inaction of others in surrounding areas. Individual *ad hoc* control is unlikely to have a lasting effect. Group schemes and cooperative efforts are also more likely to provide economies of scale and social benefits that will encourage sustained long term control efforts.

g) Monitor before, during and after

Monitoring before control is important to gather baseline data on feral pig abundance and damage, to which you can compare all future data to measure program effectiveness.

Monitoring during/after control includes:

- *Operational monitoring*: recording what was done, when and at what cost.
- *Performance monitoring*: assessing effectiveness of control based on pig population abundance and damage extent.

In monitoring performance, DO NOT rely on sightings of feral pigs as a guide to their presence. Instead, observe the signs of pigs (page 11). Common pig signs include:

- Recent or fresh rooting: but keep in mind that the area of rooting does not necessarily indicate population size because a small number of pigs can root up large areas.
- Pig tracks and dung: count in particular areas then clear for later monitoring.
- Mud or hair (left hanging on fences).
- Wallowing, tusk marking, or mud rubs (on trees and fence posts).

You can also observe the number of pigs removed per unit of effort, bait uptake levels or observe reduction in damage. For details, see Mitchell & Balogh (2007).



5. Feral pig control tools

Various lethal and non-lethal tools are available to control feral pigs in Australia. Poison baiting is often used as an initial control tool with other methods as a follow-up. There are currently no biological or fertility control agents suitable for feral pig control.

Not all tools are useful or practical for any given area. It is important to assess your local situation - environment, season, laws and regulations.

Poison baiting

Ground-based poison baiting is one of the most economical and effective ways to control feral pigs on a broad scale. 1080 (sodium fluoroacetate) is the main toxin currently used in Australia and is the only poison available for aerial application. Only authorised persons can supply 1080.

Other toxins, such as CSSP or SAP (yellow phosphorus) and warfarin, are being phased out nationally due to animal welfare and non-target concerns. Sodium nitrite, a common human food preservative (250), is currently being developed as a new toxin and will be submitted for registration in Australia once testing is complete.

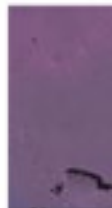
Selecting substances that feral pigs are already familiar with as a bait substrate may improve bait uptake. Grain (eg wheat, oats, barley, sorghum, soybeans and lupins) and pellet baits are often used in NSW and QLD. Fruit (eg bananas) is also used in fruit growing regions. Manufactured baits for feral pigs are also available and provide high target specificity. All poisonous baits must be coloured (usually in green or blue) to distinguish them from human and animal food and make them less attractive to birds.

Baiting programs should also consider:

- the local and seasonal diet preference of feral pigs.
- Timing: generally, baiting should take place when pigs are suffering from peak nutritional stress caused by natural lows in food resources.



*Feral pigs at a HogHopper
Image: Jason Wishart*



- **Breeding:** It is better to bait prior to pig breeding because farrowing sows restrict their normal home range by as much as 94% and their litters do not often get exposed to baits.
- **Location of the bait stations:** must be located where feral pigs are likely to find them during their daily activity. Look for travel pads, areas of thick cover, creeks and swamp edges, or waterholes when picking a bait location.
- **Pre-feeding:** prior to toxic baiting so that feral pigs become familiar with the bait type and location. In some jurisdictions (eg NSW, the Wet Tropics of QLD), pre-feeding is compulsory.
- **Non-target exposure to baits.** A bait delivery device such as the HogHopper™ can help increase the selectivity, efficiency and safety of pig baiting.
- **Relevant state and territory legislation and regulations.**



*Feral pigs in a silo trap
Image: Jim Mitchell*



*Aerial shooting of feral pigs
Image: Mal Leeson*

Successful pig trapping hinges upon several key components, including: timing, location, bait materials, pre feeding, setting a trap at the right time.

Trapping

Trapping is useful where poison baiting or shooting is not feasible, such as near urban areas. Trapping is not practical for large scale control but can be used to manage pigs at relatively low densities for small areas of high production (<5000 ha), where the operator has time to check traps regularly.

Trapping is a process, not an event.

Shooting / hunting

Aerial shooting, conducted in good flying conditions with an experienced pilot and spotter, is cost-effective when pig densities are high. Aerial shooting may also be useful to rapidly reduce pig numbers during exotic disease emergencies. Ground shooting can be an effective mop up operation after poison baiting. Ground or aerial shooting should



not occur prior to, or during trapping and poison baiting programs because it is ‘intrusive’ and can disrupt pig activity, causing pigs to move to other areas. Ground shooting is not suitable for population-scale management across large areas. Refer to relevant State and Territory legislations regarding use of firearms and regulations on permission to hunt.

A combination of these tools is essential for effective feral pig control, as no single technique will provide adequate long-term results.

Exclusion Fencing

Although expensive, exclusion fencing is useful to protect high value crops or animal enterprises - the initial outlay will generally be offset over time.

For successful fencing, fences need to be constructed BEFORE pigs get used to crossing an area. Once pigs are aware of a food or water source inside the area and become habituated to the source, fencing will have little effect. You can modify existing fences to pig-proof standard through electrification. If electrified, you need to regularly control vegetation growing underneath fences to prevent shorting.



*Feral pig exclusion fence, Daintree
Image: Steve Lapidge*

Judas pigs

Ground and aerial shooting can benefit from the use of ‘Judas’ pigs, which are radio-collared individuals released to associate and reveal the location of pigs in the area that are otherwise difficult to find. It is an expensive operation, requiring telemetry equipment and skilled operators. Judas pigs are used mostly for removing remaining pigs in the last stages of eradication campaigns and are not effective at high pig densities. Sows are preferred as Judas pigs as they are more socially connected to other pigs than old adult boars.

Choosing the right control tools

Each control method has its pros and cons (see Table 2). Select control techniques that are suited to your local environment and situation. It is important to consider humaneness of the methods as well as cost-effectiveness.

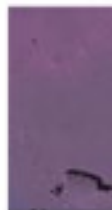


Table 2: Pros and Cons of currently available feral pig control tools

Control technique	When to use	Pros	Cons
Poison baiting (1080)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• before breeding events or good breeding conditions - eg, late summer but may be different times in different areas• when there is little other feed available	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• can reduce large numbers of pigs over large areas quickly• cost-effective control method• can be applied on-ground or from the air	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• pets & other non-target animals can be at risk• restrictions on its use• approval process and qualifications needed varies across states/territories• rain causes loss of toxicity• needs to be followed up with other methods
Trapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• when poison baiting is not feasible• when food is limited and localised	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• can be made target specific• relatively humane and safe• allows commercial use• moveable and reuseable	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• labour and skill intensive• not practical for large-scale control• requires access for trap and bait materials• some pigs are trap-shy
Shooting (aerial or ground)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• open terrain, inaccessible or remote areas (aerial)• early morning or late afternoon when pigs are active• spotlighting feeding sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• target specific• allows commercial use• can be cost-effective when pig density is high (aerial)• quick knockdown of pig population (aerial)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• costly for reducing large numbers (ground)• expensive when pig densities are low (aerial)• not suitable for thick vegetation• may alter activity patterns• labour and skill intensive
Exclusion fencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• construct fences before pigs get used to crossing an area	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• low non-target impacts• humane• effective for small high-value crop areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• requires constant maintenance• not practical at a large scale• may impede movement of non-target species• no reduction to feral pig populations
Judas pigs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• in the last stages of eradication campaign when pig density is low	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• helps remove remaining pigs at low densities following other control (eg baiting, trapping or shooting)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• expensive operation• variable effectiveness



Do's and don'ts (and why)

Don't transport live feral pigs without a permit. You may inadvertently spread the pig problem and their diseases, and you could be fined or imprisoned.

Don't use animal carcasses as bait. This practice, also referred to as 'swill feeding', is illegal in Australia due to the heightened risk of disease transfer. Mad Cow Disease would be spread by swill feeding.

Don't use old or illegal poison. Just because 'the old man used this stuff back in his day' doesn't mean that it's fine to use now. If in doubt, check with your local authorities regarding the use of toxins in your State or Territory.

Do pay attention to seasonal conditions and alternate food availability.

Do pre-feed for as long as practically possible when undertaking a trapping or poison baiting campaign. In some situations, visiting pig numbers can more than double with a couple of extra days pre-feeding.

Do try to coordinate control efforts with your neighbouring farmers, Parks Rangers or natural resource management authorities. This will give better knockdown of feral pig populations across a much wider area and slow re-invasion.

Do look for areas where pigs are regularly and currently active, to set up traps and baits stations. That means visiting each site and look for fresh feral pig signs.



Feral pig damage. Image: Mick Fletcher

Further information:

For detailed information on tools for feral pig control see:

Standard Operating Procedure (PIG005): Poisoning of feral pigs with sodium fluoroacetate (1080). Invasive Animals CRC (2012). www.pestsmart.org.au/poisoning-of-feral-pigs-with-1080

Wishart J (2015). *Feral Pigs: a field guide to poison baiting*. PestSmart Toolkit publication. Invasive Animals CRC. www.pestsmart.org.au/feral-pigs-a-field-guide-to-poison-baiting/

PestSmart Factsheet: *Poison baiting for feral pig control* (FPFS4). Invasive Animals CRC (2014). www.pestsmart.org.au/poison-baiting-for-feral-pig-control

PestSmart Video: *Use of the HogHopper™ for baiting of feral pigs*. Invasive Animals CRC (2012). www.pestsmart.org.au/hoghopper-for-baiting-of-feral-pigs

Standard Operating Procedure (PIG001): Trapping of feral pigs. Invasive Animals CRC (2012). www.pestsmart.org.au/trapping-of-feral-pigs

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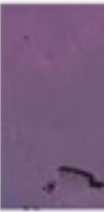
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Image: Jason Wishart





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