

LIBRARY

Department of Biodiversity,
Conservation and Attractions

This PDF has been created for digital preservation. It may be used for research but is not suitable for other purposes. It may be superseded by a more current version or just be out-of-date and have no relevance to current situations.



Department of **Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions**
Department of **Primary Industries and Regional Development**

Western Australian **Feral Cat Strategy 2023–2028**



Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions
Locked Bag 104
Bentley Delivery Centre WA 6983
Phone: (08) 9219 9000
Fax: (08) 9334 0498

dbca.wa.gov.au

© State of Western Australia 2023

May 2023

This work is copyright. You may download, display, print and reproduce this material in unaltered form (retaining this notice) for your personal, non-commercial use or use within your organisation. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, all other rights are reserved. Requests and enquiries concerning reproduction and rights should be addressed to the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions.

This publication was prepared by Invasive Animals Program Coordinator.

Questions regarding the use of this material should be directed to:

Invasive Animals Program Coordinator
Ecosystem Health Branch
Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions
Locked Bag 104
Bentley Delivery Centre WA 6983
Phone: 0400 693 807
Email: ecosystemhealth@dbca.wa.gov.au

The recommended reference for this publication is:

Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, 2023, Western Australian Feral Cat Strategy 2023–2028, Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, Perth.

The information contained in this document is guidance only. The Department is committed to quality service and makes every attempt to ensure accuracy, currency and reliability of information contained in this document. However, change in circumstances after time of publication may impact the currency of this information. Confirmation of the information may be sought from the Department if necessary.

If this document refers to specific legal obligations, to ensure you understand and comply with your legal obligations, this information must be read in conjunction with the appropriate Acts and Regulations which are available from the Parliamentary Counsel’s Office www.legislation.wa.gov.au

This document is available in alternative formats on request.

Please note: urls in this document, which conclude a sentence are followed by a full point. If copying the url please do not include the full point.

Front cover main Feral cat with malleefowl chick. *Photo – DBCA.*
Inset, left to right Northern quoll. *Photo – Judy Dunlop/DBCA.* Western ground parrot. *Photo – Alan Danks/DBCA.* Numbats. *Photo – Jacqui McGhie/DBCA.*

Back cover Feral cat predating native species.. *Photo – DBCA.*



Feral cat predating a bandicoot. *Photo – DBCA*

Goal

To conserve populations of native species, through effective and adaptive management of feral cats.

Scope

In response to the ongoing decimation of threatened Australian fauna by invasive feral cats, the Western Australian Feral Cat Strategy will guide feral cat management in Western Australia (WA) with a focus on proven, effective, and humane management techniques. It is underpinned by the *Feral cat declared pest – minimise risk to domestic cats’* policy (Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development 2019), which contains relevant information on different control methods and welfare considerations and must be read in conjunction with this Strategy.

The Strategy provides a framework to guide investment and ensure there is a consistent and coordinated approach to feral cat management to improve conservation outcomes in WA. The strategy guides stakeholders on actions that will contribute to the effective and adaptive management of feral cats. Stakeholders may include Traditional Owners, State and local governments, non-government conservation and community-based organisations and private and leasehold landholders. It guides the investigation of novel methods and technologies for feral cat management that require research to demonstrate effectiveness. Species and places listed in the *Federal Threatened Species Strategy 2022-2032* and WA listed threatened fauna under the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016* will be the focus of immediate management efforts, with a bold vision to expand feral cat management through stakeholder co-design and collaboration. Involvement of different parties, and approvals to undertake feral cat management and joint or collaborative operations, will be guided by relevant legislation, policy, agreements, native title and other requirements. Implementation of the actions in the Strategy and securing resourcing to deliver actions will be at the discretion of stakeholders engaged in feral cat management.

Objectives

- 1. Increase effective feral cat management to improve conservation outcomes for native species, through a tenure-blind approach.
- 2. Continual improvement of methods and technologies for feral cat management through research and development.
- 3. Broaden social acceptability and awareness of feral cat management methods.

Monitoring and evaluation

Progress in delivering the actions will be assessed annually, including seeking input from those involved in feral cat management through the WA Feral Cat Working Group, with a report of achievement of the performance measures to be made publicly available on the DBCA website.

The Strategy’s effectiveness will be evaluated as appropriate during the five-year implementation period, with the results informing future strategic approaches to manage feral cats in WA.

Background

Feral cats are a declared pest in WA under the *Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007* (BAM Act). Feral cats are defined as cats that live and reproduce in the wild and survive by hunting or scavenging. They are found in all WA habitats including forests, woodlands, grasslands, wetlands, heathlands, and arid areas. They live as wild animals independent of people, and their behaviour is often different from domestic or stray cats, i.e. unlikely to ever display socialised behaviour or willingness to be in the presence of humans.

Predation by feral cats is listed as a key threatening process under section 188 of the Commonwealth *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) and referred to in the Australian Government’s *Threatened Species Action Plan 2022-2032* (Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water 2022). Feral cats are recognised as a potential threat to 74 mammal species and sub-species, 40 birds, 21 reptiles and four amphibians, and have played a significant role in 27 of the 47 extinctions of Australian fauna.

Negative impacts of feral cats on WA native fauna occur through direct predation and by competition when there is a dietary overlap with species such as the chuditch. Predation by feral cats has also hindered native fauna reintroduction programs.

A multi-faceted approach to feral cat management, including lethal controls, effective control of non-native food sources e.g. rabbits, and enhancing native fauna habitat and resources is the most effective way to contribute to desired conservation outcomes. Prescribed control methods listed in the policy include exclusion fencing, baiting, cage trapping and shooting. All methods must be humane and undertaken in accordance with the *Animal Welfare Act 2002*.

The *Glovebox Guide for Managing Feral Cats* provides information on the biology, ecology, and impacts of feral cats, and outlines management techniques, policy, and legislation. This resource also provides guidance on how to develop a feral cat management plan. The research guide *Increasing Knowledge to Mitigate Cat Impacts on Biodiversity* outlines a stakeholder-led list of prioritised research that would assist in improving management outcomes in WA. The Western Australian Feral Cat Working Group brings together expertise and on-ground capabilities of the key organisations involved in feral cat management in WA.



Feral cats are a declared pest in WA under the *Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007* (BAM Act)

Objective 1

Objective 1: Increase effective feral cat management to improve conservation outcomes for native species, through a tenure-blind approach.

Outcome 1: Reduced predation on native species across a broad range of habitats in Western Australia.

Target	Actions	Performance measure
1.1 Priority cat-free areas remain free of feral cats, e.g. DBCA-managed Dirk Hartog Island, Rottnest Island, and Perup enclosure.	Monitor priority feral cat-free islands and enclosures (safe havens) to identify possible incursions. Implement management actions to remove feral cats when incursions are identified. Review and refine the pest declaration for feral cats to determine if specific control requirements should be included.	All priority feral cat-free areas consistently monitored using location appropriate detection methods. Area (km ²) and tenure considered cat-free across all tenures each year. Number of feral cat incursions and outcome of actions taken to remove those cats. Review feral cat pest declaration completed and recommendations made.
1.2 The area and effort for feral cat management are increased to maximise biodiversity conservation outcomes.	Continue to deliver feral cat management across existing areas where it is applied, using best practice techniques. Maintain feral cat enclosures to maximise threatened species survival. Where appropriate, integrate feral cat management into existing priority management areas that are currently managed for other feral/pest animals, including foxes. Expand feral cat management into new areas subject to available resources and according to conservation priorities. Encourage implementation of coordinated and integrated approaches to holistic land and feral cat management e.g. integration of different land management activities across tenure over time, addressing non-native prey species management. Encourage suitable habitat creation, restoration and/or management to provide protection for native fauna through the provision of refugia. Evaluate the impact of feral cat management projects.	Area (km ²) and tenure subject to sustained feral cat management increased over the life of the strategy. Number of areas investigated for habitat restoration projects. Assessment of the trajectory of native species at feral cat management sites.

Target	Actions	Performance measure
1.3 Increased tenure-blind feral cat management delivered in and around areas of high conservation value.	Develop a guideline to support successful cross-tenure land manager engagement (based on the Dryandra model and South Coast Fitz-Stirling Recovery project). Develop prescription guidelines to ensure the processes for application and approval of feral cat management tools are easy to follow and timely. Co-design and implement collaborative projects between land managers, Traditional Owners, Aboriginal ranger groups, Recognised Biosecurity Groups, Natural Resource Management, and non-government organisations to expand the area over which feral cat management occurs.	Guidelines are produced and published. Number and outcomes of cross-tenure projects implemented per year. Identify a mechanism for collation of data.



Fitting a radio collar to a feral cat to collect information on home range which will inform application of effective management actions. Photo – S Comer/DBCA

Objective 2

Objective 2: Continual improvement of methods and technologies for feral cat management through research and development.

Outcome 2: An improved and accessible toolkit for appropriate feral cat management.

Target	Actions	Performance measure
2.1 Novel* methods and technologies are identified for feral cat management. (*Tools that are currently not approved for operational use)	<p>Review and assess the merit of new technology and approaches for the management of feral cats at different geographical scales and the ability of the technology to be integrated into existing methods.</p> <p>Test appropriate technologies and approaches to determine their effectiveness at different scales, ecosystems, risk to non-target species, and capacity to enhance existing management tools.</p> <p>Undertake or contribute to population genetic and ecological research that improves understanding for the potential application of biocontrol technologies and understanding barriers to gene flow.</p>	<p>Number of novel methods or tools identified and assessed.</p> <p>Number of novel tools added to toolkit for control of feral cats.</p>
2.2 Baiting practices for feral cat management at a landscape-scale are improved.	<p>Improve understanding of how feral cats use habitats in different ecosystems.</p> <p>Synthesise relevant available information on factors that affect the efficacy of baiting, including consistency in bait deployment.</p> <p>Develop models that can assist with improving baiting efficacy.</p> <p>Continue to conduct experimental trials to collect information on knowledge gaps identified from modelling.</p> <p>Use information gathered to refine and adapt baiting methodologies and assess effectiveness of changed practices.</p>	<p>Baiting period, density, and timing optimised leading to reduced feral cat populations and/or an increase in native fauna.</p> <p>Information available to support best practice feral cat baiting.</p>
2.3 Integrated pest management and control technologies identified, tested and implemented (e.g., integrated control of rabbits, foxes, and feral cats).	<p>Document the role of integrated pest animal control across different habitats to inform improved feral cat management.</p> <p>Test and implement methods for integrated pest control as appropriate.</p> <p>Monitor success of integrated pest management and conservation outcomes achieved.</p>	<p>Guidelines published on best practice methods for integrated pest control.</p> <p>Uptake and success of integrated pest management reviewed and reported.</p>

Target	Actions	Performance measure
2.4 Improve knowledge of interactions between feral cats and other threatening processes.	<p>Improve understanding of the influence of different land management practices (e.g., fire regimes, grazing, land clearing) on feral cat movement and habitat utilisation and the consequences they have on vulnerable fauna across biomes.</p> <p>Understand the importance of habitat structure and complexity in how feral cats target prey.</p> <p>Investigate the role of habitat restoration in mitigating impacts from feral cat predation and trial the use of this technique in appropriate areas.</p>	<p>Improved knowledge of interactions that affect feral cat predation success.</p> <p>Number of publications on the interactions that affect feral cat predation success.</p> <p>Number of trial sites investigating the role of habitat restoration to mitigate feral cat impacts.</p>
2.5 Improve monitoring techniques to reliably and accurately measure the efficacy of feral cat management.	<p>Investigate use of existing and new monitoring techniques and technologies (e.g., artificial intelligence - AI) for different habitats, land tenures and for different purposes.</p>	<p>Refined monitoring techniques are available and used to demonstrate management effectiveness.</p>
2.6 Improve and refine the use of prescribed operational tools (shooting, cage traps, exclusion fences) and integrate, where potentially useful, with other available methods.	<p>Investigate and implement complementary tools for feral cat management.</p> <p>Understand when and where operational tools are most effectively applied.</p>	<p>Number of sites or area where integrated feral cat management has been implemented.</p> <p>Number of sites with improved feral cat management through reduction in population measures.</p>

Objective 3

Objective 3: Broad social acceptability and awareness of feral cat management methods.

Outcome 3: An engaged community that supports the use of approved methods for feral cat management.

Target	Actions	Performance measure
3.1 Publish information on available feral cat management tools.	Raise awareness of existing resources on feral cat management, including relevance to scale, habitat and climate. Publish and promote new information on feral cat management approaches as it becomes available.	Number of visits to relevant web information pages. Number of social media posts. Number of face-to-face presentations. Information is accessible and used to enhance state-wide management of feral cats. Improved understanding of what tools work best with consideration of scale, resource availability, habitat type and climate. Increased stakeholder engagement across WA, facilitating a collaborative approach to feral cat management. Number of community groups actively engaged in feral cat management.
3.2 Engage in the development of a decision support tool to guide best practice feral cat management.	Actively support development of a framework that describes the best feral cat management tool/s for different scenarios and make it available to all stakeholders to support decision making.	Framework is publicly available to support land manager decisions on feral cat management. Number of visits to relevant web information pages. Number of social media posts. Number of community actively engaged in feral cat management.

Target	Actions	Performance measure
3.3 Promote best practice feral cat management techniques.	Engage and educate the broader community in best practice feral cat management through traditional and online platforms, information sessions and workshops. Review and update policy as new research or technologies are approved/published. Promote integrated pest control, e.g., rabbits, to enhance successful feral cat management. Develop communication plan for landholder and community group engagement that provides information on ethical feral cat management and opportunities for collaboration.	An increase in applications for feral cat management projects by stakeholders. Increase in positive responses to feral cat management from stakeholders and broader community.
3.4 Improved public awareness of the role feral cats play in the extinction of native species.	Make resources available online that clearly demonstrate the role feral cat management plays in protecting native species. Publish widely accessible information on the impact of feral cats on native species. Educate the broader community and stakeholders about why feral cats are a problem in certain areas (e.g., mine sites, waste management facilities). Publish results of scientific research to inform improved feral cat management.	Clear, concise information is available to the public on the impacts of feral cats. Number of visits to relevant web information pages. Number of citations/downloads of relevant scientific publications. Number of education programs delivered.
3.5 Understand community concerns in relation to feral cat management.	Research/synthesise existing resources that provide an understanding of community views regarding feral cats specifically and cats more generally. Conduct field days and community workshops to understand community sentiment. Improve community engagement through coordination of programs and collaboration between stakeholders. Explore community emotions and sentiment concerning feral cat management, (using surveys etc) to help identify any barriers to the full implementation of this strategy. Ensure community sentiments are reflected in all communication and engagement strategies.	Community concerns are understood and considered in developing feral cat management programs and information. Community survey results.

For more information

Invasive Animals Program Coordinator
Ecosystem Health Branch
Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions
Locked Bag 104
Bentley Delivery Centre WA 6983
Phone: 0400 693 807
Email: ecosystemhealth@dbca.wa.gov.au

dbca.wa.gov.au

