

Agriculture Protection Board  
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# FERAL PIG



Adult sow.

**D**OMESTIC pigs (*Sus scrofa*) were introduced to Australia with the first fleet. Early settlers throughout Australia kept pigs on free range, letting them scavenge for food in the bush and herding them into yards at intervals. Inevitably some of these escaped and became established in the wild. Many feral pigs in south western Australia came from farms which were abandoned during the depression. In Western Australia, pig hunters also may have released pigs in the forests to provide game. Domestic animals and their descendants which have returned to the wild state are called feral animals. There are no native pigs in Australia and the feral pig is only distantly related to the European wild boar.

Feral pigs are now established over much of the medium to high rainfall districts throughout Australia. There are over two million feral pigs in New South Wales alone. In W.A. they are found on nearly all the Kimberley river systems and on many other rivers north of Perth as well as in fairly large numbers in the Jarrah forest areas of the south-west. Feral pigs can cause extensive damage to vegetable and grain crops. They also dig up pastures while searching for earthworms and Guildford grass bulbs. They have been implicated in killing new-born lambs in New South Wales. Pigs probably cause some lamb losses in W.A. but this has not yet been conclusively demonstrated. Feral pigs are believed to spread

*Phytophthora cinnamomi*, the fungus which causes Jarrah dieback, into uninfected parts of the forest. Pigs also increase soil erosion and increase the amount of mud going into dams and water supplies by their rooting and wallowing in the catchment areas. If an exotic disease such as foot and mouth disease or swine fever ever became established in the feral pig population of Australia, it would be extremely difficult and costly to eliminate. This would have disastrous consequences for our meat export trade as well as causing death and suffering to livestock. Feral pigs damage native plants while searching for edible roots and tubers. They also compete for food and habitats with native animals.

(continued overleaf)

# FERAL PIG

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Pigs are capable of breeding rapidly. In the wild, most sows have one litter per year and rear from four to five piglets. Mortality of piglets is heavy, around 30%, but adult pigs have few enemies except man. They reach sexual maturity at about 12 months of age at a minimum weight of 27kg. Breeding is reduced by dry seasons, but the population can rapidly expand over a series of good seasons.

Pigs have a wide ranging diet.

In one study of pigs in the Jarrah forest of W.A., they were found to eat the fruit and kernels of *Zamia* palms, roots and tubers of bracken and other ferns, *Bossia ornata*

(a common forest legume), Guildford grass bulbs, other green vegetable matter, *Oxalis* bulbs, frogs, earthworms, reptiles, fledgling birds, crops, fungi and carrion.

Most feral pigs are black or partly black, although some domestic pigs which originally went wild would probably have been white. It seems likely that black pigs survive better than white ones in the wild, since white coat colour is genetically dominant to black in domestic pigs. Adult females and their litters are frequently found together in small groups of up to 12 pigs. Boars are usually solitary. Groups occupy

defined territories of several square kilometres, invariably close to water. Feral pigs are controlled by trapping, hunting with dogs, shooting and poisoning. Techniques have been worked out to poison pigs without killing non-target species.

***Pigs represent a threat to agriculture and the environment. It is essential to control the population.***

***For advice on pig control, contact the Agriculture Protection Board, Jarrah Road, South Perth, W.A. 6151, telephone (09) 367 0111 or any country office of the APB or the Department of Agriculture.***