

## FERAL PORK CHOPS

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### INTRODUCTION

Throughout the history of Australia many domestic pigs have "gone bush". These have multiplied and spread through a considerable area to form the current population of feral pigs. The size and importance of these populations fluctuate markedly in response to seasonal conditions and hunting pressures. Feral pigs are declared noxious animals in N.S.W., Victoria, Queensland and W.A. The States most affected by these pigs are Queensland and N.S.W. Within W.A. they are established in the Kimberleys, Pilbara and North West and in the lower Murchison and Geraldton areas. A major population has colonised parts of the State Forest area in the lower south west.

### Distribution within State Forest

Feral pigs were first reported in the Darling Range in 1870 and were present around Williams in 1914. It is now considered that they occur in the forest from the Serpentine River southwards to Kirup, Grimwade and Boyup Brook.

### Hunting or Management?

About 100 hunters of feral pigs have been identified. Few actually shoot the pigs and hunting with dogs is the most common form. Some are in fact "farming" the feral pig - as indicated by stories of castrated pigs, boar releases for the purposes of upgrading stock, translocation of captured pigs (especially sows in litter) to other areas. It has been estimated that 2000+ feral pigs are captured and slaughtered each year.

### Concern?

Concern about feral pigs has been expressed by several bodies and some of these met in November 1975, to exchange ideas and information.

Agriculture Feral pigs could be carriers of disease (e.g. foot and mouth, leptospirosis, tuberculosis etc.). Since feral pigs are slaughtered privately, health problems (e.g. salmonella) could occur.

A.P.B. Pigs are declared vermin.

Forests Pigs could be of concern from the spread of dieback, water supply and native fauna points of view.

Fisheries and Wildlife Expressed concern with respect to native animals and destruction of habitat.

Water Supply (PWD and MWB) Possibility of disease spread, turbidity problems and pollution of water supplies.

Farmers group Concern with damage to crops and fences.

These groups were concerned about the possible effects of quarantine, in that it could assist in a rapid buildup of feral pigs and result in a population explosion. Current evidence suggests that sows become pregnant at very light weights and commonly raise quite large litters.

#### RESEARCH

It was obvious that further data was required to identify the nature and scale of the problem (or perhaps to decide if a problem existed!). Several projects have commenced. These include:

- a) Autopsy and serological examination of blood samples. To date these have shown feral pigs to be remarkably healthy. Evidence suggests that these pigs have little contact with domestic stock.
- b) "Sensitivity analysis" of pigs to naturally occurring and other poisons (1080, warfarin etc.). Baiting techniques. Effects of poisons on native fauna and water supplies.
- c) Trapping techniques.
- d) University project.

The six departments involved have agreed to sponsor a student at the Zoology Department, (University of W.A.), for a period of 1 to 2 years. This student is Mr Kim Masters, a resident of Collie, who is currently undertaking a Master's Degree. Several aspects are under investigation. Both direction and support is being provided by the Departments represented on the feral pig committee.

One aspect of this study is a survey which will attempt to gather all available information in order to obtain a clearer overall picture of the status of the feral pig. A questionnaire has been prepared and issued to Government employees, pig hunters, farmers etc. By now, I trust that you have returned your copy and thank you for your assistance.