

# Feral Animals on islands - Effect and Control

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Earlier papers in these proceedings have discussed the effects and control of feral animals on Australia and New Zealand islands and it is clear that feral animals, both vertebrate and invertebrate, can significantly degrade conservation values of islands through predation, overgrazing, competition for food and nesting sites etc. It is also clear that eradication and control programs will only be successful if undertaken by personnel determined to succeed and if supported by appropriate resources. It should be noted that in this workshop no distinction is made between control and eradication and the term control is subsequently applied in the general sense.

Because of the large number of feral animals introduced to New Zealand, and the early realisation of the conservation values of New Zealand islands, control programs have been underway in New Zealand for many years and Australia has been able to learn a great deal from the New Zealand experience, particularly in control and post control techniques such as relocation of species. However, because of the physical differences between many Australian and New Zealand islands, and because instances control on Australian islands is undertaken to preserve population of native mammals (many of which are in the critical weight range referred to by Burbidge in these proceedings), Australian workers have in some cases developed their own technique for feral animal control.

Feral animal control is an important aspect of island management in both Australia and New Zealand, and consideration was given during this workshop to how priorities for control should be established. Consideration was also given to responsibility for control of feral animals and the public relations aspect of feral animal control.

Resources for feral animal control including funding, personnel and equipment have always been, and will probably continue to be limited and it is important for any organisation involved in this to determine their own priorities. Some of the factors influencing these priorities could be:

- a. Is the feral animal actually a problem animal and causing damage to an ecosystem?
- b. Does its continued presence threaten the survival of a species? (Islands with the last population of a species should receive high priority for control.)
- c. What other values does the island have, and will eradication of the feral species make it available for other purposes?
- d. Is there a good chance of successful eradication, and is there a possibility of further works being required.
- e. How many feral species need controlling? If more than one species, it should be determined which be eradicated first and what the consequences of this on the other feral species will be.

Presently feral animal control is conducted by government agencies on land for which they have responsibility, or against declared pest species. There are problems on freehold and leased islands where the owner/lessee does not control feral animals and in some cases may even encourage them.

It was suggested that feral animal control should be a coordinated undertaking between all responsible government agencies and land owners, and that a single species, such as the fox in Australia, should be tackled on a national scale. Invertebrate pest species should also be considered for coordinated control where they affect wildlife conservation. Techniques for control such as genetic engineering, sterilization and chemosterilants were discussed. This type of response to feral animal control could possibly be co-ordinated by the CONCOM Feral Animal Committee. As part of this co-ordinated approach, a register of personnel and institutions involved in feral animal control in New Zealand and Australia would be kept.

Public scrutiny of feral animal control programs is increasing and the public relations aspect is an important consideration when planning such a program. The public should be informed accurately about why control is necessary and how it will be undertaken. The positive aspects of the program should be emphasized. There is a Code of Practice

for feral animal control and control should be undertaken in the most humane way possible. The emotive value of target species is also important to consider, especially when undertaking control programs close to population centres.