2023

Greater Port Hedland Vertebrate Pest Management Program


Flatback Turtle

Port Hedland Industries Council

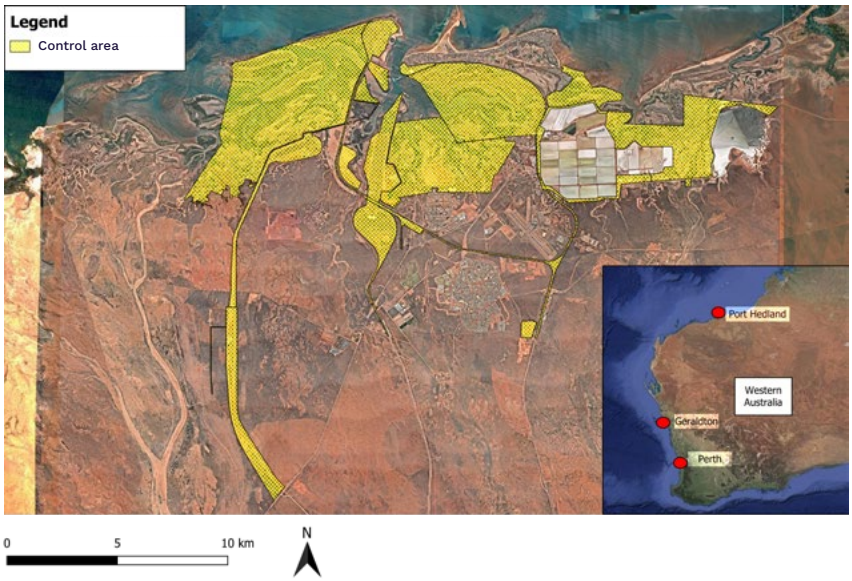
Port Hedland Industries Council (PHIC) plays a key role in facilitating industry partnerships and provides a platform for relevant parties to engage meaningfully through information and resource sharing.

The Greater Port Hedland Vertebrate Pest Management Program (VPMP) is an example of this collaborative approach and provides a more holistic management strategy for broad scale feral animal control in Port Hedland.

PHIC members have been coordinating efforts to manage vertebrate pests in Port Hedland since 2009 when individual members started coordinating their programs to support work undertaken by Care for Hedland. This evolved into the Vertebrate Pest Management Program (VPMP) in 2017, a coordinated program which aims to control foxes and feral cats across multiple land tenures in Port Hedland. Stakeholders including Care for Hedland, Pilbara Ports Authority (PPA), Roy Hill, Fortescue, BHP, Dampier Salt (DSL) and Town of Port Hedland (ToPH) have been involved in various coordinated programs since its implementation. PHIC commenced coordination of the VPMP in 2022, with the aim of regular industry involvement in the Program, resulting in a more holistic approach to vertebrate pest control measures in Port Hedland.


Northern Quoll


Brush-tailed Mulgara



"The VPMP covers an area of approximately 9,932ha across multiple land tenements within the Port Hedland district in the Pilbara region of Western Australia."

GREATER PORT HEDLAND VERTEBRATE PEST MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

The Greater Port Hedland Vertebrate Pest Management Program (VPMP) is a coordinated feral animal program targeted at managing environmental impacts caused by the Red Fox *(Vulpes vulpes)* and feral cats *(Felis catus)*.

While coordination of individual feral animal control programs within the Port Hedland region has been conducted as early as 2009 (Animal Pest Management Services, 2009), it was recognised that outcomes could be improved by conducting the program as a whole of Port Hedland collaborative approach. Land managers recognised that, to effectively control the need to address the feral animals and the effectiveness of feral animal control on a broader scale, the VPMP program was needed. This included the timing of control efforts across multiple tenures which is critical to avoiding refuges from which feral animal populations could recover.

Prior to the implementation of a coordinated Vertebrate Pest Management Program (VPMP) in the Town of Port Hedland (ToPH) high levels of predation by foxes of turtle nests was occurring. Reports from Care For Hedland's turtle monitoring program indicate that up to 88% of nests are destroyed at some beaches within a single nesting season. VPMP has seen a total drop in nest disturbance at Pretty Pool and turtles have been observed successfully nesting in areas where they had been previously unknown to nest (Downes Island). The VPMP also reduces pressure on populations of other native fauna such as Quolls, birds and lizards and these animals have now been observed where previously there were heavy fox populations.

How is Port Hedland Protected?

The Greater Port Hedland VPMP includes bi-annual treatment, with on ground treatment focussing on the red fox and feral cats.

The VPMP covers an area of approximately 9,932ha across multiple land tenements within the Port Hedland district in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. The Program works to increase awareness of the damage that can be caused to native fauna and ecosystems by foxes and feral cats and works to reduce the impact on susceptible native fauna species and the environment. By covering a broad area around Port Hedland's turtle nesting beaches, the Program reduces the opportunity for reestablishment of fox populations close to these beaches. This is achieved by:

- implementing effective controls according to leading practice guidelines, and
- promoting collaboration and information and resource sharing to ensure a holistic, broadscale approach across multiple land tenures.

Declared Pests

Under the *Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007*, management of declared pests, to limit their distribution and alleviate harmful impacts, is a requirement of landowners and managers. Within Western Australia, foxes are listed as a declared pest and assigned management control.

Similar to the red fox, predation of native species by feral cats is identified as a threatening process under the EPBC Act and a Threat Abatement Plan provides a framework to guide a national response to the effects of feral cats on native biodiversity.

Red Fox (vulpes vulpes)

Red foxes were introduced to Australia in the 1860s and are currently widely distributed throughout Australia in a range of habitats, including the urban environment. Due to its adaptability, broad habitat, reproductive success and predatory instincts the red fox poses a serious threat to native biodiversity.

Poison baiting, using 1080, is the most effective broadscale control strategy to manage fox and wild dog populations, however it is only used in areas where there is no public access or risk to pets. Soft foothold trapping is the other strategy used in areas closer to the community, with euthanasia occurring away from public areas.

Other conservation significant native fauna that may be at risk from fox predation and are known to occur in the area include:

- Brush-tailed Mulgara (Priority 4)
- Crest-tailed Mulgara (Priority 4)
- Northern Quoll (Endangered)
- Bilby (Vulnerable).

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Red Fox

Feral Cats (felis catus)

Cats were introduced to Australia with the First Fleet, with numerous subsequent introductions around the mainland and offshore islands. Feral cats now occupy almost all habitat types over 92% of Australia.

While cats are grouped into three categories, it is important to note they all refer to the same species and have the potential to be a significant threat to native fauna. Whether considered feral, domestic or stray, the categorising of cats are labels of convenience and individual cats may move from one category to the next. Stray and domestic cats have the potential to impact threatened species if left unchecked in high value conservation areas.

The objectives of the Threat Abatement Plan include:

- Effectively control feral cats in different landscapes
- Improve effectiveness of existing control options for feral cats
- Develop or maintain alternative strategies for threatened species recovery
- Increase public support for feral cat management and promote responsible cat ownership.

Similar to fox abatement, the most effective control techniques used for feral cats includes trapping and baiting euthanasia.


Bilby

Program Implementation

A target baiting and trapping program is carried out biannually (April and August) to coincide with the lifecycle and ecology of the target species.


Feral animal trap

Outcomes

Results of the September /October 2022 treatment saw a total of 10 cats and one fox trapped and removed.

Feral animal capture results were similar to September 2021 treatment, with nine cats and one fox captured and removed. Trapped foxes and feral cats are humanely euthanised.

During the September 2022 treatment fox tracks were found in areas where baits had been taken. Several baits were taken during the September 2022 treatment event from across various tenements within the approved baiting areas indicating the program is successfully targeting foxes in the region.

Care for Hedland's results from their 2022/2023 turtle nesting program found no evidence of predation on turtle nests by foxes.

PHIC Members

Pilbara Ports Authority · BHP · Fortescue · Roy Hill · ConsMin · Mineral Resources · Pilbara Minerals · Sandfire

Community Partners

Town of Port Hedland · Care for Hedland · RioTinto

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