CASE STUDY – Southern Queensland Murray Darling Feral Animal Initiative

INTRODUCTION

Goondiwindi Regional Council area covers approximately 19,294 square kilometres. Landholders in the area have been impacted by the current drought situation with a loss of agricultural production. Producers have been put in a marginal situation and feral animals have added to that impact.

Producers have identified that feral pest numbers increased dramatically during the wet years of 2011 – 2013 and even though the region has been experiencing drought since 2014, the dry conditions have not reduced pest populations.

Funding was received from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) to support feral animal management through the Federal Government Drought Assistance Program. The funding was provided for landscape scale action on wild dog and feral pig populations in the area.

Western Downs, Goondiwindi, Balonne and Maranoa Regional Councils in partnership with the Queensland Murray Darling Committee looked to collaboratively use this funding to enhance existing pest control programmes targeting wild dog and feral pig populations that are further damaging drought impacted rural enterprises.

This case study focuses on the unique way that the project was delivered in the Goondiwindi Regional Council area.

AIMS

The project aimed to:

- Use the funding efficiently and effectively
- Deliver the project on a landscape scale targeting a large group of landholders
- Provide short to medium support to landholders
- Work in conjunction with existing programs in the area assisting landholders to manage pest impacts.
- Introduce more landholders to available support groups.

PARTNERS AND MANAGEMENT

1. **Targeted Feral Pig Control Program**
   Governance – Goondiwindi Regional Council
   Coordination of on ground activities and data collection– Waggamba Landcare, Inglewood & Texas Landcare Association Inc, Council's Natural Resource Management Officer
   Facilitation and engagement of landholders – Landcare

Identifying target areas – Landcare and Goondiwindi Regional Council
Bait Preparation - Goondiwindi Regional Council Rural Services team and Biosecurity Queensland Officer.
Technical Advice for feral pig control – Biosecurity Queensland Officer
Coordination of Aerial Shooting Contractor – Waggamba Landcare and Inglewood & Texas Landcare Assoc Inc.
Reporting - Goondiwindi Regional Council

2. **Intensive Dog Trapping Program**
   Landholder engagement and coordination of on ground activities – Waggamba Landcare and Inglewood & Texas Landcare Assoc Inc.
   Trapping - Goondiwindi Regional Council Trapper and contracted trapper.

Cross border partnerships also existed with Balonne, Maranoa and Western Downs and their neighbouring projects.

PROCESS/METHODS

Identifying Target Areas:

Priority target areas were ascertained in two ways:

- Both Landcare and Council had existing knowledge from previous consultations where high impacts were being felt as a result of feral animals
- Where existing producer groups were actively working to implement control programs.

Landcare groups were already strong in the areas and a strong relationship between Landcare and Council was also pre-existing. This relationship was deemed particularly important in allowing the groups to become peer support teams to deal with the rigours of drought and difficult conditions. The Landcare officers would be able to link landholders with other resources following their interaction through the program.

Engagement:

Landcare coordinated producer meetings in the target areas and gave landholders ownership of the decision making of the best way the funds could be used. Biosecurity Queensland provided technical advice on the use of 1080 poison and introduced the methods involved. Producers identified key times to bait so that the program could be best scheduled for maximum success. Key times identified were during winter, before the milky stage of the wheat and before sorghum comes to head. Outside of these times, producers identified there would be too much preferred food source available for pigs and they wouldn't take the bait.

Landcare worked one on one with landholders to fill in the gaps in some areas to ensure a landscape scale approach was achieved.

Eight (8) landholder groups were involved in the pig control program, coordinated by the two Landcare groups, across the region.

Producers from the Commoron Creek area Co-ordinating the aerial shooting

Delivery:

The pig control program involved a variety of methods being utilised including: 1080 baiting, trapping and aerial shooting. Landcare liaised with landholders and Council to arrange a date for the bait mixing day (inside the key timing window identified by landholders) when all parties were available. Once the date was set Landholders went about free feeding to determine where the hot spots were and how much grain was required for 1080 treatment. Landcare collected the volume uptake data from the landholders to provide to council to ensure enough 1080 was available for the baiting day. Landcare would then set about coordinating the schedule for the landholders to bring their soaked and drained grain to a central spot for treatment to ensure it was time efficient for all involved. Where landholders were not comfortable with using 1080, they utilised trapping during the same time. Once baiting was completed, a follow up aerial shoot was conducted.

In the case of the wild dog control a baiting program was implemented followed up by an intensive trapping program. This involved contracting an experienced trapper from the local area that was well respected by his peers. As evidence of dog movement in an area was reported the trapper had the flexibility to respond promptly. Once on the property the landholder would accompany the trapper to assist in setting traps and to learn the signs of dog movement, enabling the landholder to monitor and reset traps as required. As one landholder commented "*I sleep much better at night now knowing that all the tips I have learnt and the mentoring I have received are achieving results".*

Distribution of meat baits treated with 1080 for wild dog control in the Inglewood & Texas Landcare Assoc Inc area

Monitoring:

A conscious decision was made to keep monitoring simple. Landholders were asked to make diary notes of pest sightings, tracks, crop damage and attacks on livestock. During baiting, bait sites were monitored for uptake of baits and where bait had not been taken it was buried or moved to an area where uptake was occurring.

RESULTS

Impact assessment: Visually it was easy to observe that the adverse impacts on crop production had reduced. Likewise animal production increased due to reduced numbers of wild dogs and feral pigs. Also fewer numbers of feral animals were observed in the areas involved.

The follow up trapping planned for the Eastern portion of the region (mentioned above) was delayed after the baiting as landholders reported little dog activity. There the baiting program was deemed to be very successful. However recent increased dog activity may be the result of an adjoining Council not being able to be involved in the project from the outset.

The project was delivered within the timeframes set out in the agreement and the funding was used efficiently and effectively in conjunction with existing programs in the area due to largely to the Landcare coordination of the projects and existing relationships in the study area. The program was very useful in exposing producers to other assistance that may be available and support services that

may be of interest. Most importantly it has seen increased participation in ongoing pest control and land management programs.

Proposed Activity	Outputs	Details of Outputs Achieved
Additional round of baiting aimed at dogs and foxes but may include pigs	1. Number of landholders engaged	56 landholders targeting dogs
	2. Area baited	186501.40 ha
	3. Kilograms of bait distributed	975 kg of injected meat 132 manufactured baits
Dog trapping in the Eastern area of the region	1. Number of landholders participating	39
	2. Area of land trapped	106193.337 ha
	3. Number of animals trapped	19
	4. Number of traps purchased	50
Targeted feral pig baiting	1. Number of landholders participating	167
	2. Number of animals destroyed	It is hard to accurately identify how many pigs were destroyed during the baiting. Based on a 500g fatal dose it is not unreasonable to assume that 75% of meat baits were taken resulting in the death of 1,000 pigs. 250g of treated grain is considered a fatal dose however it is unlikely that an individual pig would only consume 250g, if they each consumed a kilogram of treated grain, potentially 18,496 pigs were destroyed. This is not an unreasonable figure when over 9,000 pigs have been shot and baiting was carried out prior to the aerial shooting.
	3. Area baited	477240.6739 ha
	4. Kilograms of bait distributed	18.5 tonne of grain 673 kg meat
Targeted aerial shooting of feral pigs	1. Number of landholders participating	199
	2. Number of animals destroyed	9,076
	3. Area shot	566184.1415 ha

Table 1 - Table of outcomes as at 24 June 2015

WHAT WORKED

Involving producers in the initial decision making process gave them ownership of the project which ensured engagement. Landcare facilitated the initial producer meetings to ensure producers could have their say on how the project should be delivered and what way the funds were best used, all the while ensuring the final approach taken met the guidelines outlined in the funding deed.

Utilising established networks – Landcare already had strong group memberships which made it quick and easy to instigate the projects.

Each stakeholder had their own strengths which provided diversity to the program, and each stakeholder understood their role in the program, which contributed to positive interactions and all participants working together well as a team.

Providing participants with alternatives to baiting enabled greater participation in some districts and increased effectiveness.

Use of one pilot contractor in the aerial shooting in most cases meant that the shooting was done on a broad scale, rather than property by property. The boundaries were eliminated to an extent creating fewer restrictions.

Chopper used for aerial shooting of feral animals.

The length of the project enabled coordinated delivery at key times for producers.

There was also flexibility in the delivery. The shooting and baiting needed to be swapped in one instance due to weather but the program was still able to be delivered.

Communication with neighbouring councils outside of the program was also a positive.

Reporting and monitoring was kept simple to ensure funds went on the ground and not into bureaucracy.

HURDLES TO OVERCOME

Many Landholders have regular ground shooters who access their properties to help control feral pigs, and even though research shows ground shooting has very little impact on the overall pig population, some Landholders were still reluctant to use 1080 in case they upset their regular shooters.

Absentee landholders were difficult to contact so needed to be identified earlier to be included in the program.

Predictably, boundary lines of the project area creates sites at which potential reinfestation can occur. It is planned to use the phase II funding and to divert some Council efforts to work with adjoining Councils not included by the guidelines of phase I.

CONCLUSION

The key to the programs success was having the right people in roles, utilising existing networks, to allow the program to be performed on a landscape scale in a timely and effective manner.

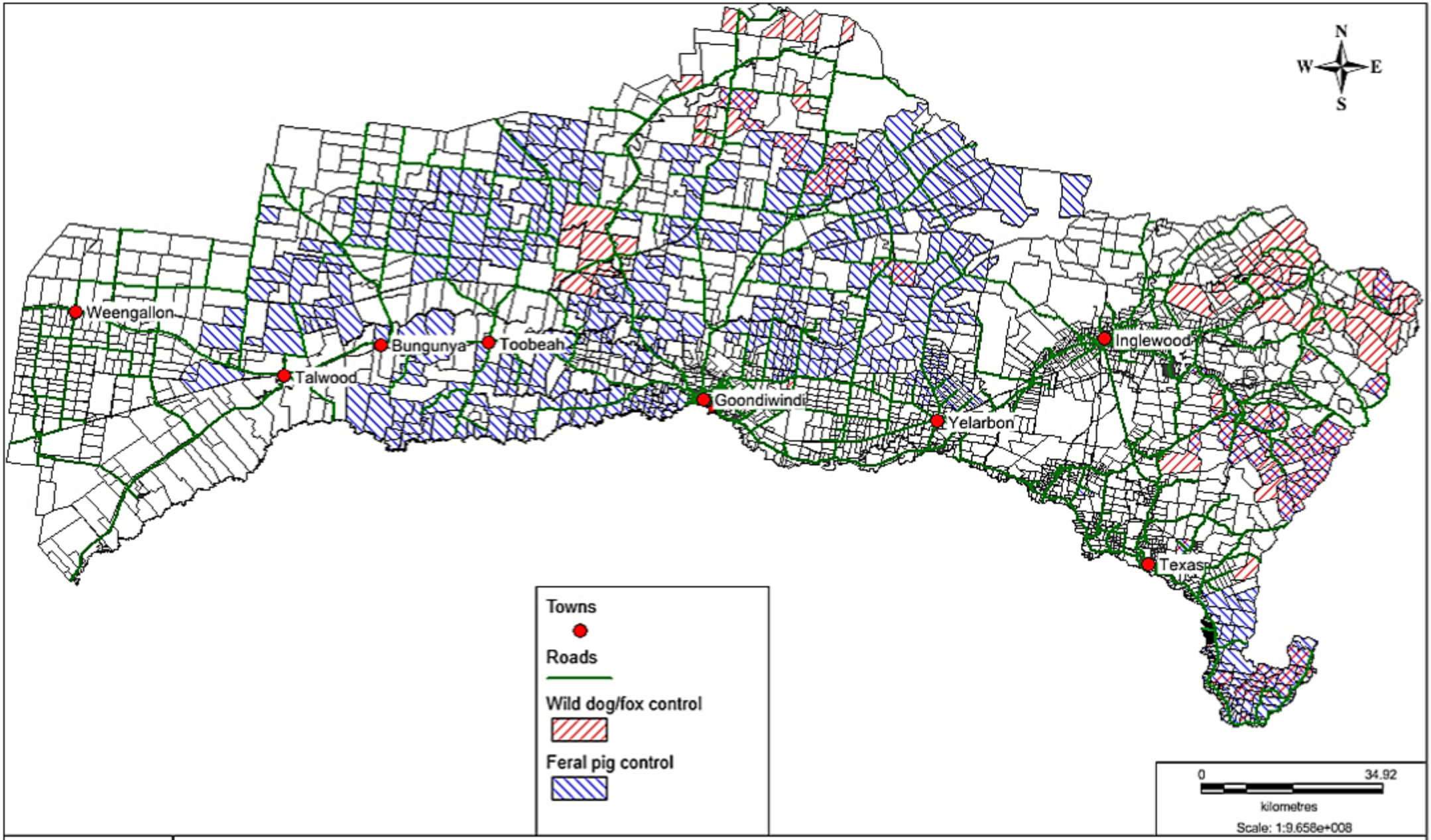
In this region the active Landcare groups were able to quickly mobilise and get funds flowing to those impacted by the drought. The simple reporting and monitoring meant that already frustrated and stressed landholders were not being put to more work to collect data that many other programs and processes already collect.

Goondiwindi REGIONAL COUNCIL

WAGGAMBA LANDCARE

LANDCARE Inglewood & Texas

Australian Government
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry



Goondiwindi REGIONAL COUNCIL

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Southern Queensland Murray Darling Feral Animal Initiative
Involvement map.

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