

QUESTION ON NOTICE
No. 730
Asked on 17 October 2013

DR FLEGG asked the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (MR McVEIGH)—

QUESTION:

What work has the government done in assessing and reducing the impact of feral animal species on Queensland's biodiversity generally and in particular, what control strategies are practical to reduce the impact of feral animals, and in particular, feral cats, on the environment?

ANSWER:

Feral animals including cats, foxes, pigs, cane toads, rabbits, deer and wild dogs can impact on biodiversity in a number of ways, such as by direct predation, competing with native animals for food or shelter and degrading habitats.

I am advised that the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection has assessed the impact of feral animals on native species that are at risk through the 'Back on Track Species Prioritisation Framework'. This process showed that the pest animal that posed a major threat to most priority species was feral pigs, followed by foxes, gambusia and feral cats.

Feral cats, pigs and foxes are declared pests under Queensland's legislation which means that Local Governments must manage the species in their local government area and landholders must take reasonable steps to control the species on their land. Similarly, gambusia are noxious fish and cannot be released into Queensland waterways.

Frontline Service Officers from Biosecurity Queensland in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) provide leadership and assist co-ordination for feral animal management in Queensland. They provide technical advice, supply 1080 for use in state-wide baiting programs and train authorised 1080 users. They also work with local governments and landholders to develop landholder-led feral animal management.

The Queensland Government has taken further direct action to limit the impact of feral animals. Earlier this year, the Queensland Government hosted a Feral Animal Summit. Officers from several Government departments including DAFF, worked closely with industry, business, community groups, Local Government and conservation organisations to bring the Summit to fruition. The management of feral cats to limit impacts on threatened species was discussed at the Summit.

One of the findings of the Summit was that a great deal of work is being done by a range of organisations and individuals however there could be an improvement in increasing the coordination of these actions. Information from the Summit will guide the development of a framework to address particular feral animal issues and increase co-ordination activities.

As a further example of my commitment to combating the feral animal problem, I have also recently appointed the Invasive Plant and Animal Committee or IPAC to provide strategic advice to myself and DAFF.

DAFF advocates the integrated control of feral animals and recommends concurrent baiting for feral cats, foxes, feral pigs and wild dogs. In particular, DAFF officers in Western Queensland are currently encouraging landholders to manage their feral animal populations as wild life and domestic animals are congregating around remaining waters.

With respect to feral cats, Queensland's legislation is the strongest in Australia as landholders are required to control feral cats on their land. As broad scale eradication of feral cats is not practical, control programs are best managed at the regional and local level. Effective management includes the identification of natural assets that require protection and coordinated multispecies control programs carried out by landholders, Natural Resource Management Groups, local governments, State government departments and volunteers.

As an example, I am advised that since May 2012, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service rangers have removed around 3,000 feral cats from Astrebla Downs National Park, following a boom in feral cat numbers after successive wet seasons.

Stray cats can add to the feral cat problem particularly in urban areas, hence promoting responsible cat ownership to limit the source of stray cat populations is important. The Queensland Government promotes responsible pet management by requiring that owned cats are microchipped by a registered implanter.

In summary, pest animals represent an ongoing threat to biodiversity and the environment as well as agriculture and Biosecurity Queensland will continue to work to limit their impacts.