Concept Plan 0-2003

Development of effective broad-scale aerial baiting strategies for the control of feral cats

Animal Science

Project Core Team

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Approved and active

Document endorsements and approvals as of April 11, 2016, 4:18 p.m.

Project Team	granted
Program Leader	granted
Directorate	granted

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Science and Conservation Division Program

Animal Science

Parks and Wildlife Service

Service 2: Conserving Habitats, Species and Ecological Communities

Background and Aims

Control of feral cats is recognised as one of the most important conservation issues in Australia today. The impact of feral cats on native fauna is acknowledged by Commonwealth legislation, as outlined in Schedule 3 of the Endangered Species Protection Act 1992. The national 'Threat Abatement Plan for Predation by Feral Cats' (Anon. 1999) lists 38 species on Schedule 1 of the above Act for which there is a known or inferred threat from feral cat populations. That is, 38 endangered species have been identified as potentially benefiting from effective feral cat control, as part of their management/recovery programs.

Predation by feral cats (Felis catus) has been identified as one of the major obstacles to the reconstruction of the fauna, particularly small to medium-sized mammals, in the arid and semi-arid zones of Australia (Dickman 1996; Anon. 1999). Anecdotal evidence has indicated that predation by feral cats, either acting singly or in concert with other factors, has resulted in the local extinction of a number of species on islands and mainland Australia. Many of these species are now restricted to several offshore islands, others have undergone dramatic contractions in their former mainland range. Due to small population sizes and restricted geographic ranges these species are vulnerable to total extinction.

Predation by feral cats also affects the continued survival of many native species persisting at low population levels (Dickman 1996; Smith and Quin 1996) and has prevented the successful re-introduction of species to parts of their former range (Gibson et al. 1994; Christensen and Burrows 1994).

Broad-scale baiting offers the best option to control feral cats in strategic areas and is seen as the method most likely to produce an effective operational method for cat control (Anon. 1999). Development of an effective baiting technique for the control of the feral cat is cited as a high priority by the national Threat Abatement Plan for Predation by Feral Cats (Anon. 1999). The Department of Conservation and Land Management has designed and developed a bait medium that is attractive to feral cats and effective in controlling them on a localised scale. The baits are manufactured at the Department's Bait Factory at Harvey. This bait medium has been employed as an integral part of successful island cat eradication programs off the Western Australian coast (Algar and Burbidge 2000; Algar et al. in press) and was used as the sole tool of eradication on Faure Island (Algar et al. in prep.). The program, in progress, described in this SPP is aimed at developing optimal broad-scale control programs for feral cats.

Expected outcome

The step-wise approach to developing an optimal broad-scale cat predation control strategy for wildlife recovery outlined above is being pursued to provide for effective and cost-efficient wildlife recovery. The focus is on optimising cat predation control through aerial baiting and providing a comprehensive evaluation of any impact on non-target species populations. The program is structured to enable analysis of the cost-benefit of various baiting regimes on both feral cats and non-target species and provide information essential to gaining registration of the cat bait. Once registration is achieved the baiting protocols developed will be able to be implemented across the arid and semi-arid interior of Australia and perhaps elsewhere in the world.

Strategic context

Expected collaborations

Proposed period of the project

None – None

Staff time allocation

Role	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Scientist Technical Volunteer Collaborator			

Indicative operating budget

Source	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Consolidated Funds (DPaW) External Funding			