

Progress Report SP 2015-016

Improved fauna recovery in the Pilbara – assessing the uptake of feral cat baits by northern quolls, and their associated survivorship

Animal Science

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Project Team	granted
Program Leader	granted
Directorate	granted

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Context

The northern quoll (*Dasyurus hallucatus*) is one of seven terrestrial mammal species that has declined in the Pilbara over the last 100 years. Predation by feral cats is regarded as one of the most significant threatening processes for this Vulnerable listed species. The recent development of the *Eradicat*[®] bait provides an opportunity to control feral cats at a landscape scale in the Pilbara. However knowledge of the diet and laboratory trials suggest that northern quolls may be at some risk from ingestion of toxic feral cat baits. This risk needs to be examined in a field situation where alternative prey items for quolls may reduce the risk from toxic bait ingestion. This project is funded from a Rio Tinto *EPBC Act* offset condition.

Aims

- To assess the field uptake of *Eradicat*[®] feral cat baits by northern quolls and impact on survivorship in the Pilbara.
- To develop an effective cat control strategy that will benefit the northern quoll and other threatened species in the Pilbara.

Progress

- Finalised funding arrangements and project design with Rio Tinto.
- Field work commenced in May 2015.
- 21 quolls radio-collared at the Yarraloola site (cat baited) and 2 quoll radiocollared at the Red Hill (unbaited site).
- Baiting of a 20,000 ha area at Yarraloola undertaken in early July.
- As at August 2015, no quolls had died as a result of cat bait ingestion, most mortalities were associated with feral cat predation.

Management implications

- The outcomes of this trial will determine how the feral cat bait *Eradicat*[®] will be used in the Pilbara for fauna conservation programs at a landscape level.
- If it is shown that cat baiting does not present a risk to northern quolls, further cat control programs in the Pilbara can be contemplated.

Future directions

- Finalise cat baiting trial at Yarraloola / Red Hill, remove radio-collars from quolls.
- Prepare report for Rio Tinto.
- Commence planning for the longer term monitoring of northern quoll population at Yarraloola with implementation of operational cat baiting program.