

Progress Report SP 2015-016

Improved fauna recovery in the Pilbara – benefitting the endangered northern quoll through broad-scale feral cat baiting

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Project Team

granted

Program Leader

granted

Directorate

granted

Improved fauna recovery in the Pilbara – benefitting the endangered northern quoll through broad-scale feral cat baiting

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Context

The northern quoll (*Dasyurus hallucatus*) is one of a suite of terrestrial mammal species that has declined in the Pilbara over the last 100 years. Predation by feral cats is a key threat to this endangered species. The development of the *Eradicator*[®] feral cat bait has provided the opportunity to control this invasive predator at a landscape scale in the south-west of Western Australia, but questions remain as to the potential risks of broad-scale feral cat baiting programs on northern quolls and other native carnivores in the Pilbara. A trial baiting program undertaken on the Yarraloola pastoral lease in 2015 demonstrated that the *Eradicator*[®] bait presents no detectable risk to northern quolls. Based on this evidence, annual winter baiting of feral cats with *Eradicator*[®] over 145,000 hectares of Yarraloola will occur from 2016 to 2019. Monitoring programs will measure its success in reducing cat numbers and the response by northern quolls.

Aims

- Conduct and assess the effectiveness of broad-scale aerial baiting program using *Eradicator*[®] to target feral cats on Yarraloola.
- Assess the potential benefits of broad-scale cat baiting on northern quoll populations by comparing their abundance and demographics over time within the baited Yarraloola site and the neighbouring unbaited reference site on Red Hill pastoral lease.

Progress

- A final report was published on the baiting trial and how northern quolls expanded their range in response.
- A paper was published in *PLOS One* demonstrating the positive benefits provided to northern quolls by controlling feral cats using the aerial application of the *Eradicator*[®] bait.

Management implications

- The evidence that *Eradicator*[®] baiting has no harmful impact on northern quolls indicates that quolls benefit both directly and indirectly from landscape-level control of feral cats and that operational use of the *Eradicator*[®] feral cat bait in the Pilbara can protect northern quolls and other native fauna from feral cat predation.
- The unpredictable behaviour of feral cats indicates that an adoptive management approach is likely to be needed to enhance effectiveness of control programs.

Future directions

- This project has been completed.