

Pigs

Impacts

Predation, habitat degradation, competition and disease transmission by wild pigs has been listed as a key threatening process. A key threatening process is defined as a something that “threatens or may threaten the survival, abundance or evolutionary development of a native species or ecological community” (DECC).

Pigs can cause very significant soil disturbance as they root around for food or wallow in wet areas. Both of which can contribute to soil erosion and a reduction in water quality. They compete with native animals for food such as native plants, insects, reptiles and ground nesting birds. Pigs will also eat and damage commercial crops damaging fences in the process and have been known to attack new born lambs. A little known fact about pigs is that they are predators of native birds, reptiles, reptile eggs, frogs and soil invertebrates.

The damage caused to habitats by pigs can also provide an opportunity for weed species to become established. Once established these weeds have the potential to alter the composition of native vegetation communities. Pigs are also a vector for dispersal of diseases such as leptospirosis, porcine brucellosis and tuberculosis and possibly root rot fungus causing vegetation dieback. Pig activity can have a significant impact on biodiversity and ecosystem resilience and they also foul and damage water holes.

The negative impact of pigs comes at a considerable cost to the environment and the Australian economy. The costs associated with pigs include management and control programs, rehabilitation of degraded sites and increased costs to food production. The following table highlights the annual costs of managing pigs in Australia.

Table 1: Cost of pigs (Pest Animal Control CRC, 2004)

Cost Component	Control	Loss
Agricultural Production	-	\$100 million
Management Cost	\$5 million	-
Research Cost	\$1.5 million	-
Total Cost	\$6.5 million	\$100 million

Distribution

Pigs occur throughout Australia with estimates on population levels varying from 3.5 to 23.5million. Pigs are common throughout NSW especially in the west. They are mobile and their distribution within the Molonglo catchment is considered patchy and seasonal. They favour timbered areas with access to water, with less activity reported in cleared country. Sightings of pigs occur most frequently in the south-eastern side of the catchment. However, they have been recorded in a number of other areas.

Case Study

A long time local from the Burra creek area within the Molonglo catchment has been struggling with wild pigs on his property for some years now. In their search for food, the pigs will often root around in the soil, “sometimes it’s so bad it looks like a rotary hoe has been through the place, they create the perfect conditions for weeds to invade.” He believes most of the pigs are coming down through the Tinderrys: “They tend to stay up in the higher country during the day and hang about water, but during the night they make their way to the lower areas and cause unbelievable damage” he said. In a concerted effort to control the pig numbers on his property, he has set up a number of large cage traps, luring the pigs with wheat. The local landholder said “most people aren’t aware of their presence because they are active at night which means they don’t directly see them, but I can assure you they are there. I have caught as many as 13 pigs in a single trap on occasions ranging from young ones through to a 140kg boar”.



Description

Pigs are opportunistic omnivores whose diet includes vegetation, grains, fruit, roots, fungi, insects, small mammals and carrion. They tend to be most active during the cooler periods of the day; in hot weather they become mostly nocturnal. Moist areas are often favoured as they can provide adequate food, water and relief from extreme heat.

Pigs are able to breed all year, depending on food. Gestation lasts 112-114 days, with the average litter of 5-6 piglets weaned at 2 or 3 months. In favourable conditions two litters in a year are possible, however breeding is very susceptible to protein and energy supply. Mortality in the first year of life varies from 10-100% and is caused by abortion, adverse weather, predation, starvation, cannibalism and accidental suffocation by sows.



Michael Dickinson

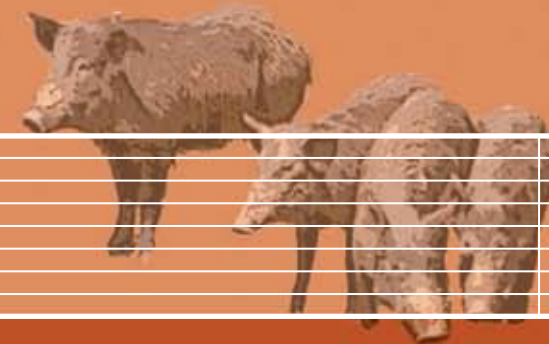
Image © Michael Dickinson

Wild boar in a trap



NSW Department of Primary Industry

Wild pig and piglets



What can be done?

There are a number of options for pig control on your property. A good place to start is to contact your local Livestock Health and Pest Authority (LHPA) or Parks, Conservation and Lands (PCL) branch. Wild pigs are a declared pest species under the *Rural Lands Protection Act 1998* in NSW. This means that all land managers, be it on private or public land, are obliged to control them. The LHPA or PCL can provide you with advice and assistance on control measures. It is important to undertake pest animal control in a humane manner, minimising pain and suffering to the animals involved whilst being aware of your legal obligations. Before conducting any control measures ensure you are aware of your legal obligations and any ethical issues by contacting the relevant authorities. When planning a control strategy, be sure to engage your neighbours as their assistance will be essential for success of any control program.

Control Methods:

- Poisoning - Effective when other food sources are restricted. Significant legal restrictions apply relating to signage while baiting, number of baits supplied, clearance distances between baits, use on small properties and in urban or closely settled rural areas. LHPA or PCL advice is essential.
- Trapping - can be effective in follow-up work or maintenance programs to prevent population build up. Traps require free feeding, regular checking and are easily relocated. This method has minimal impact on native animals.
- Shooting - Target specific and opportunistic. Can be done with dogs, but humane treatment of dog and pig is essential. Should not to be conducted during any other control program as may cause population disturbance and dispersal. Under the Game and Feral Animal Control Act 2002 a licence (R-Licence) issued by the Game Council of NSW is required to hunt pigs on public land in NSW.
- Fencing - expensive and time consuming, requiring regular maintenance to ensure protection. Usually used to protect high value assets. Electric fencing, if well-constructed and maintained, can be very effective.

Consider a control program that tackles all your pest animal issues as the reduction in one species may lead to an increase presence of another. Pest animal control is also a part of controlling your weeds as these species often create the opportunity for weed establishment or act as a vector for the weeds. It may be useful to consult the Molonglo Catchment Group's weed information pack to identify the weeds pest species are bringing on to your land.

What YOU can do

The Molonglo Catchment Group is always interested to hear from you regarding any pest animal activity in your area. If possible, record the GPS coordinates of the location of a sighting. If this is not possible, a description of the location will suffice. Other than direct observations of pigs some indications of their presence include:

- Foraging: Areas of disturbed ground where rooting for larvae, insects and roots has occurred. Dust or mud wallows may also be formed;
- Droppings: Dung sites, typically found where the pig is eating. Dung is typically cylindrical, brown and made up of individual round cakes when the diet is solely plant material. Smell can range from peaty to strong acrid odour;
- Tracks: Similar to deer, sheep and goat;
- Trails: Rubbing or tusking of trees and logs along trails is common.

Your help will enable the MCG to build up a picture of the distribution of this destructive species in our catchment.

Molonglo Catchment Group

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Livestock Health and Pest Authority

(formerly Rural Lands Protection Board)

Cooma Office: (02) 6452 1122

Braidwood Office: (02) 4842 2536

Web: www.LHPA.org.au/pest-control

Parks Conservation and Lands

Phone: 13 22 81



Jason Wishart, Invasive Animals CRC



Wild pig damage to ground cover and soils

LHPA, Cooma



Wild pigs grazing

Jason Wishart, Invasive Animals CRC



Damage to a tree from a pig rubbing on it