

Action Plan for Managing Wild Dogs in Victoria

2014 – 2019

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Minister's foreword

I am pleased to release the Victorian Government's Action Plan for Managing Wild Dogs in Victoria.

The Victorian Government understands that wild dogs are a significant problem in North East Victoria and Gippsland. These pests seriously challenge livestock producers, causing damage estimated at \$13-18 million annually. Wild dogs negatively impact on productivity, animal welfare, social well-being and our natural environment.

Since 2011 the Victorian Government has taken a number of steps to help improve wild dog control, including:

- Building a flexible and responsive team of wild dog controllers to respond to incident reports quickly and efficiently with maximum effect
- Reintroducing Lanes traps
- Introducing a wild dog pelt bounty, and doubling the bounty to \$100 in January 2013
- Establishing community baiting programs, including allowing farmers to bait outside their property boundaries
- Establishing the Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee to provide strategic advice
- Maintaining the 72 hour check rule for traps
- Cut red tape so wild dog controllers can work outside the 3km buffer zone
- Applied to the Commonwealth for aerial baiting. This was unsuccessful but another application will be lodged in December 2013
- Redirected the aerial baiting funding for 2012-13 to a large scale ground baiting program
- Provided wild dog controllers with iPads so they can log data in the field, and spend less time in the office
- In 12 months, wild dog controllers trapped or shot 499 wild dogs and laid more than 18,000 baits
- More than 1,000 wild dog pelts have been handed in as part of the wild dog bounty which started in October 2011.

Our new five-year Action Plan is a commitment to continuing to improve wild dog management, to reduce the impact these pests have on Victorian farming communities and our native fauna.

The Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee's advice has been key in the development of the Action Plan which I believe will deliver best-practice, effective and efficient wild dog management in Victoria.

The Action Plan recognises that all land managers (private and government) share responsibilities for wild dog management. Consequently, the plan encourages everyone to work together using the available management practices including poison baiting, trapping, shooting, exclusion fencing and implementation of good animal husbandry.

Reporting wild dog attacks and stock losses and participating in community wild dog control programs will help all of us better address the problem. Effective control of wild dogs will only be achieved when all parties work cooperatively as part of an integrated program.

I have appointed Dr Bill Sykes, Parliamentary Secretary for Primary Industries, to chair the Wild Dog Action Plan Delivery Group which is tasked with implementing the Action Plan. The group comprises the chair of the Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee and key government officers.

I look forward to working with communities, stakeholders and other Victorian Government departments and agencies in ensuring the Action Plan is fully implemented.

The Hon. Peter Walsh MLA

Minister for Agriculture and Food Security

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Action Plan for Managing Wild Dogs in Victoria 2014 – 2019

Introduction

Wild dogs are a significant threat to Victoria's livestock industry, at an estimated cost of \$13–18 million per year. Their impact on productivity, animal welfare and social wellbeing requires an action plan to address the wild dog issue over the five years to 2019. This plan's implementation is the responsibility of all stakeholders, recognising all land managers (private and government) are responsible for wild dog management.

The Victorian Government understands the impacts that wild dogs can have on the welfare of livestock, the livelihood and wellbeing of livestock producers, and in some situations on environmental values. As a result, the government accepted the *Directions Statement for the Wild Dog Management Program in Victoria*, developed by the Victorian Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee (see attachment 1). This plan describes how to achieve that strategic direction.

Wild dogs in Victoria will be managed using a strategic, proactive and cost-effective approach. Private and public land managers will work together to reduce the negative impacts of wild dogs. As part of this work, government and key stakeholders will be responsible for wild dog control on their land.

This plan provides a framework for land manager cooperation by:

- recognising the knowledge and experience of Victorian communities in managing problems such as wild dogs
- identifying opportunities for community participation and leadership in wild dog management, both locally and statewide
- describing the expectations of private and public landholders who will work with industry on nil-tenure wild dog management
- considering the need to raise the capacity of community participants, government employees and other wild dog professionals, with training and support for effective, safe and humane wild dog control.

Against the objective of all land owners and managers working together to reduce the negative impacts of wild dogs, this plan sets out three priority areas for government and stakeholder action over the next five years:

- strengthen the coordination of wild dog management in Victoria
- reduce the negative impacts of wild dogs
- continuously improve how wild dogs are managed in Victoria.

Action area 1: Strengthen the coordination of wild dog management in Victoria

Action 1: Align wild dog management in Victoria with best practice invasive species management

Action Intent

1.1 Wild dog management

in Victoria will be aligned with national and state approaches to addressing biosecurity threats.

- Wild dog management is a national issue. The approach in Victoria must be consistent with national and state policy documents.
- National policy documents include the *Intergovernmental Agreement on Biosecurity*, the *Australian Pest Animal Strategy* and the *National Wild Dog Action Plan*. State policy documents include the *Biosecurity Strategy*, the *Invasive Plants and Animals Policy Framework* and the *Directions Statement for the Wild Dog Management Program in Victoria*.

Action 2: Ensure continued strategic input and feedback from all stakeholders

Action Intent

2.1 As the representative stakeholder body, the

Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee will strategically advise the Department of Environment and Primary Industries.

The government is committed to the Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee being the representative stakeholder body to advise how to most effectively and efficiently implement wild dog control across the State, regardless of land tenure.

The government will:

- provide executive support to the Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee
- host a statewide forum annually on key community issues
- work with the Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee to continuously improve how wild dogs are managed
- implement agreed recommendations.

The Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee will work with stakeholders to gather industry feedback for the government.

2.2 The government will work with stakeholders and

the National Wild Dog Management Advisory Group to ensure national collaboration on wild dog management.

The government welcomes a nationally coordinated approach through stakeholder participation in groups such as the National Wild Dog Management Advisory Group. Participation at a national level will mean Victorian issues and approaches are appropriately recognised and jurisdictions can share improvements. It will also maximise Victoria's cooperation with other jurisdictions.

The government will:

- continue to be represented on the National Wild Dog Management Advisory Group
- pursue collaborative approaches with other jurisdictions and at a national level. Industry and community stakeholders will continue to be represented on the National Wild Dog Management Advisory Group.

Action 3: Promote community leadership and participation in wild dog programs at the local level

Action	Intent
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3.1 The government will work with the community to promote local approaches to wild dog management. The government will work with the community to develop wild dog management zone work plans. These plans will describe the proactive and reactive control measures that the government and the community will use to address wild dog impacts at the local level.

The government will:

- involve the community in developing wild dog management zone work plans
- identify opportunities for the community to help plan, deliver and assess control measures
- provide feedback to local communities on plan implementation
- foster community group formation and participation
- explore opportunities to link wild dog management with other public land programs (works and resources), to help the state's biosecurity, land and resource management be more integrated, sustainable and cost-effective.

The community:

- is encouraged and helped to participate, as individuals or groups, in local approaches to wild dog control
- recognises the partnership approach to wild dog control requires input from community members, especially at the local level.

3.2 The government will support community members participating in wild dog management to increase their capacity to plan, lead and deliver local approaches.

- Community participation is central to wild dog management. The community will be empowered to deliver effective wild dog control.

The government will:

- provide the support, training and feedback that community members need to plan, lead and deliver local wild dog management
- consider opportunities to enhance community participation in wild dog management.

The community:

- continues to participate in local approaches to wild dog management
- initiates training and shares learning among community groups.

Action 4: Ensure all stakeholders, including public land managers, meet their responsibilities for wild dog control

Action	Intent
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4.1 The government will work with stakeholders to increase understanding of and articulate the roles and responsibilities in wild dog management.

Stakeholders involved in wild dog management are many and varied, and not confined to livestock producers.

The government will:

- clarify the roles and responsibilities of all key stakeholders

- engage with stakeholders to ensure they understand their roles and responsibilities.

The community:

- accepts wild dog control needs a partnership and planned approach, regardless of tenure
- expects government to meet its obligations as a public land manager, and private landholders to meet their obligations
- expects landowners to work with the government to support wild dog control on all tenures.

4.2 The government's roles and responsibilities in wild dog management will be articulated.

The government is obliged to manage wild dogs, and it has a role to encourage and coordinate community input to wild dog management.

The government will:

- undertake proactive and reactive wild dog control activities to fulfil its obligations as a land manager
- document, via the wild dog management zone work plans, its deliverables—that is, how it will fulfil its obligations as a landholder
- help communities develop and implement local work plans.

Action 5: Develop and implement local plans over which all stakeholders have ownership

Action	Intent
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5.1	The government will ensure wild dog management zone work plans, developed with the community, drive strategic management at a local level.
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A nil-tenure approach to wild dog management is essential. Planning should primarily determine the action needed to meet control objectives, rather than action based on land ownership. Stakeholders will have effective input and influence over local plans.

The government will:

- coordinate the development of wild dog management zone work plans
- support communities to set their objectives for wild dog management, work towards achieving them and monitor progress to improve decision making
- help communities implement the work plans
- ensure the program inputs, outputs and outcomes are appropriately measured in line with the *Directions Statement for the Wild Dog Management Program in Victoria (Attachment 1)*
- take into account its responsibility to conserve dingoes (*Canis lupus dingo*) on public land outside the 3 kilometre livestock protection buffer.

The community will:

- actively participate in the planning process to deploy limited shared resources effectively and efficiently
- drive local planning when it can do so
- help implement local plans, as appropriate.

Action area 2: Reduce the negative impacts of wild dogs, with the government meeting its responsibility to control wild dogs on public land

Action 6: Proactively manage wild dogs to reduce their impacts

Action	Intent
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6.1	The government will work with all stakeholders to implement strategic, proactive and cost-effective wild dog
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management approaches.

As established pest animals, wild dog populations require ongoing and enduring control. Management actions need clear, long term objectives. All stakeholders need to work on preventive, proactive approaches that seek to minimise impact where it is most likely to occur, rather than reacting to impacts after an incident.

The government will:

- use proactive approaches within the livestock protection buffer of public land where needed to protect livestock
- streamline planning and permit processes to enable wild dog management outside the livestock protection buffer to protect livestock
- work with other agencies to protect biodiversity and reduce impacts on recreational areas, using an integrated wild dog management approach
- inform stakeholders on 'best practice' approaches to wild dog management
- work with industry and community to coordinate proactive approaches across all land tenures.

The community will:

- help set clear and realistic long term objectives
- support proactive approaches to minimise impacts
- look for cost-effective and integrated approaches to wild dog control
- accept best practice approaches to wild dog management.

Action 7: Increase the availability of new and existing products, tools and strategies for wild dog management

Action	Intent
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7.1	The government will work with all stakeholders to remove unnecessary barriers to access 1080 products for wild dog management.
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1080 is a key toxin for vertebrate pest control in Australia. To maintain access to it, it must be safely and effectively applied only by qualified users.

The government will:

- improve access to fresh 1080 bait products in wild dog affected areas
- work with interstate authorities to enable suitably qualified landholders to access fresh meat baits from outside Victoria
- work with all stakeholders to ensure the whole supply chain complies with 1080 regulations and directions for use
- review and improve the 1080 commercialisation framework in Victoria, as needed
- promote effective stewardship and ensure the safe use of 1080 through clear policy, regulation and compliance.

The community accepts land owners need to use 1080 products responsibly and according to labelling and directions for use, to safeguard access to these products.

7.2	The government will remove any potential regulatory barriers to access new products for managing wild dogs.
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New products being developed to manage wild dogs include the new toxin PAPP and tools such as lethal trap and canine ejector devices. Once the national regulator approves these products, the Victorian Government will amend regulations to make the products available to qualified users. The products will complement existing practices and not replace current tools.

The government will:

- address the regulatory barriers that may prevent rapid implementation of the new products
- account for the need for inter-agency cooperation, given different legislative responsibilities
- identify the safeguards that need to be implemented (for example, training, access rules)
- develop implementation plans for the products/tools to be used in Victoria
- help harmonise the use of the new products nationally.

7.3 The government will consider potential strategies to enhance wild dog management.

The engagement of a flexible workforce via a contractor model leads to the timely delivery of local responses. Aerial baiting and ground baiting, for example, are two possible strategies for delivering integrated wild dog control in remote areas of Victoria to protect livestock.

The government will:

- consider how to improve existing strategic approaches
- task the Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee with advising on enhanced and innovative strategies and approaches.

The Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee will advise the Department of Environment and Primary Industries on strategy.

Action 8: Use safe, effective and humane approaches to wild dog management

Action	Intent
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8.1 The government will ensure agreed standards for wild dog control are met.

Nationally, a draft model code of practice and standard operating procedures cover the humane destruction of wild dogs. The government refined these model documents for use in Victoria. Subsequently, government operators, contractors, casuals and agents have implemented the Victorian Code of Practice and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

The government will:

- adhere to the Code of Practice and SOPs for wild dog management in Victoria
- encourage all stakeholders to adhere to the Code of Practice and SOPs
- ensure wild dog control continues to be environmentally responsible.

The community will partner with the government to use best practice standards for all wild dog control on private and public land.

8.2 The government will ensure its operators, contractors, casuals, and agents follow best practice approaches to wild dog management. The operating environment for wild dog control will allow a mobile workforce to operate in remote locations.

Wild dog management generally occurs in remote and isolated areas, which present two key challenges. The first challenge is to ensure a safe work environment for government operators, contractors, casuals and agents. Further, this workforce needs to follow standard operating procedures, collect data and comply with appropriate legislation. The second challenge is to collect information (data) in a manner that is consistent with the *Directions Statement for the Wild Dog Management Program in Victoria* and that informs strategic management decisions. The government will:

- provide tools and technology to ensure work place safety and appropriate data management
- continue to provide a safe workplace for its staff, contractors and agents
- promote best practice by all involved in wild dog control.

Action 9: Increase community understanding of the benefits of wild dog management in Victoria

Action	Intent
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9.1 The government will develop and implement an integrated wild dog communication and engagement strategy for Victoria.

Communication and engagement are critical components of increasing the understanding of wild dog management. Often, the government must deploy resources to respond to negative issues raised by a few in the community or media. Conversely, elements of the community and media can overlook key positive messages.

The government and the Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee will:

- implement a clear communication and engagement strategy for wild dog management in Victoria
- incorporating their key messages in that strategy
- articulate the government's service offer in wild dog management zone work plans

- promote the benefits of effective wild dog management, along with the range of control techniques
- report on program activity and outcomes.

Action area 3: Continuously improve the way wild dogs are managed

Action 10: Improve the mechanisms used to carry out, monitor, evaluate and report on wild dog control, so it is focused, streamlined, timely and efficient

Action	Intent
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10.1 The government will continually improve the wild dog management program and evaluate its impact, effectiveness, value and efficiency.

The government will measure the success of the wild dog management program against its stated primary objective: to reduce the negative impacts of wild dogs.

The government will:

- monitor, evaluate and report on the program's outcomes
- use this reporting to continually improve the program
- seek feedback from the Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee on the relative success of the program and how to enhance the program
- use evaluation findings to identify gaps in the program design and inform future design
- communicate the program's achievements to stakeholders.

The Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee will provide feedback on how to continually improve the program.

10.2 The government will improve data capture, systems and processes to meet changing needs of the wild dog management program.

Good data are essential for monitoring, evaluating, reporting on and improving wild dog management.

The government will:

- implement Dogbytes (its internal database for wild dog activities) across the State
- consider how community groups can collect and use data, and how that data can contribute to the state dataset for monitoring, evaluation and reporting
- review the Dogbytes dataset to ensure it collects information to inform business decisions
- develop a decision support tool to improve real-time decision making and long term strategic decision making.

The community will provide accurate and timely information on wild dog activity.

Action 11: Build a flexible and skilled workforce

Action	Intent
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11.1 The government will build a flexible, responsive and adaptable program to deliver wild dog management in a more cost-effective manner.

Greater workforce flexibility and responsiveness will help meet the seasonal needs of the wild dog control program. The program may need a different mix of government workers, contractors and casuals, and workers employed by the community.

The government will:

- in consultation with the Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee, use the best approach to engage a wild dog management workforce
- encourage the development of wild dog control capabilities in communities and in professional service

- providers, to maintain a flexible response to the program's changing needs
- ensure all involved in wild dog control have the skills needed for safe and effective action
 - coordinate the efforts of private and public land holders so program delivery is flexible and integrated, regardless of land tenure.

Action 12: Promote innovation, research development and extension

Action	Intent
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12.1 Effective wild dog control will be a priority for the government's research and development program. The government sets investment priorities for research and development for weeds and pest animals. It will ensure wild dogs remain a priority for research and development investment.

12.2 The government will work with national research and development bodies to deliver applicable findings to end users.
The government will continue to work with the Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre to deliver research outcomes in a timely manner in Victoria.

12.3 The government will work with key stakeholders to identify gaps in the State's ability to manage wild dogs, and when research might fill those gaps.
The government will continue to work with stakeholders (via the Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee) to identify gaps in and opportunities for research and development.

The community will provide the government and the Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee with ideas for possible improvements.

12.4 The government will work with research and development organisations to enhance the development and extension of wild dog management in Victoria.
The government will:

- identify approaches and mechanisms that can address gaps in the research, development and extension of wild dog management in Victoria
- continue to work with research and development organisations (for example, Australian Wool Innovations and the Invasive Animals Cooperative Research Centre) to enhance community led approaches.

Action 13: Investigate how legislative, regulatory and policy reform can benefit wild dog management in Victoria

Action	Intent
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13.1 The government will consider the tools that can be used under new invasive species legislation to improve wild dog management.
The proposed invasive species legislation potentially provides a framework for applying new tools to manage wild dogs.

The government will:

- explore ways in which new legislation can support community led management
- examine opportunities to remove legislative and red tape restrictions on effective wild dog management.

13.2 The government will promote ways to maintain farm infrastructure for managing wild dogs (for example, electric fences).
Exclusion fencing is an effective, strategic control measure to protect livestock from wild dog attacks. The management of vegetation is important for maintaining an effective wild dog exclusion fence.

The government will:

- review by December 2014 the fences exemption under clause 52.17 of the Victorian Planning Provisions, which enables vegetation clearance to a minimum extent
- continue to work with stakeholders (via the Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee) to design regulations that allow more flexible clearing of vegetation to protect electric exclusion fences.

The government will produce an annual report to stakeholders on progress against this plan. The report will present both quantitative and qualitative information, including case studies.

Definitions

capacity building: The development of skills, abilities, relationships and networks among individuals and groups in a defined community¹

community: A very broad term to define a group of people, whether they are stakeholders, interest groups or citizen

pest animal: An animal species declared by the Minister under Victoria's *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* as one of four pest animal classes: prohibited pest animal, controlled pest animal, regulated pest animal and

established pest animal

groups etc. A community may be a geographic location (a community of place), a group of similar interest (a community of practice) or a group of affiliation or identity (such as an industry or sporting club)¹

community capacity: The networks, organisation, attitudes, leadership and skills that allow a community to manage change and sustain community led development²

community engagement: Mutual communication and deliberation between government and citizens, allowing them to mutually formulate policy and the provision of services³

established species: A species that will perpetuate within an area, for the foreseeable future, after entering that area⁴

invasive species: A species that occurs, as a result of human activities, beyond its accepted normal distribution and that causes damage that threatens valued environmental, agricultural and/or other social resources⁴

nil-tenure: An approach of acting where needed, rather than concentrating on land ownership in the first instance. It allows local communities and government to address negative impacts cooperatively across all land tenures.

stakeholder: Individual and/or group with an interest in an organisation's activity and/or outcomes.

They may be internal or external to the organisation, and may be direct or indirect beneficiaries of the activity or outcome.¹

stakeholder engagement: A way of thinking about external audiences and their relationship to organisational outcomes. It implies a longer term relationship whereby both parties have a mutual interest in, and ability to impact, the project outcomes. External stakeholders may not be outside the organisation; they can be internal to the organisation but external to a unit, program or project.¹

wild dogs: Feral or wild populations of dogs (*Canis lupus familiaris*) and Dingo-Dog hybrids (*Canis lupus dingo* x *Canis lupus familiaris*). These dogs are declared as established pest animals for the whole of Victoria under sections 58(1)(b) and 59(5) of the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*.

¹ Department of Sustainability and Environment, Victoria (2005). *Effective engagement: building relationships with community and other stakeholders*. 'Book

1: an introduction to engagement', Melbourne.

² Cavaye, JM (2000). 'The role of government in community capacity building', Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries information series, QI99804, Queensland Government, Brisbane.

³ Cavaye, JM (2001). 'Community engagement framework project: scoping and review paper', Cavaye Community Development / CEO Committee on Land Resources, Queensland, citing Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2001). *Engaging citizens in policy-making: information, consultation and public participation*, PUMA policy brief no. 10, Paris.

⁴ Department of Primary Industries, Victoria (2010). *Invasive plants and animals policy framework*, Melbourne.

Attachment 1: Directions Statement for the Wild Dog Management Program in Victoria

Aim of wild dog management in Victoria

Wild dogs are declared *established pest animals* under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*, and are a major pest threatening livestock and production on private land in rural Victoria.

Wild dog control is a priority for the Victorian Government, which collaborates with affected landholders to reduce the economic, social and environmental impacts of wild dogs in Victoria.

The Victorian Wild Dog Management Program will adopt a strategic, proactive, cost-effective and nil-tenure approach when private land managers and public land managers work together to reduce the negative impacts of wild dogs.

Roles and responsibilities

All landowners (including state and local government, and private landowners) have a responsibility under the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994* to take all reasonable steps to prevent the spread of, and as far as possible eradicate, wild dogs.

Management

The control of wild dogs on public land is largely undertaken by the Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI). In addition, Parks Victoria undertakes some wild dog control on public land in defined areas, to protect threatened biodiversity such as the brush-tailed rock wallaby and to facilitate removal of 'problem' wild dogs from recreational or other areas.

DEPI works proactively with owners of land bordering public land and with the community to reduce wild dog attacks on livestock. It also offers some support to producers after wild dog attacks. DEPI maintains a database that can provide a statewide record of wild dog attacks on livestock.

By providing local knowledge and information, landholders can significantly support the management of wild dogs across the state. They have a key role to provide reports of dog attacks to the relevant agency for inclusion in the DEPI database. This reporting will enable a more accurate assessment of the wild dog control program's performance.

Control program

The control program aims to minimise the incidence of attacks by using baiting, trapping, shooting, exclusion fencing and good on-farm animal husbandry practices, and reducing wild dog access to food sources that can sustain packs.

Landholders can make a significant contribution to wild dog control by participating in community and individual baiting programs and adopting farm management strategies to prevent attacks on livestock.

Local governments also educate dog owners about responsible pet ownership.

Research program

Research will be undertaken to make wild dog control more safe, efficient and humane. When possible, research will complement national research and development initiatives.

Program objective

All land owners and managers will work cooperatively to reduce the negative impacts of wild dogs.

Review

This directions statement became effective when endorsed by the departmental Secretary, and will be subject to annual review by the Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee. The annual review will analyse reports against the following targets and measures, to determine progress against the wild dog control program's objectives.

Targets

Measures

Strategic—our approach will be coordinated, planned and structured

Within two years (2014), baiting programs in each local area will support all reactive control operations.

Number of locations in which trapping and shooting is being conducted where baiting programs exist

After three years (2015), the number of reported dog attacks each year will be 15 per cent less than the number in the previous year.

Number of reported dog attacks

Proactive—we will move away from reactive responses

Within one year (2013), the number of baits deployed within the program will rise by 10 per cent.

Number of baits laid

Within one year (2013), the effectiveness of traps set to capture wild dogs will rise by 10 per cent.

Numbers of traps set versus dogs captured

Cost effective—we will maximise the use of available government resources, investing in projects and programs that deliver the highest returns for the lowest cost

Within two years (2014), the cost per wild dog destroyed will fall by 10 per cent.

Dollars invested in the Wild Dog Program

Number of employee hours effort in wild dog control

Numbers of dogs caught by trap

Numbers of baits taken

Numbers of dogs destroyed by other methods

Nil-tenure—we will work across land tenures

Within three years (2015), the effort of program partners will increase by 20 per cent.

Number of hours contributed from resources outside

DEPI

OFFICIAL

OFFICIAL