

Pig shooters take to the air at Bloomsbury

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Helicopters have been used to remove a significant number of feral pigs from a region north of Mackay as part of an effort to create a feral animal control syndicate.

Reef Catchments in partnership with Whitsunday and Mackay Regional Councils orchestrated and delivered two aerial pig control shoots throughout the Bloomsbury region. This partnership is aiming to promote a future Bloomsbury feral animal control syndicate which it is hoped will be an expansion of the existing, proven, Whitsunday Feral Animal Aerial Shooting Program coordinated by Whitsunday Regional Council.

By supporting the Bloomsbury region to participate in the Whitsunday Feral Animal Aerial Shooting Program, Reef Catchments is aiming to promote a catchment scale approach to feral pig management. This approach could see both financial and environmental benefits across the region's basins.

Reef Catchments Waterways Project Officer Emma Jones said: "Input from local farmers indicated that greater success of the aerial shooting was likely to be in mid to late November, correlating with the end of the cane crushing season. The shoots were carried out in November last year and successfully removed 50 feral pigs from the area, along with four wild dogs. Local farmers were pleased with the initial results and are looking forward to participating towards improving future control efforts."

The aerial shoots were the first carried out by Whitsunday Regional Council and Mackay Regional Council throughout the Bloomsbury region. The shoots were also a learning opportunity for all the stakeholders involved.

Ms Jones said: "One such learning opportunity was establishing relationships with new landholders and developing an effective communications platform which kept all stakeholders informed. This included developing an email notification system and regular phone checking with participating landholders.

Whitsunday Regional Council Pest Officer Bren Fuller explained: "Another lesson was the level of impact local weather conditions will have on the success of an aerial shoot. The aerial control operators indicated that the Bloomsbury area received 18mm of rain the morning of the shoot which washed away all signs of fresh pig activity. Additionally, feral pigs tend to disperse in wet weather due to the ample surface water and softer ground allowing easier foraging. When evaluating the limited success of the second aerial shoot, we also need to appreciate that 48 pigs had been removed from the area during the initial aerial shoot two weeks prior."

The latest economic estimates from the Whitsunday Regional Councils Feral Animal Aerial Shooting Program indicate that each feral pig costs approximately \$786 to the agricultural industry and \$1,750 to the environment each year. Regionally, this is a significant burden carried by both local industry and ecological environments with each individual pig costing society approximately \$2,536 per year in damages. It is critical that feral pig control is continued across the region to alleviate this financial burden and continue to protect our local values and assets.

Reef Catchments, Whitsunday Regional Council and Mackay Regional Council hope to continue supporting the Bloomsbury region in its transition to becoming a part of the Whitsunday Feral Animal Aerial Shooting Syndicate Program. With another round of feral animal control flights earmarked for action later this year.

Reef Catchments have delivered these Bloomsbury feral animal control programs with funding from the Australian Governments Reef Trust and contributions from both Mackay and Whitsunday Regional Councils.

Further Information:

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