

Burdekin Productivity Services Ltd



Funded by Burdekin Canegrowers and CSR Sugar

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INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACT ON AGRICULTURE OF PEST ANIMALS

Burdekin Productivity Services Ltd (BPS) provides agricultural services and technical advice to growers in the Burdekin cane-growing region in North Queensland in order to maximize their farm productivity, profitability and sustainability.

Listed below are some of the Pest animal issues that affect productivity, profitability and sustainability in the region. BPS staff are actively engaged with growers on a day-to-day basis and record the incidence and severity of any such losses in a comprehensive database. A summary of any such losses is provided to the Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations Ltd (BSES) and Burdekin Canegrowers and CSR Sugar annually.

1. PEST ANIMAL ISSUES – Feral Pigs, Field Rats (Melomys and Rattus species), agile wallabies and Chital deer cause damage to the regions cane crop. Feral cats, Rabbits and Foxes pose a threat to other produce grown in the region. While government agencies have systems in place to facilitate the reduction of impact of pest animals, these permits (pest fauna damage mitigation permits) and regulations are seen by most property owners as onerous and difficult to access. Feral animal control is at best uncoordinated and purely responsive to particular damage situations. What is needed is a coordinated approach across government and industry groups with some power given to regional representative industry / general public bodies to act along with instrumentalities in their areas. This would give ownership of the control program to the sector concerned. Such regional bodies could be coordinated at a state or federal level and should be able to seek government funding (subsidized or fully funded) to undertake control programs. These regional bodies could be modelled along the lines of rural fire brigades, with voluntary local effort guided by regional government appointed officers.

2. IDENTIFICATION, DETECTION, REPORTING, ERADICATION, REDUCTION - The identification of small but damaging populations of new pest species is best handled on a local level by people trained in identification techniques, who can then report to regional bodies anonymously if need be. The regional body would be then able to assess the pest potential and report to the relevant government body. The regional bodies mentioned in (1.) would be well placed to coordinate control / eradication measures.

3. ADEQUACY OF STATE EXPENDITURE ON PEST ANIMAL CONTROL – There is no visible control in the national park areas located in the Lower Burdekin region. The parks act as a reservoir of pest animals, particularly feral pigs that cause serious environmental damage as well as serious crop damage. The management of pest animals in government controlled lands is best vested in neighbouring regional control bodies who should be funded to

carry out control of particular pest animal issues with the cooperation and guidance of National Parks management. Other non-allocated government controlled lands (i.e. BRIA riparian vegetation zones) could also be managed under this system.

4. INDUSTRY GROUPS AND R&D CORPORATIONS – Handled via regional representative groups. Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations Ltd (BSES) and Burdekin Canegrowers and CSR Sugar annually.

5. COMMUNITY UNDERSTANDING AND INVOLVEMENT – In the Sugarcane area of the Burdekin local productivity groups have been formed to assist participating growers (about 60%) to improve productivity, profitability and sustainability. These groups would be ideal conduits to the sugarcane community for two way information flow and regional pest animal management. Pest animal management funding could be channelled through local representative groups via these productivity groups as well as ensuring a rapid roll out of pest animal management awareness flowing on to the community in general. The previously mentioned regional representative groups could also oversee local public awareness campaigns.

REGIONAL CAMPAIGN - An example of a regional campaign that has been implemented locally, applies to the feral pig program. BPS has purchased two portable feral pig traps and these are used in conjunction with the local pest management and land protection officer working for the Burdekin Shire Council. This officer has conducted a baiting program in feral pig hot spots. While growers in another section of the region have adopted a successful shooting program from a Helicopter that has reduced feral pig numbers and damage significantly.

LOCAL LOSSES - The losses listed in the table below give an indication of the damage caused in recent years by local pest animals. This damage may not appear significant from a regional crop perspective. However for the individual growers on the fringe areas of the region who experiences losses on a regular basis they can have a serious effect on their profitability and sustainability. Growers on these farms tend to suffer the majority of the damage caused by these pest animals in any year and without control measures being adopted there is the potential for the damage to spread onto neighbouring farms.

The fluctuations in the level of losses caused by these pest animals that have occurred in the past five years generally reflect reactions to the seasonal weather conditions experienced in the region. These losses have also been affected by the control measures that have been adopted by growers.

PEST/YEAR	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Feral pigs					
HA'S DAMAGE	416	977	797	747	270
TONNES LOST	7077	18987	12996	18217	5918
field rats					
HA'S	318	353	296	99	37
TONNES LOST	1300	1510	1378	1690	772
agile wallabies					
HA'S	109	222	304	301	184
TONNES LOST	1275	5221	2587	6152	4141
chital deer					
HA'S	12	20	93	79	33
TONNES LOST	51	389	2135	2431	708

DJ WILLIAMS
BPS MANAGER – PROTECTION SERVICES