

45 years of feral pig control



Are us old blokes resistant to change?

What lessons remain relevant for effective pig control programs today?

Tell us a boring story.....

LANDSAT image (scale approx $1:2 \times 10^6$)

showing Yantabulla study site on a



Troy Crittle Invasive Species Officer



A brief history of government pig control in NSW

Telephone 2 C
Extension 46

New South Wales Administration & Legislation
Department of Agriculture Information Sheet No. 5.10
Vertebrate Pest Control November 1978

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The break-up of funding to each of the 10 Boards provided by the government is \$10,000 per Board in the first year, \$1,000 of which is to be used specifically for purchase of recommended bait material (pellets or grain), and \$9,000 per year subsequently.

The \$9,000 should cover wages of the pig control officer. The Pastures Protection Boards will be required to meet the purchase of a vehicle, travelling costs and incidental administration expenses. The contribution to be provided by Pastures Protection Boards to meet these expenses is estimated at \$6,000 per year. Most of the Boards will meet this by increasing their rates or by a pig

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Reports to the Pastures Protection Board on control work undertaken each month, and keeps Directors informed on the position regarding wild pig populations in the District.

Maintains records of properties harbouring wild pig infestations. These records to be maintained to Departmental specifications.



1974 circular > research began 1971 > progressed rapidly
Jack Giles Phd. Cuttaburra Basin (submitted 1980) > Saunders et. al.

Research into the ecology and control of feral pigs has been in progress in New South Wales for approximately three years. The subject was discussed in the Agricultural Gazette June 1973, but since 1971, when the article was written, several modifications and additions to the techniques described have come to light.

1974 circular > “get the timing right”

because such feed forms the bulk of the pigs' diet. Poisoning and trapping should therefore be restricted to times when the pastures are dry and the pigs are forced to rely on roots, grain, carrion and other scavenge.

1974 circular > “you must free feed”

Experience during the research programme and information gathered from landholders experienced in pig trapping has shown that the best system is to free feed for a week or thereabouts. Then construct a trap without setting it, to allow the pigs to become accustomed to feeding inside the trap. Finally, set the trap for two or three days, after which it is again opened and free feeding recommenced. This

1974 control cont.

1974 circular > “you must follow up”

As with rabbit control, clean up operations are essential after poisoning or trapping. The pigs that remain, particularly pregnant and lactating sows which do not travel very far from their bedding areas need eliminating. Shooting is greatly aided by trained dogs which are much more efficient at locating

1974 circular > “you must work together”

To achieve effective control, graziers are advised to form themselves into groups with control over areas of 10,000 to 50,000 hectares. These areas can then be subdivided into groups of six or eight properties with a section-head to co-ordinate control operations over the whole area.



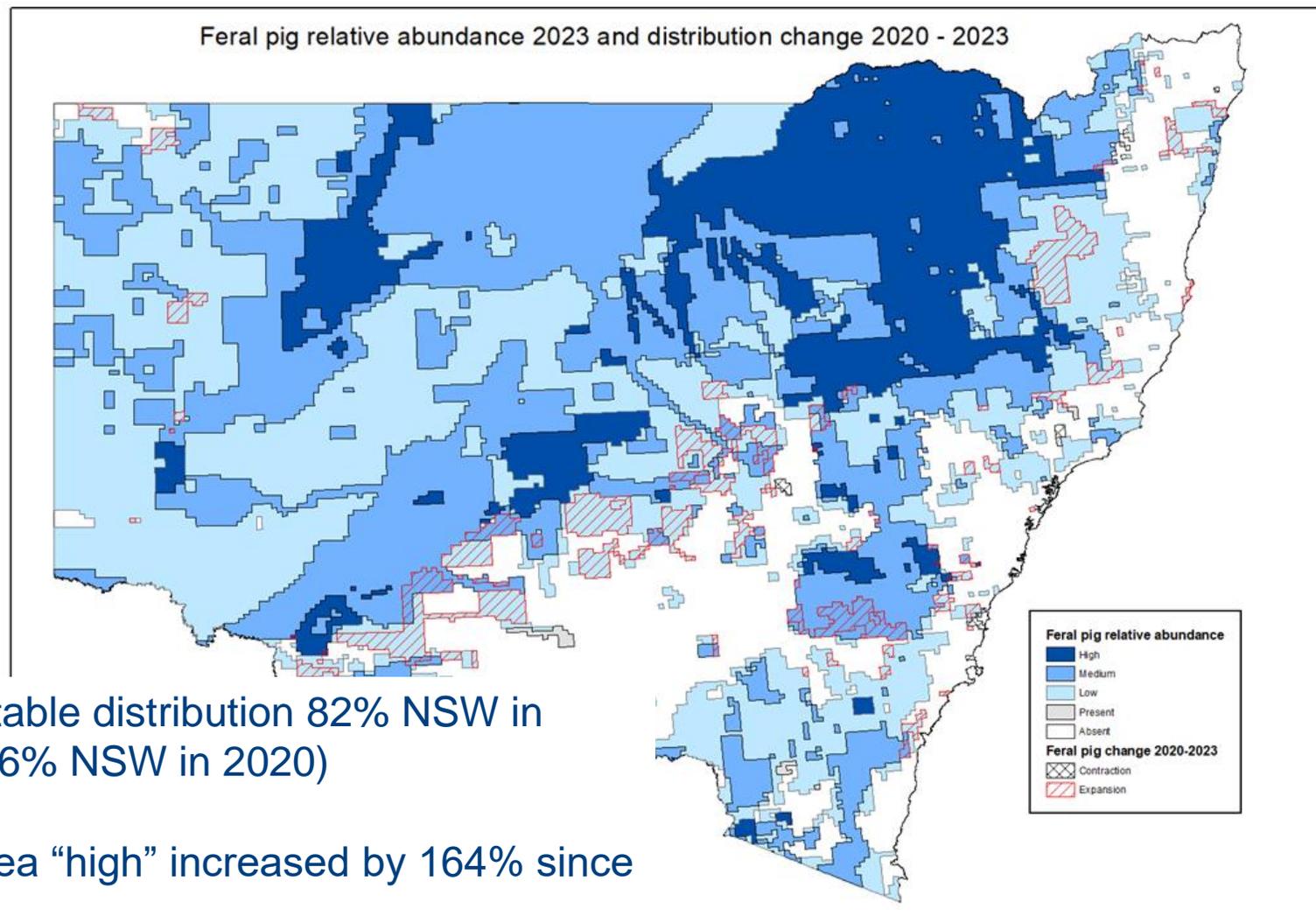
A brief history of aerial shooting in NSW

- Aerial shooting first carried out (at least officially) was in the Moree Wetlands west of Moree in 1987.
- Followed by technique developed in the Macquarie Marshes 1980 and then extensive shooting in the Riverina area 1984, Cuttaburra basin 1987. (1989 520hrs pigs)
- First rules around government aerial shooting produced in 1990 to eventual formation of the National Animal Aerial Shooting Team (FAAST) committee

I, TIM TURNER of Mungindi in the State of New South Wales, hereby solemnly and sincerely declare as follows:-

1. I was engaged as a helicopter pilot on a Feral Pig Eradication "shoot" in the Cuttaburra Basin area from 23rd October, 1987 to 25th October, 1987.
2. In a 2½ hour period in the afternoon of 25th October, 1987 on property known as [REDACTED] I personally counted and witnessed the shooting of a least 835 feral pigs.
3. I have piloted helicopters on numerous Feral Pig Eradication "shoots" in the Macquarie Marshes, Moree area and in the Northern Territory and I say that I have never observed feral pigs in such numbers as I did whilst flying on [REDACTED]. Further I say that I have never observed or witnessed the shooting of such a large number of pigs in a two and a half hour period on any previous "shoot".

Feral pig relative abundance 2020 and distribution change 2016 - 2020

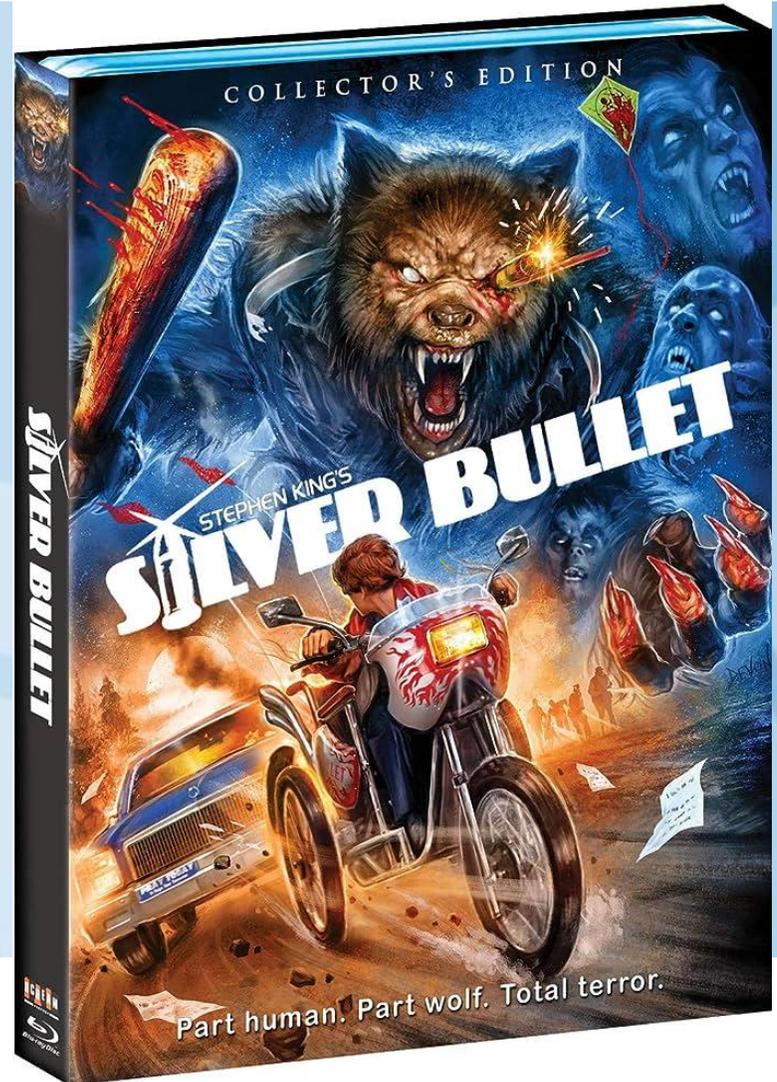


Fairly stable distribution 82% NSW in 2023 (76% NSW in 2020)

Total area "high" increased by 164% since 2020

What have been the greatest changes?

- Prioritisation of animal welfare and risk minimisation
- Standardised training for industry practitioners
- Broadening of the funding base away from a ratepayer-based system
- Staff turnover
- Interconnectivity
- Search for the silver bullet



What hasn't changed?

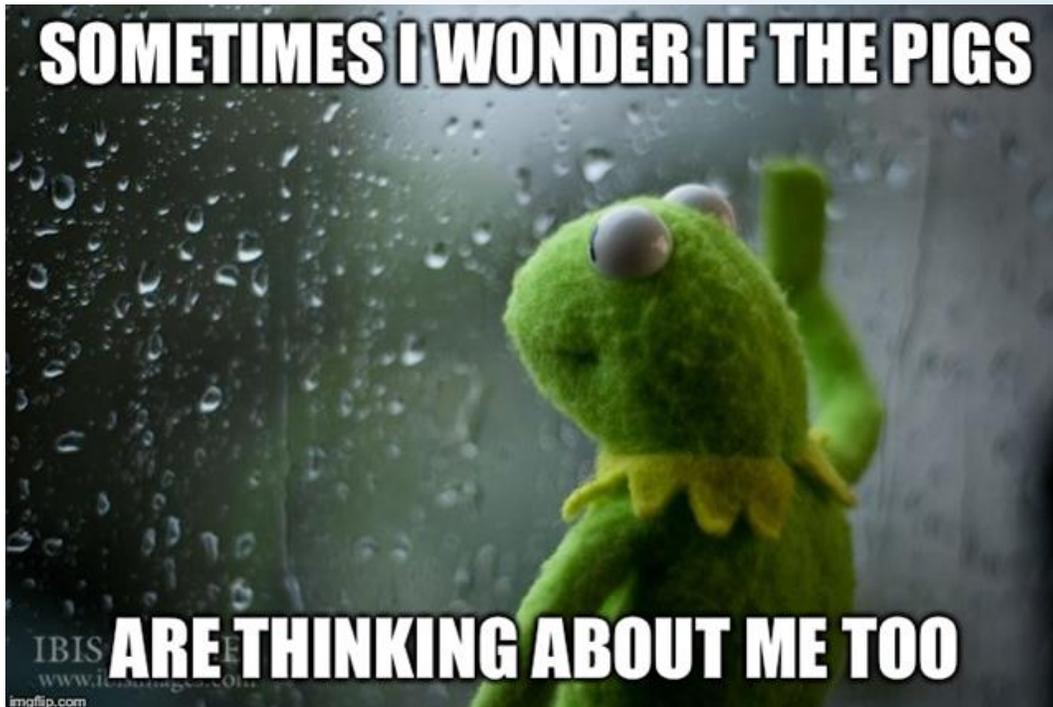
Pigs

- Habitat suitability
- Feral pig population regulated by environmental factors (2-3 wet years)

Control techniques

- Integration (control hierarchy)
- The importance of free feeding
- Timing
- Working in groups
- Monitoring and follow-up

The need to communicate and create relationships with landholders, neighbours, your peers....





Five enduring principles rules for pig control IMHO

- 1. DO THE WORST FIRST** 70% bait > aerial shoot > bait/trap
- 2. Get the timing right** time control for resource stress
- 3. Communicate** neighbors > peers > collaborate
- 4. Follow-up** within one breeding cycle
- 5. Make monitoring your superpower** allocate 15% to monitoring