



Government of South Australia
 South Australian Arid Lands Natural
 Resources Management Board

Biteback

Wild Dog Program Report

2009 – 2019



JULY 2019

South Australian Arid Lands Natural Resources Management Board



Government of South Australia
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 Resources Management Board

**SA Sheep
 Industry
 Fund**



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Acknowledgments

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SA Sheep Advisory Group: have been a major partner since 2009 through committing funding from the Sheep Industry Fund (SIF) for the Biteback program.

Australian Wool Innovation (AWI): whose financial support for the aerial baiting program has been essential in providing wild dog control in inaccessible areas across the rangelands in S.A.

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- The support of the Minister for Primary Industries and Regional Development in approving Sheep Industry Funds for the Biteback program; and
- Biosecurity SA staff who have collaborated with the SAAL NRM Board in drawing Commonwealth funding towards wild dog management programs, including professional trappers, training workshops and in technical or policy advice.

Department for Environment and Water:

- Minister for Environment & Water; who oversees the Natural Resources Management Act 2004 and regulations for the control of wild dogs in S.A.; and
- The support of park rangers in managing wild dogs on the national parks and reserves

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The South Australian Wild Dog Fence Board and local Dog Fence Boards: as the key bodies to maintain the Dog Fence providing an important barrier and control of wild dogs in the buffer zone outside the fence.

Livestock SA: support in advocating for investment in wild dog control and endorsing the Board's Wild Dog Best Practice Guidelines.

The Arid Lands Community:

- The Biteback group coordinators for their efforts at coordinating land managers to continue and expand their wild dog control efforts and in reporting wild dog activity and impacts.
- Land managers for their continued efforts to control and monitor wild dogs on their properties.



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Executive Summary

The SA Arid Lands Natural Resources Management Board is the lead agency for management of wild dogs, a significant pest animal impacting the livestock industry in South Australia. This report provides an overview of the Board's wild dog program 'Biteback' over the last 10 years between 2009 and 2019.

Major findings to date:

- Wild dog management requires a significant and ongoing investment in time and resources by landholders, government and industry to achieve positive outcomes towards reducing the impacts by wild dogs on the livestock industry.
- Landholder participation in wild dog control, especially baiting, is seen as the key measure for monitoring compliance in wild dog management through the Biteback program. Increased uptake in the program is assisting with the development of baseline information through landholder reporting and direct engagement of landholders
- Prior to 2017 the Board measured progress in Biteback as any landholder participation in managing wild dogs with an increase from 59% in 2009 to 82% in 2018.
- In 2017, the SA Arid Lands NRM Board developed the 'Best Practice Guidelines for Wild Dog Control', an Australian first. The Guidelines are now the primary monitoring tool for the Biteback program and provide a benchmark for landholders and the Board to assess the level of management undertaken by individual properties with an intent to integrate these guidelines into State wide policy.
- In 2018, the level of properties meeting Best Practice was 57.5% with another 10% partially meeting best practice and 32.5% not baiting. A portion of properties not baiting are in areas where there are little to no dog activity reported.
- The Best Practice Guidelines provide a tool for implementing an equitable and consistent system for compliance in wild dog management.
- The best results are achieved through landscape scale coordinated ground baiting by landholders providing a frontline defence against wild dogs in concert with additional measures including trapping, shooting and targeted aerial baiting.
- Participation levels vary over the region with an even spread across livestock and non-livestock properties. This indicates participation is generally influenced by personal experience of wild dog impacts or community expectations rather than land tenure.
- Continuous engagement and coordination of landholders has a significant bearing on the level of participation by landholders.
- Extension activities such as trapping workshops provide a direct improvement and adoption of those skills by landholders and support the recommended integrated approach.
- The annual aerial baiting program, is not a replacement for but, complements the ground baiting efforts of land managers, requiring extensive time and investment to deliver with future funding subject to confirmation.
- The Biteback program is supported through partnerships across land tenures, departments, industry groups and peak bodies, community, landholders and multiple levels of government.



Introduction

Inside the dog fence, wild dogs (Dingoes and their hybrids) are a declared pest species, which requires land managers to control them on their properties regardless of the land tenure and use.

The SA Arid Lands (SAAL) NRM Board, with funding support from the SA Sheep Industry Fund (SIF), has been delivering its significant pest management program *"Biteback: Continuing Coordinated Behavioural Change in Wild Dog Control & Management in the SA Sheep Pastoral Zone"* since 2009.

This program supports Biteback local area groups and assists land managers in the SA Arid Lands region to coordinate their wild dog control efforts, apply best practice control measures and significantly reduce wild dog numbers and impacts inside the Dog Fence.

The program activities include bi-annual 1080 bait injection services for each of the 21 Biteback groups for ground baiting (Spring and Autumn) and manages an annual aerial baiting program for inaccessible areas of the region with high reported wild dog activity (inside the dog fence). The program also offers injection services to land managers located outside the dog fence when requested to reduce impacts to cattle when dog numbers are too high.

Additional actions include encouraging the monitoring of wild dog activity, supplying information about new and emerging technologies for wild dog control, and offering training opportunities for a range of integrated wild dog control methods including trapper-training workshops for land managers.

This report provides an overview of the Biteback' program over the past 10 years, including activities undertaken, monitoring data on land manager involvement and wild dog activity, and a review of program outcomes. This report will be used by the SA Arid Lands NRM Board to inform future planning and improve the program outcomes.

Background and History of the Biteback Program

The 'Biteback' Program **commenced in 2009** following a group of land managers in the Flinders Ranges district of the SA Arid Lands (SAAL) region experiencing an increase in wild dog activity. The land managers applied for funding from the Sheep Industry Fund (SIF), which is administered by the SA Sheep Advisory Group (SASAG), to help manage these impacts. The application was successful, for a three-year period, with the land managers requesting the SAAL NRM Board to manage the program.

The program was designed to assist pastoral land managers inside the Dog Fence in the Northern Flinders Ranges with expansion to the North-East Pastoral, Kingoonya and Gawler Ranges NRM districts over time to reduce the impact of wild dog predation within their local area through:

- The development of Biteback local area plans to improve participation in strategic and coordinated wild dog control activities within the region.
- Targeted trapping by a skilled 'dogger' – applied in strategic locations where bait-shy, breeding wild dogs exist.
- The provision of 1080 meat injection services at key locations in affected districts.
- The provision of a trap and motion detection camera loan service; and
- Education and extension activities designed to engage land managers in a common objective and best practice methods of control.

In 2012, the 'Biteback' program received a further three years with changes to the program including:

- Omission of targeted trapping;
- Inclusion of maps for monitoring wild dog activity, distribution and predation on a district scale;

- Aerial baiting inside the Dog Fence commenced in the SAAL NRM region targeting wild dogs in areas inaccessible to vehicles.

In 2015, the 'Biteback' Program secured funding for a further three to focus on building landholder capacity to manage and control wild dogs through the development of the Board's '*Best Practice Guidelines for Wild Dog Control*' in 2017. The Guidelines used data collected during extensive landholder consultation efforts during the previous three years, and is aimed at increasing and standardising the level of wild dog control implemented by land managers.

In addition to previous years, the program included:

- The provision of a trap loan service.
- The employment of a State Wild Dog Coordinator (0.5FTE) to engage landholders in other NRM Regions who were experiencing impacts from wild dogs.
- Continued expansion of the aerial baiting program inside the dog fence with funds from AWI and SIF.
- The employment of a fully funded wild dog trapper (2015) funded through Commonwealth drought assistance funding; and
- The development of a 50% trapper rebate for land managers to employ a trapper (2017). This was also funded through Commonwealth drought assistance funding.

In 2018, the Biteback program applied to the Sheep Industry Fund for an additional three years with an annual confirmation of funding. The program approach was to develop a baseline of landholders meeting the requirements outlined in the '*Best Practice Guidelines for Wild Dog Control*' (2018-19) and increase it by 5% each year until 2020-2021.

The program expanded to:

- Promote the Best Practice Guideline as a benchmarking tool for landholders and the Board to assess community participation in wild dog management.
- Reviewing the aerial baiting program and modifying target hot spot areas with funds from AWI and SIF.
- Distributing free manufactured baits to land managers inside the dog fence. Baits (94,250) were purchased by PIRSA with drought assistance funding and were distributed prior to the commencement of the government funded trapper program (2018).

Biteback Program Funding Sources

Financial Years	Sheep Industry Fund	SA Arid Lands NRM #	Australian Wool Innovation	Commonwealth Funding
2009-2012	\$281,100*	\$235,500	\$75,000*	-
2012-2015	\$286,500*	\$142,500	\$195,000*	-
2015-2018	\$415,500*	\$246,000	\$150,000*	\$336,164*
2018/2019 FY	\$183,840*	\$165,000	\$70,000*	\$82,000*
2019/2020 FY	\$186,536*	\$210,000	TBA	\$0

*GST exclusive, NRM Levy & in-kind#

Biteback Groups

Biteback management groups (hereafter 'groups', Figure 1) were established to streamline the transfer of information between land managers and coordinate wild dog control efforts by geographical location, inside and outside the dog fence.

Inside the dog fence, the 200 properties are divided amongst 21 groups, made up of between four and 23 properties, based on their physical location and travelling distance to coordinated injection service sites. Each group has a nominated group coordinator whose role it is to:

- Coordinate group members and keep them informed about coordinated injection services, information sessions and training opportunities.
- Ensure information about wild dog activity is shared between group members.
- Liaise with the Wild Dog Project Officer about wild dog impacts and activity in their groups' area; and
- Encourage group members to monitor, report and control wild dogs.

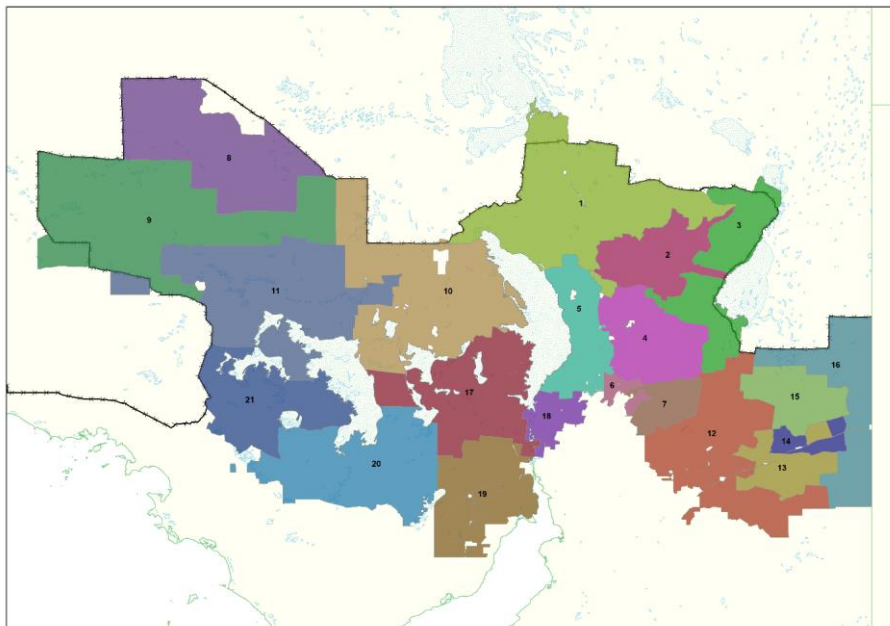


Figure 1 Biteback Groups (inside the dog fence)

Total Land Manager Participation in the Biteback Program

From 2009 to 2017 the primary monitoring method used by the SA Arid Lands Board to assess progress was any landholder participation in managing wild dogs. This was measured by attendance at injection services, participation in ground baiting, aerial baiting or provision of mapping data. From 2009 to 2018 there was an improvement from 59% to 82% (Figure 2).

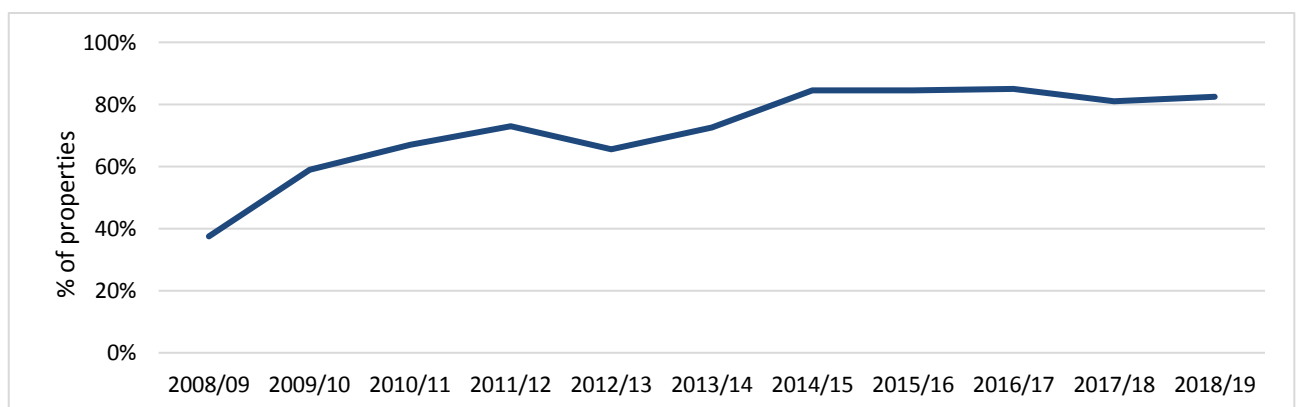


Figure 2 Total Land Manager Participation

The Wild Dog Best Practice Guidelines

The 'Best Practice Guidelines for Wild Dog Control' (BPGL) outlines a proactive and a reactive level of wild dog control expected for all properties located inside the dog fence.

The proactive level of baiting sets the expectation that:

- All properties located inside the dog fence will distribute wild dog baits at a rate of 1 bait/km of track across the entire property, twice a year (Spring and Autumn), regardless of wild dog activity. This level of baiting will be assessed after every coordinated baiting program (every 6 months), to determine if a property is meeting the standard for the previous 12-month period.
- Where wild dog activity is present, baiting should increase to five baits per kilometre of tracks within a radius of 10km until activity ceases.
- A property who does not meet this standard may be subject to the SAAL boards Compliance Framework procedures.

The guidelines followed extensive consultation with the Biteback Groups over a three-year period and were endorsed by Livestock SA.

The Guidelines are also used as part of the criteria for assessing applications for the PIRSA trapper program.

Measuring uptake of Best Practice Baiting

After the distribution of the 'Best Practice Guidelines for Wild Dog Control' in November 2017, landholders have been encouraged to meet the proactive level of baiting voluntarily.

In June 2019, a review of the previous 12 months was undertaken to identify the number of properties baiting at proactive levels. This 2019 baseline level will also be used to determine future increases in proactive level baiting.

Figure 3 shows that 57.5% of properties were baiting at the proactive levels in 2019, which is 24% higher than the previous financial year.

The increase in properties meeting the best practice level of baiting has resulted in a reduction in both the number of properties not baiting and the number of properties not baiting at best practice levels.

The Biteback program will be aiming for a 5% increase in the number of properties baiting at the best practice proactive level from the 2018 baseline over the next 12 months.

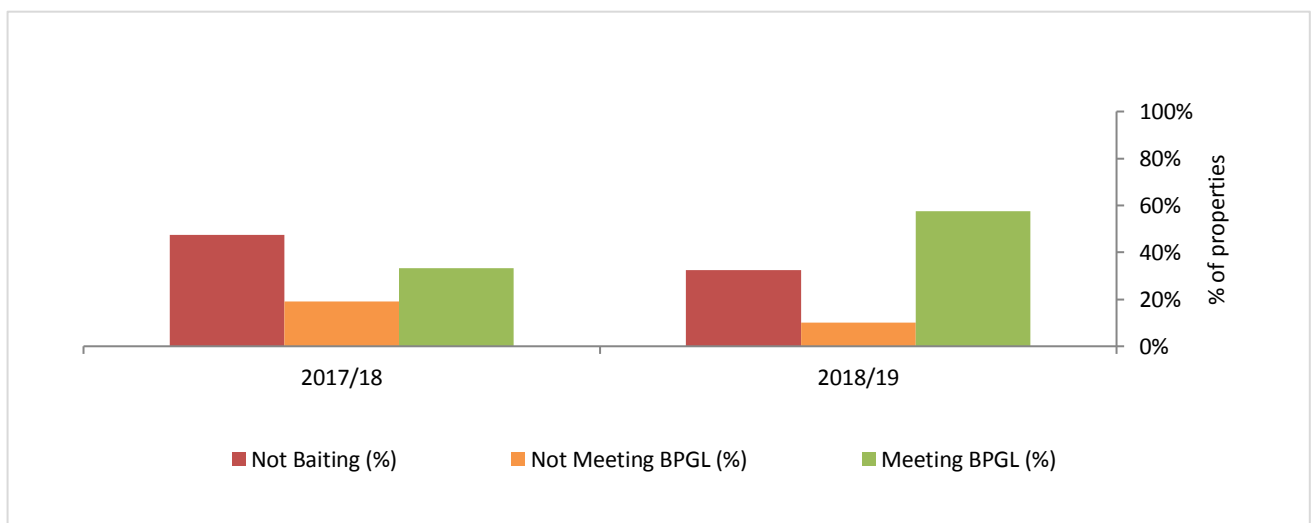


Figure 3 Properties meeting the Best Practice level of baiting

SA Arid Lands NRM Board Compliance Framework

The SA Arid Lands NRM Board, as the relevant authority under the NRM Act, endorsed its compliance framework with implementation focus on landholder participation in wild dog management.

The compliance framework uses the following considerations:

- Properties deemed to be in 'high wild dog activity' areas (inside the dog fence), who are not baiting will be visited by the Wild Dog Project Officer to encourage an increase in their wild dog control efforts.
- Where properties fail to voluntarily engage in wild dog management or meet the best practice standards, a follow up visit by an Authorised Officer will be conducted with the potential of a Protection Order being issued requiring mandatory actions to be completed by the land manager.
- During the 2018-2019 financial year, an assessment of properties over the previous 12 months was made with an initial six properties in hot spot areas identified and visited to encourage an increase in wild dog control efforts. No further compliance action is required at this time and these properties will continue to be assessed over the next coordinated baiting period.
- A further seven properties have been selected for visitation during the 2019-2020 financial year.

Ground Baiting

SA Arid Lands Inside Fence baiting

Most properties involved in wild dog management undertake ground baiting as the most cost effective and least time-consuming way to reduce high wild dog numbers.

Figure 4 shows land manager participation in ground baiting efforts and the total amount of baits distributed to land managers for ground baiting since the program began in 2009.

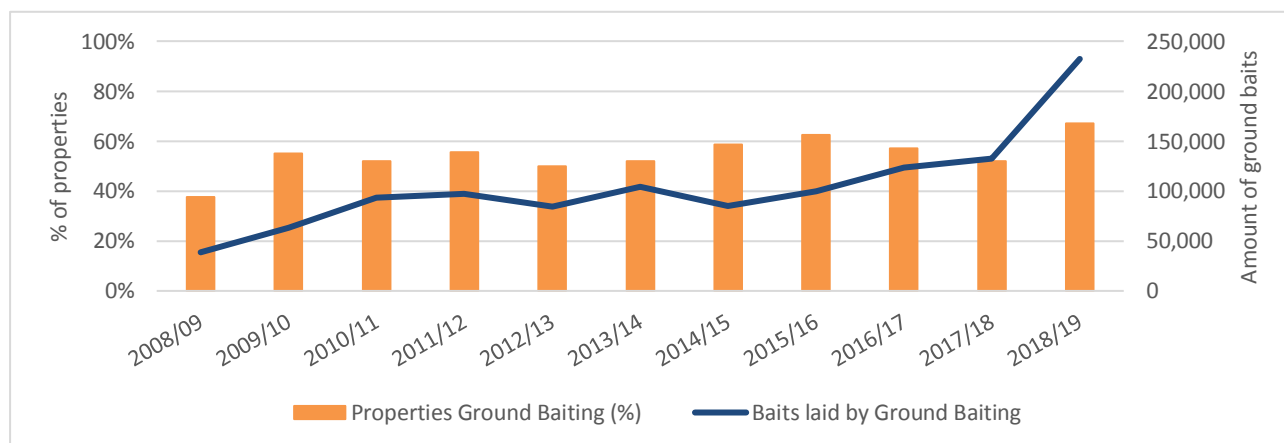


Figure 4 Ground Baiting Effort (inside the dog fence)

2018-2019 also recorded the highest participation levels at coordinated injection services (67%). This increase was attributed to the development of the Best Practice Guidelines and the distribution of the 94,250 free manufactured baits prior to the commencement of the PIRSA managed trapper program.

Since the program began in 2009, the total number of baits distributed for ground baiting has steadily increased. The highest recorded increase in bait numbers was in 2018-2019 where 232,205 baits were distributed for ground baiting (this was an increase of more than 100,000 baits). The significant increase is predominately related to the free manufactured baits provided by PIRSA for distribution prior to the two full time equivalent trappers commencing.

The total amount of baits displayed in figure 4 includes:

- Injected meat baits (fresh and semi-dried).
- Manufactured baits (land managers can purchase these from the SA Arid Lands NRM Board at subsidised prices).
- Canid Pest Ejector (CPE) dog strength capsules (these became available for purchase since 2016).
- The 94,250 free manufactured baits distributed to land managers in the SAAL region (inside the dog fence).

In recent years, emphasis has been placed on educating land managers about supplying good quality meat at injection services to ensure effective meat baits are offered to wild dogs.

In 2018-2019, forty bait-drying racks were purchased to be located at key locations for landholders to semi dry their meat baits prior to 1080 injection.

SA Arid Lands Outside Fence baiting

Outside the dog fence, wild dogs are classed as a non-protected native species under the National Parks and Wildlife Act, which means there is no legislative requirement to control them.

Land managers in this part of the region, who are experiencing wild dog impacts can bait if they choose to, but are limited to one bait per 2km² annually, based on property size. This limitation was implemented to ensure wild dog numbers could be reduced to manageable levels, without affecting the species ecological role as the top line predator.

Baits are provided on a needs basis when requested by groups of land managers experiencing high impacts from wild dogs in their area. Property managers who have met their maximum bait quota in a 12 month period, and are still experiencing a high level of impacts from wild dogs can apply for additional baits to reduce wild dog levels to a manageable level.

Figure 5 shows the land manager participation in ground baiting efforts and the total amount of baits distributed to land managers for ground baiting outside the dog fence since 2009. Maximum baits that could be laid annually outside of the fence is 156,461 based on one bait per 2km²

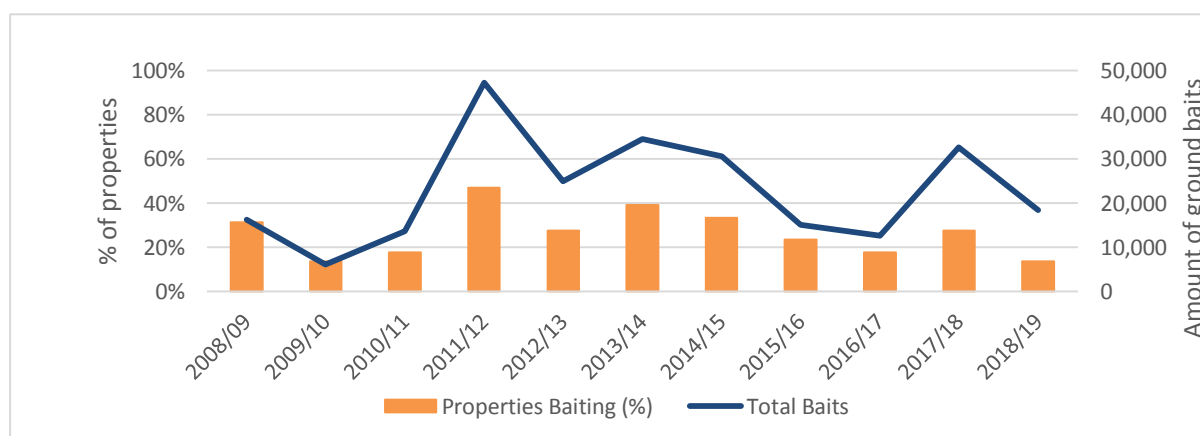


Figure 5 Ground baiting effort (outside the dog fence)

Subsidised cost for manufactured baits.

Land managers located inside the dog fence in the SA Arid Lands NRM region have benefited from a subsidised cost for manufactured wild dog baits since 2014. Access to subsidised baits was expanded with Federal government funding to include land managers located outside the dog fence during the 2015-2016 financial year.

Aerial Baiting

The aerial baiting program began in 2012 to target areas of the region (inside the dog fence) that are inaccessible for ground baiting, and is a supplementary baiting program only offered to properties already ground baiting. Aerial baiting is undertaken in a fixed wing aircraft with a baiting rate of five baits per kilometre on selected areas. In 2018, an additional emergency aerial baiting program was completed on properties in high wild dog activity areas prior to the commencement of the PIRSA managed trapper program. In 2019, the aerial baiting program was scaled back to target properties with reported high wild dog activity. Baits were dispersed at a higher rate (8 baits per kilometre).

Figure 6 shows the percentage of properties involved in the aerial baiting program, and the total baits distributed aurally.

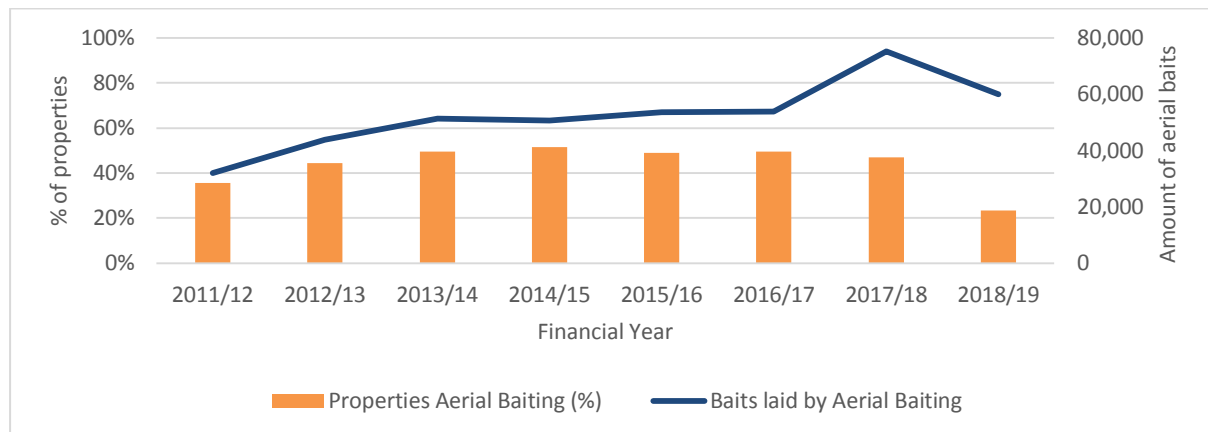


Figure 6 Aerial Baiting Participation and Total Baits Deployed

Monitoring (inside the dog fence)

Wild dog control activity mapping

Land managers have been sharing wild dog activity and control measures through the mapping (monitoring) component of the Biteback program since 2009. Initially, data was only collected from properties inside the dog fence annually, but has now been expanded to include all properties in the region (inside and outside the dog fence) bi-annually.

The data collected is used to report long-term trends in total control effort, fluctuations in wild dog populations and stock impacts over time and in the development of aerial baiting flight paths to ensure 'high wild dog activity' areas are targeted.

The information collected about wild dog activity and control measures is one of the largest and most complete wild dog data sets in the country.

Wild Dog Scan (WDS) Application

The WDS application was developed in Queensland as a way to record wild dog activity and control measures across Australia. The app can be used on any smart device without an internet connection. The information collected on the app is accessed along with hard copy maps and included for reporting purposes.

It also gives land managers the ability to share wild dog activity information with each other, and can enable land managers to target specific dogs in real time before they experience stock impacts.

A 5% increase in properties using the WDS app to report wild dog activity occurred in 2018. This increase is attributed to the commencement of the Government managed trapper program (professional trappers report wild dog control through the app) and encouragement of land managers to use the app instead of returning hard copy maps.

Figure 7 shows the total percentage of properties returning wild dog control and activity information (inside the dog fence) from both the hard copy mapping program and the WDS app. This data also includes wild dogs shot or trapped by professional trappers through the PIRSA managed Trapper Program.

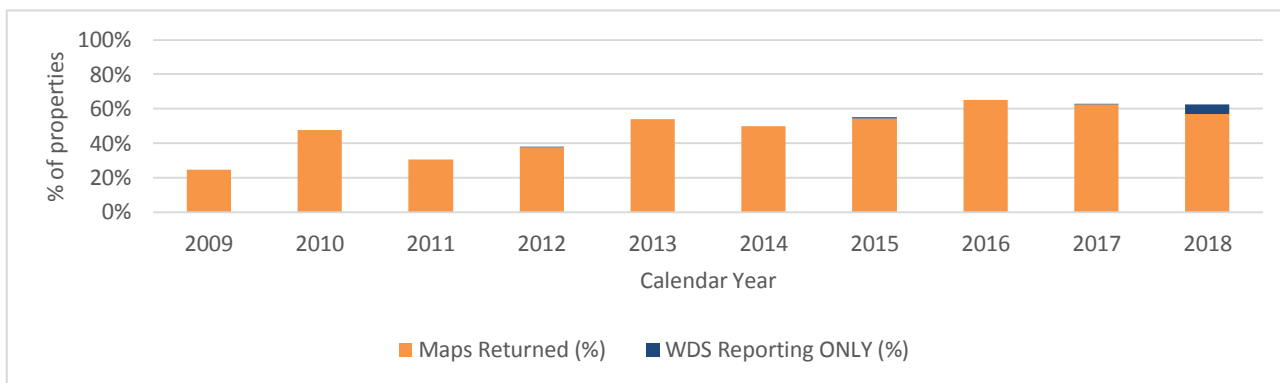


Figure 7 Properties returning maps and reporting through WDS

Trapping

Trapping is an effective tool for controlling wild dogs, but is expensive and extremely time consuming. It is particularly effects when targeting wild dogs who have become bait shy through poor baiting practices or exposure to sub-lethal baits, or are elusive and avoid human presence because of being shot at or chased in the past.

Figure 8 shows reported property trapping effort, including PIRSA managed professional trappers and the total amount of wild dogs trapped.

The Biteback program began delivering trapper training courses in 2015, resulting in an increase in the number of properties using trapping as a control measure.

The most significant increase that resulted from the training was the amount of wild dogs successfully trapped. This increase has continued each year since this time.

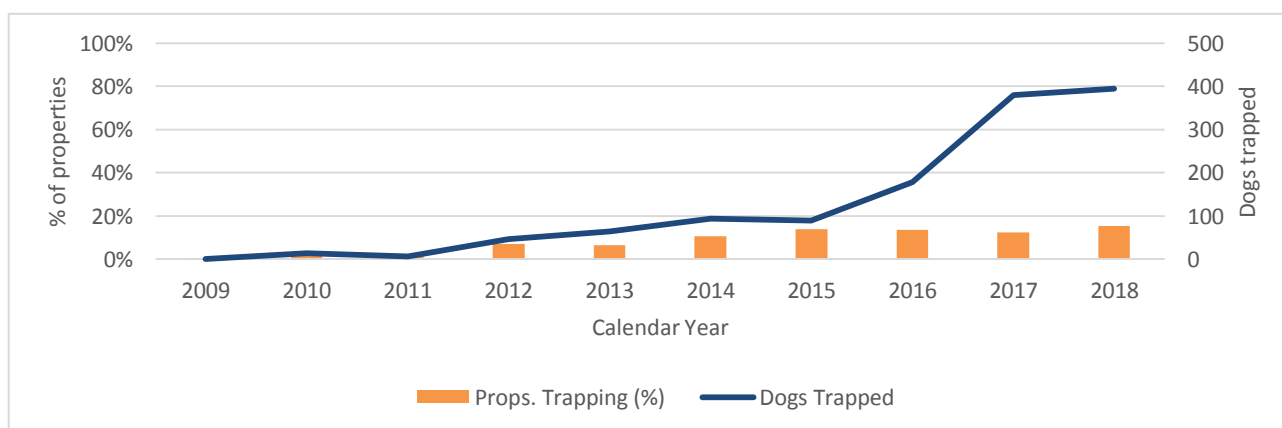


Figure 8 Reported trapping information (inside the dog fence)

This data also includes wild dogs trapped and recorded on the WDS application by PIRSA managed professional trappers.

Trapper Training Workshops

Drought Assistance and Commonwealth Government funding was used to run 11 trapper training workshops between 2015 and 2018. These training workshops were highly successful with 125 people from 59 properties increasing their skills at trapping wild dogs. The two most recent courses (completed in 2018) included demonstrations on the use of Drones equipped with Infrared – Thermal Imagery to monitor wild dog activity at night. This type of technology is currently being used to manage stock and assist with feral management programs in Queensland.

Drought Assistance Funded Trappers

In 2015-2016, a fully funded professional trapper was contracted to help land managers control wild dogs (inside the dog fence) in the SA Arid Lands region. The program operated for 13 months and the trapper successfully removed 59 wild dogs.

Subsidised trapper program

In 2017, the professional trapper program was modified to offer a 50% rebate to land managers who employed a trapper to help control wild dogs on their property. The aim of the modification was to make existing funding available to more landholders; while still reducing the costs to a landholder associated with engaging a trapper. The modified version of the program ran for 12 months and serviced 21 properties and removed 207 wild dogs.

State Government and Industry funded wild dog trappers.

The State Government and livestock industry funded wild dog trapper program began in 2018. The \$300,000 per year program is funded through a partnership between PIRSA, industry (Sheep Industry Fund and Australian Wool Innovation) and the four wild dog impacted NRM boards (SAAL, EP, N&Y and SAMDB).

Prior to the commencement of the program, a large number of manufactured wild dog baits were distributed to land managers in all wild dog affected regions of South Australia (SAAL, EP, N&Y and SAMDB). An emergency aerial baiting program was also completed in 'high wild dog impacted' areas of the SA Arid Lands region prior to the commencement of the program. The aim of the increased baiting was to reduce fox and 'easy to get' wild dogs before sending in the trappers to target the 'harder to get' wild dogs.

Participating properties are required to meet certain criteria to receive the services of a trapper including carrying out baiting in accordance with SA Arid Land's 'Best Practice Guidelines for Wild Dog Control', committing property staff to personalised training with the trapper, and uploading wild dog activity and control effort onto the Wild Dog Scan (WDS) application.

Key outcomes during 2018/2019:

- The wild dog trapping program completed the first year of operation removing 294 dogs across 33 properties.
- In addition to trapping and shooting, the wild dog trappers have also spent the equivalent of 38 days of on-the-job training of land managers.
- Most of the trapper deployments have targeted wild dog hotspots in the North East Pastoral zone, Northern Flinders/Marree district and in the Roxby Downs area.



Shooting

Many land managers in the SAAL region regard shooting as an effective form of wild dog control as they experience immediate results. The majority of properties located north of the dog fence and organically certified properties south of the fence use shooting as their only form of wild dog control.

In 2017, high numbers of wild dogs were shot in the North Flinders/Marree district and in 2018, high numbers were shot in the North East pastoral district. This data coincided with an increase in reported wild dog activity during this period, particularly near the dog fence.

Figure 9 shows reported property shooting effort and the total amount of wild dogs shot. Most of the reported shooting effort by land managers is opportunistic.

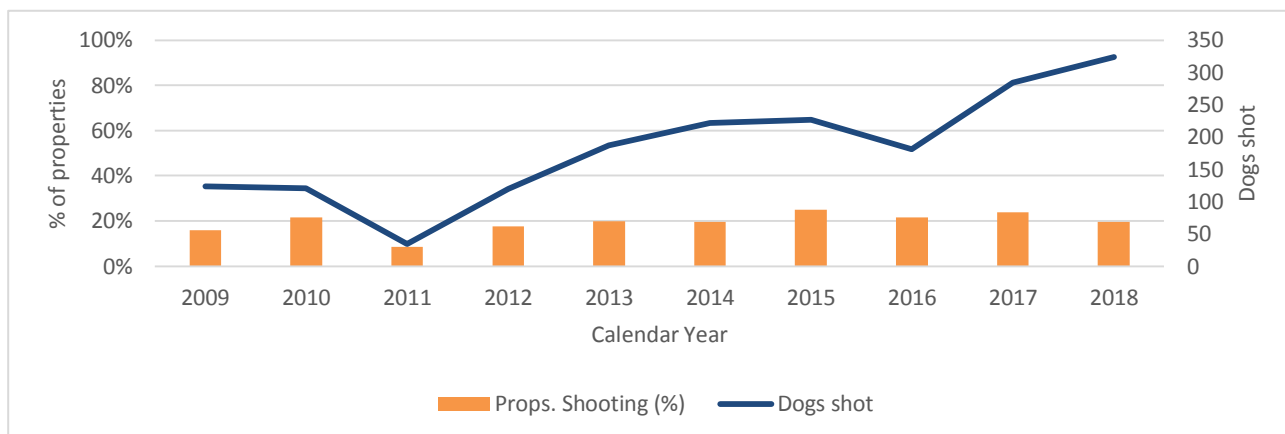


Figure 9 Reported shooting information (inside the dog fence)

Stock loss

Originally, it was expected that a reduction in stock loss would be a good measure of the overall success of the Biteback program although a number of factors including drought or disease can be attributed to stock loss. Although this information is valuable in assessing land manager beliefs about causes of stock loss, limitations to the accuracy of reporting techniques by land managers has showed high variability in the data based on the perceived impacts from wild dogs instead of actual impacts.

Figure 10 shows the percentage of properties reporting stock loss and the total number of stock reported to have been killed by wild dogs. In 2018, reported stock loss increased to the highest it has ever been, despite a decrease in properties reporting. This significant increase in stock loss was localised to three Biteback groups within the North Flinders/Marree (one group) and North East Pastoral districts (two groups) and were all situated immediately inside the dog fence.

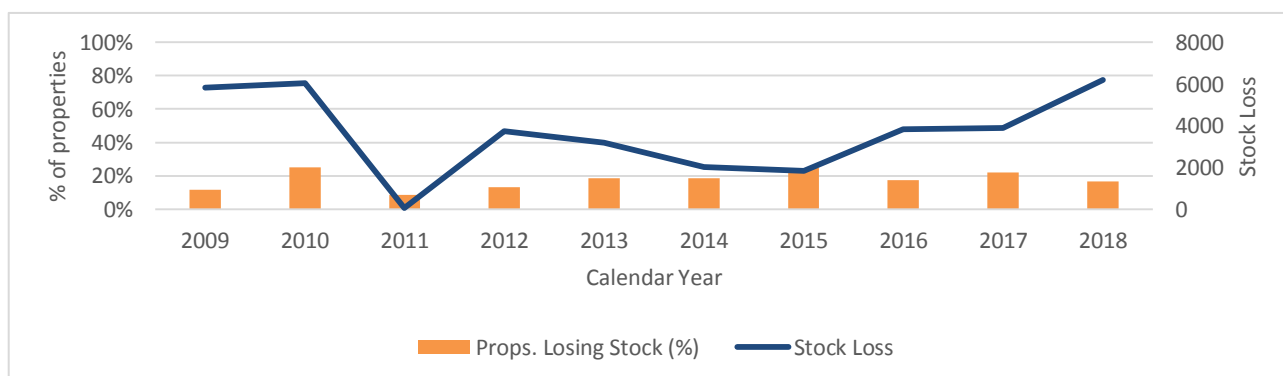


Figure 10 Reported stock loss information (inside the dog fence)

Rebuilding the dog fence in SA

Rebuilding the Dog Fence will have a considerable return on investment, generating net benefits to the state of up to \$113 million over a 20-year period. To prevent wild dog incursions and thereby help protect the sheep industry, 1,600 km of the Dog Fence will be replaced over a 3-5 year period.

The rebuild of the Dog Fence will be funded by the Commonwealth Government (\$10 million), the State Government (\$10 million) and the livestock industry (\$5 million).

It is expected that landholder's efforts to control wild dogs inside the Dog Fence will be considerably improved once the work on the fence is completed.

Future Priorities

- On the back of the Dog Fence rebuild, Biteback will be working with landholders towards virtual eradication of wild dogs in the SAAL region inside the Dog Fence
- Continue to seek secure funding sources for delivery of Biteback including support services, extension activities, skills development workshops and aerial baiting.
- Expansion of Wild Dog Scan adoption across SA Arid Lands region.
- Recruit additional staff and resources to deliver on community engagement and service delivery in SAAL region.
- Increase adoption of Best Practice standards across the region.
- Implement compliance to ensure all land managers are managing wild dogs.