Dudley Peninsula Feral Cat Eradication Operations Plan: Summary
May 2020–mid 2023

Natural Resources
Kangaroo Island

Government of South Australia
Scope
This document serves as a summary of the operational plan currently in use for the eradication of feral cats from the Dudley Peninsula. It aims to inform all stakeholders and interested parties about the rationale, methods and proposed timeline for completion of this project, up to mid-2023.

Background
Kangaroo Island (KI) is one of five priority Australian islands supported by the Australian government to undertake eradication of feral cats. This program aligns with the Australian Government Threatened Species Strategy (2007); The National Threat Abatement Plan for Feral Cats (2007); Australia’s Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010–2030; The Australian Pest Animal Strategy (2007). It also supports the objectives of the Feral cat eradication on Kangaroo Island 2015–2030 Prospectus and the Kangaroo Island Natural Resources Management Plan 2017–2027.

The eradication aims to provide a safe haven for the endangered KI dunnart, and other EPBC-listed species, including the southern brown bandicoot and KI echidna, by eradicating cats from the Dudley Peninsula by 30 June 2023. It will also benefit KI sheep farmers and the broader community because feral cats are the definitive host of toxoplasmosis and sarcosporidiosis, two diseases that have an estimated $2 million impact on the KI sheep industry.

The Dudley Peninsula covers an area of 370 km² of mixed bushland on the eastern end of Kangaroo Island, including conservation parks, coastal and agricultural land. The peninsula represents approximately 8% of the total area of KI which is 4,400 km². The peninsula will be isolated from the remainder of the Island by a cat barrier fence built across a narrow isthmus to limit reinvasions from the west. The eradication program will begin in 2020 as a “rolling front”, starting at the eastern end (Cape Willoughby) and slowly moving westward to meet the barrier fence once areas are deemed clear of cats.

Feral cats will be eradicated using a range of methods;
- Trapping (various methods)
- Felixer® grooming traps
- Baiting (effectiveness to be tested as the front progresses)
- Targeted shooting using thermal scopes (effectiveness to be tested as the front progresses)
- The use of detector dogs

Surveys for feral cats behind the front will be conducted using a number of methods;
- The use of detector dogs
- Remote camera traps
- Citizen science reports through the feral cat scan app

For effective eradication across the peninsula a number of other knowledge gaps will be filled in 2020, during the roll out;
- Estimations of the density of feral cats in woodland (outsourced)
- Investigations into feral cat movements throughout woodland (outsourced)
- Examinations of the effectiveness of baiting with Curiosity® cat bait (outsourced)
- Using thermal imagery (on firearms and drones) as a survey and eradication tool
The proposed method for eradication in this Operations Plan includes some changes from the Feral Cat Eradication and Monitoring Plan 2019-23. The Eradication and Monitoring Plan provided a significant background on what would be required for feral cat eradication as well as a detailed approach to planning the Dudley feral cat eradication. Scrutiny of the data collected during previous work on the Dudley Peninsula, further discussions with experts, and various logistical and operational constraints have indicated that the alternate approach proposed in this Operations Plan is the most likely for successful eradication.

Scope
The feral cat eradication extends across the Dudley Peninsula, Kangaroo Island, and west to the cat fence (still in construction) on the isthmus, south of Pelican Lagoon. This Operations Plan outlines works planned for 2020 and touches on the broader scope for the following years 2021-2023 (subject to new information or additional funding streams becoming available). This plan is prescriptive where possible, also describing some projects that are to be outsourced, whilst leaving room for modification as the project continues and new information becomes available, in particular the testing of new technologies.

Landholder engagement
There is broad acceptance and enthusiasm for the project and its ultimate goal (feral cat eradication), as evidenced by 100% approval for access to sites during the first deployment of camera traps for monitoring. During 2020 and the eradication rollout we will engage in the following ways:

- Landholder contact and liaison
- Farm meetings
- Email updates
- Newsletter
- Website updates
- Regional and state-wide print and broadcast media articles and updates

Community engagement
There is also broad acceptance and enthusiasm for the project and its ultimate goal within the community on the Dudley Peninsula and the wider island, as evidenced by a recent survey to every household on the Dudley Peninsula which recorded an approval rating for the eradication program of over 98% and a larger survey held across the island in 2015 which registered 94% approval from the wider island community.

A Community Engagement Plan has been developed to accompany the Feral Cat Eradication Program to ensure we bring the community and their support with us on the journey including the following engagement tools:

- Community meetings
- Email updates to interested parties
- Newsletter
- Social media updates
- Website updates
- Regional and state-wide print and broadcast media input articles and updates
Brief methodology

There are many techniques that have been used to eradicate cats from other islands, however the basic process remains the same. Broadly, the idea is;

A. Knockdown. Use one broadscale and highly effective technique (typically baiting or introducing a disease) to bring the population down rapidly (ideally by 80-90%).

B. Mop up. Follow up with other, more targeted techniques to cull any remaining animals.

However, this technique will need to be modified across the Dudley Peninsula for a number of reasons;

1. There is currently no highly effective, broadscale knockdown technique that can be used for feral cats on Kangaroo Island.

2. The size of the peninsula prohibits this type of broadscale approach because by the time the mop up operations sweep across the island (it can take many person hours to find and cull the last few cats in any particular area) the remaining cats will have bred up again, possibly to pre-knockdown levels.

The technique for the Dudley Peninsula therefore involves a rolling front of control methods to “push” the eradication line across from east to west (see Figures 1 and 2), followed continuously by intensive survey and mop up methods.

Figure 1. Map of Dudley Peninsula showing barrier fence (pink line; indicative only) and starting place for the rolling eradication front, at the very eastern edge. Yellow dots: control methods (various techniques) in farmland, pink dots: control methods in woodland, blue dots: intensive camera monitoring array to detect any remaining cats or those that have invaded through the line.
Timing and resources required

Although the eradication will begin in 2020 it is not anticipated to be completed for a number of years, dependant on many factors, particularly how long it takes to be certain particular areas are clear of feral cats and whether enough resources are available to sustain the effort required to move the front westward continuously. The proposed timing for delivery of all major works (and associated staffing requirements) for 2020 is outlined in Table 1 and the proposed continuation of the project is outlined in Table 2. Resources required (particularly staff time) are dependent on the size of the front that has to be maintained as it moves across the Peninsula.

Milestones

In addition to the rolling eradication front there are a number of associated monitoring milestones and specific projects that will be addressed and completed during 2020 and beyond. These Milestones will help us to evaluate our work as we proceed and will include themes such as feral cat abundance on the Dudley Peninsula, the KI echidna abundance levels on the Dudley Peninsula, numbers of adult and juvenile Hooded Plovers counted on the Dudley Peninsula and the level of support we retain from the local community members for the feral cat eradication Program.
Table 1. The major logistical tasks to be completed, and resourcing required in 2020.

Green indicates work solely carried out by NRM staff, blue indicates use of contractor with assistance from NRM staff. It assumes (but does not outline) constant and specific landholder, general public and internal liaison, permit applications, data analysis and reporting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Mar</th>
<th>Apr</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>Jun</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dudley Peninsula wide Camera monitoring array</td>
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<td>Deploy cameras for start of eradication</td>
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<td>Targeted Bandicoot camera trapping</td>
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<td>Evaluation of UAVs and thermal imagery</td>
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<td>Begin thermal shooting (Cape Willoughby end)</td>
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<td>High density camera array in woodland</td>
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<tr>
<td>Trapping in woodland, collaring feral cats</td>
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<td>Baiting woodland</td>
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<td>Establish eradication front; control line (various methods) Cape Willoughby end</td>
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<td>Examine Curiosity bait longevity in the field</td>
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<tr>
<td>Examine knockdown of feral cats in woodland from baiting</td>
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Table 2. The major logistical tasks to be completed, and resourcing required beyond 2020.

It assumes (but does not outline) constant and specific landholder, general public and internal liaison, permit applications, data analysis and reporting. Blue arrow indicates constant activity throughout the period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Summer 2021</th>
<th>Winter 2021</th>
<th>Summer 2022</th>
<th>Winter 2022</th>
<th>Summer 2023</th>
<th>Mid-year 2023</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dudley Peninsula wide Camera monitoring array</td>
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<tr>
<td>Targeted Bandicoot camera trapping</td>
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<tr>
<td>Continuation of rolling front (various methods)</td>
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<td>Blue arrow</td>
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<td>Monitoring and mop up behind front</td>
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<td>Blue arrow</td>
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<tr>
<td>Curiosity baiting in woodland (if determined to be effective)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Operational requirements (NRM staff: FTE)</td>
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Figure 3. A map showing the remote IR camera array (yellow dots) deployed across the peninsula to bi-annually monitor feral cats and other species of interest/threatened species. Pink line: approximate location of cat barrier fence.
Eradication roll out

The initial stages of the eradication will be conducted from the eastern side of the peninsula at Cape Willoughby and Cape St Albans (Figure 4). The major advantages of this approach are that:

- It is a relatively small area so logistical and operational issues can be resolved and streamlined
- The eradication will start with minimal "edge". That is, there are fewer opportunities for feral cats to reinvade because the ocean presents a barrier on 3 out of four compass directions
- This will allow time for the cat barrier fence to be completed on the isthmus and the eradication project and its partners (e.g. KI Council) to exert pressure on domestic cat owners to comply with by-laws requiring registration, de-sexing, micro-chipping and containment of their pets.

Figure 4. Closeup view of the eastern end of Dudley Peninsula showing the area for the initial knockdown and the area where the first eradication line will be established with various control methods (yellow shading).

The eradication front will consist of a minimum of three lines of control measures (CM) spaced a maximum of 500m apart, each consisting of various traps, Felixers etc. CM will also be spaced a maximum of 500m apart in the north-south direction (Figure 5). All CM will be placed in likely places to encounter feral cats. At the beginning of the eradication, trapping will continue for at least 5 nights a week, every week until such time as the Catch Per Unit Effort (CPUE) plateaus.
Once the plateau has been reached and maintained (length of time to be determined as the project progresses) the easternmost line of CM will be removed and placed to the west of the westernmost line (Figures 1 and 2), with the same spacing as before and in likely places to encounter cats. In its place a line of remote IR cameras will be deployed and surveys with thermal scopes and beach track surveys will be conducted. If any further cats are detected, intensive mop up operations will commence using the most appropriate CM.

Whilst the eradication is progressing a more probabilistic way of determining when to move traps to the west will be developed.

![Figure 5. Stylised representation of eradication front. Spacing in reality will be more aligned with landscape features, but the line to be established and maintained will be ~1.5 km wide with maximum 500m between each CM.](image)

**Specific Projects**

**Curiosity®** cat baiting in woodland

Curiosity® cat bait has recently been approved for use by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority. It is a bait that has been specifically targeted to attract cats and uses a different poison *para-aminophenone* (PAPP), which is more humane and faster acting than *sodium fluoroacetate* (1080). The PAPP is contained inside a Hard Shell Delivery Vehicle, which is inserted into a meat bait. This reduces the risk of non-target uptakes as many species only eat the meat portion of it.

Camera trapping indicates that cats are present (although at low densities) deep inside woodland areas. In areas such as these where cats are hard to capture by other means, baiting may be the only option to eradicate them. However indiscriminate baiting with Curiosity® bait may not be effective in this vegetation as the canopy and understorey are so thick that baits may not hit the ground, or be discovered by cats. Using GPS collared cats to
discover how cats are using woodland (Figure 5), particularly if cats primarily use open areas and tracks within woodland will help focus trapping/baiting efforts.

The Directions for Use for Curiosity® cat baits limit distribution to 50 km\(^2\) and there are also specific limitations on where and how baits can be deployed. They can also only be deployed within a small seasonal window to ensure Heath Goannas (Varanus rosenbergii) do not encounter baits.

In large sections of suitable country (where all permits have been obtained and notifications conducted) aerial baiting can be conducted by helicopter, with restrictions about placement determined by the Directions for Use and landholder requirements.

**Curiosity® bait longevity in woodland**

As there is only a narrow, winter window in which Curiosity® cat baits can be deployed (to remove the risk of Varanus rosenbergii ingesting them), it is important to know how long baits remain palatable in the field. Knowing the longevity of baits once deployed will also help determine how long feral cats are exposed to the possibility of consuming a bait. This will inform the best time to assess the possible mortality of GPS collared feral cats in the woodland project.

**Use of UAVs (Drones) as a survey tool for feral cats**

Feral cats will be eradicated using a range of methods as outlined above, however determining when areas have been cleared of cats, or finding cats that could not be captured by other methods may require the use of new and emerging technologies.

The University of Adelaide has been contracted to conduct a field trial of various infra-red cameras (of differing resolutions) mounted to drones, under different weather conditions and at differing heights to determine whether this technique can be used for reliably detecting feral cats.

**Targeted Bandicoot camera monitoring**

The Southern Brown Bandicoot *Isoodon obesulus* ssp. Obesulus is listed as Endangered under the Australian Government’s EPBC Act. There are recent records of the species across the Dudley Peninsula. These areas will be surveyed three times a year using infra-red cameras. Any populations detected will be recorded as baseline data and then monitoring will continue throughout the project to detect any positive benefits as a result of the removal of feral cats. The exact methodology will be determined once the extent and distribution of bandicoot populations is known from the Dudley Peninsula-wide camera array and targeted surveys.
Effectiveness of hunting feral cats using thermal equipment

After the commencement of the eradication roll out (see above), a ~690 ha section of the Dudley Peninsula will be used to examine the effectiveness of hunting with thermal scopes as a mop-up tool. This area was chosen because it is a small, contained section (surrounded by ocean on three sides) and can serve as a start point for the peninsula wide eradication, once the effectiveness of trapping has been quantified and the coordination of the program has been streamlined.

If this technique is deemed efficient (as compared to other methods) it may be deployed as part of the knock-down regime. Otherwise it will still be part of the arsenal that can be deployed for mop up of remaining cats behind the line.

Figure 5. Map displaying likely area for Curiosity® cat baiting and GPS collaring of feral cats in woodland (yellow polygon; ~3000 ha). Pink line denotes approximate location of cat barrier fence, solid brown indicates DEW reserve (Simpson Conservation Park)

Effectiveness of leg-hold (two techniques) and cage trapping

Trapping feral cats with leg-hold traps has historically been an integral part of most feral cat eradication campaigns (Parkes et al. 2014). This technique, and in particular the best ways to avoid non target captures (e.g. possums and bandicoots), have not been examined on Kangaroo Island.

Various traps will be used whilst trapping feral cats for GPS collaring as part of the woodland Curiosity® baiting project and for the eradication front rollout (see above). Leg-hold traps (2 types), and cage traps will be deployed a maximum of 500m apart along roadsides and in
open areas throughout the woodland, baited with chicken wings and tuna oil or cat urine/commercial product and checked in the cool, early hours of the morning.

Detector dogs
This project aims to train a small team of local landholders and their companion dogs in humane and ethical wildlife detection dog (WDD) techniques to support feral cat eradication on the Dudley Peninsula. To date an accredited Australian WDD specialist has delivered three workshops with field exercise training, supported by the NRKI Feral Cat Team. Once accredited, the WDD teams should significantly enhance the ability of the feral cat eradication to find and cull any difficult to trap cats.

Use of Felixer™ Grooming Traps
At time of writing Felixer™ Grooming traps are approved for use under a research permit and can only be deployed where members of the public cannot access them, i.e. private landholdings. Felixers can be a very effective culling tool if placed and setup correctly, facing a likely egress point for feral cats with appropriate structures (typically vegetation) to guide them towards the unit. Felixers will be used as part of the rolling eradication front across private land, where landholder approval has been granted. As with the use of Curiosity® baits, landholders with adjacent land must also be informed and signage posted at all possible access points to the property where the units are deployed.

Barrier fence
On the western end of the peninsula a barrier fence will be erected (currently still in the construction phase) which will limit the movement of feral cats to an unknown extent (Figure 6). The fence will terminate at the southern end at a cliff and to the north will continue into Pelican Lagoon beyond the low tide mark. There will be a number of self-closing gates and two, 40m wide gaps in the fence (Figure 7) to allow for vehicular traffic.

To assess how many cats are using these gaps, cameras will be placed at each side of the road and checked regularly. A number of deterrent/control techniques will be trialled once pressure on the gaps has been determined.
Figure 6. Alignment of the barrier fence across the isthmus connecting Dudley Peninsula to the main section of the island. To the south the fence terminates on a cliff and to the north the fence will run into Pelican Lagoon beyond the low tide mark. Two 40m gaps in the fence are denoted by yellow circles.

Figure 7. One of the gaps in the barrier fence. Hog Bay Road looking west. The road can be seen to the left of the image and the poles for the fence to be constructed to the right (demarcated by the yellow line)
Table 3. External communications required for each control measure to be deployed to eradicate feral cats.

All notifications and permits to be organised well in advance of operations starting. In some cases specific times for notification/application are regulated in which case the relevant documents are referred to in the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Private landholder notifications/requests for access</th>
<th>Signage</th>
<th>Parks liaison</th>
<th>Council liaison</th>
<th>Licenses/Permits/Approvals</th>
<th>Staff call in/Message</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Curiosity® baiting</td>
<td>Yes, refer to Directions for Use (SA; in prep, will be appended to Ops plan once finalised)</td>
<td>Yes, refer to Directions for Use (SA; in prep, will be appended to Ops plan once finalised)</td>
<td>Yes, refer to Directions for Use (SA; in prep, will be appended to Ops plan once finalised)</td>
<td>Yes, refer to Directions for Use (SA; in prep, will be appended to Ops plan once finalised)</td>
<td>Yes, refer to Directions for Use (SA; in prep, will be appended to Ops plan once finalised)</td>
<td>Dependant on schedule, to be decided at work debrief (see 2.4 Data management)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trapping</td>
<td>Yes, prior to beginning any works and at periods specified by landholder</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes, if working on Parks estate and at periods specified by Parks delegate</td>
<td>Yes, if working on Council land and at periods specified by Council delegate</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Dependant on schedule, to be decided at work debrief (see 2.4 Data management)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felixer use and deployment</td>
<td>Yes, prior to beginning any works and at periods specified by landholder</td>
<td>Yes, at all possible entry points and at Grooming trap as per directions</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Dependant on schedule, to be decided at work debrief (see 2.4 Data management)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shooting (daytime)</td>
<td>Yes, prior to beginning any works and at periods specified by landholder</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes, if working on Parks estate and at periods specified by Parks delegate</td>
<td>Yes, if working on Council land and at periods specified by Council delegate</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Dependant on schedule, to be decided at work debrief (see 2.4 Data management)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shooting (night time)</td>
<td>Yes, prior to beginning any works and at periods specified by landholder</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes, if working on Parks estate and at periods specified by Parks delegate</td>
<td>Yes, if working on Council land and at periods specified by Council delegate</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Dependant on schedule, to be decided at work debrief (see 2.4 Data management)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camera trap deployment</td>
<td>Yes, prior to beginning any works and at periods specified by landholder</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes, if working on Parks estate and at periods specified by Parks delegate</td>
<td>Yes, if working on Council land and at periods specified by Council delegate</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Dependant on schedule, to be decided at work debrief (see 2.4 Data management)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Camera trap retrieval</td>
<td>Yes, prior to beginning any works and at periods specified by landholder</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Possibly organised during camera deployment negotiations</td>
<td>Yes, if working on Council land and at periods specified by Council delegate</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Dependant on schedule, to be decided at work debrief (see 2.4 Data management)</td>
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Landholder/ Stakeholder/ Partner communications

Table 3 outlines the external communications required for each CM to be deployed to eradicate feral cats across lands of varied tenure. A GIS layer will be developed, and constantly updated, which contains for each parcel on the Dudley the tenure, contact details and willingness for each CM to be used.

All notifications and permits to be organised well in advance of starting. In some cases specific times for notification/ application are regulated in which case the relevant documents are referred to in the table.
Animal Welfare, permits and approvals

Although the feral cat eradication program, by definition, involves the culling of animals, there are many considered and humane techniques that can be employed to achieve this. Likewise, radio-collaring and monitoring feral cats can also be done with the welfare of each individual cat in mind. Feral cat eradication works across the Dudley Peninsula will always be conducted to the highest animal welfare standards. To this end, all methods have been approved by relevant regulatory agencies and all staff are familiar with the ethical use of these techniques. All notifications and permits will be organised well in advance of starting. In some cases specific times for notification/application are regulated.

Many landholders have indicated they are willing to be actively engaged in the program. To this end NRKI have cage traps available which community members can borrow at any time, and this assistance would be particularly helpful once the eradication front arrives. Landholder support will therefore greatly increase the opportunities for, and time taken to, remove cats from any area or property. For all landholders, including those supportive of the project but not willing or able to participate, a permission form (available on the NRKI website here) is provided which allows them to outline which CM they are happy for NRKI staff to use on their land.

Feral cats need to be destroyed humanely. The most humane method is a single shot to the head whilst the animal is still in the cage, and all landholders will be advised of this during the trap borrowing process and will be required to sign a form indicating they are aware of this.

All control measures will be carried out under and according to:

- Requirements under the Animal Welfare Act 1985
- Requirements under the Animal Welfare Regulations 2012
- Animal Ethics permit E26901-3
- Scientific License 53/2019
- SA Health 2020-85205 (Felixer 1080 Cartridges)
- APVMA Permit 80926 for the use of Felixers
- Controlled Substance Licensing Unit Licence to Possess Regulation 25 Poisons
- Use of Felixers protocol
- Curiosity® Directions for Use
- Working Alone in the Field
- JSA Trapping and shooting Feral Cats
- Pestsmart Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) CAT001: Ground shooting of feral cats
- Pestsmart SOP CAT002: Trapping of feral cats using cage traps
- Pestsmart SOP CAT003: Trapping of feral cats using padded-jaw traps