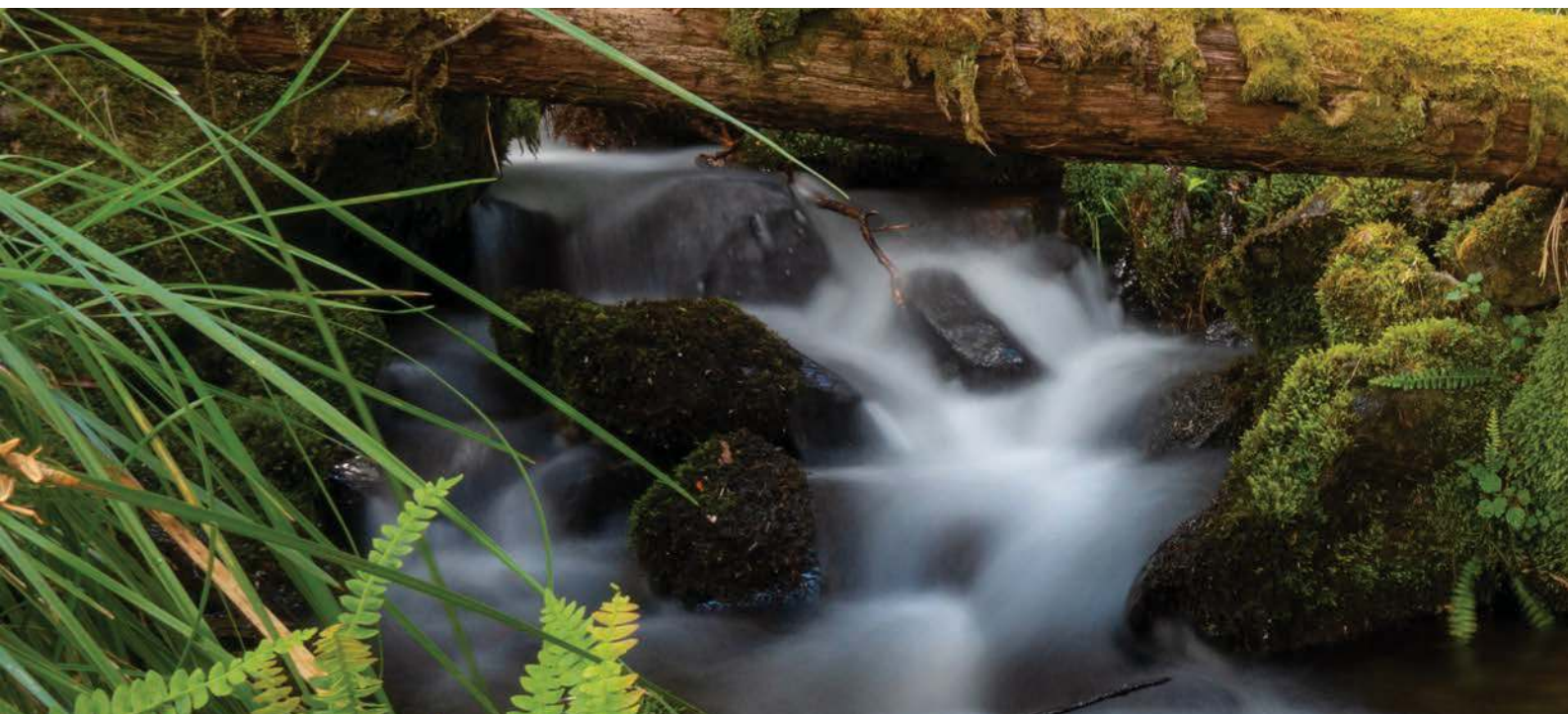


Combating invasive species:

Priorities for the next NSW Government

JANUARY 2023





Stream near Wheelers Hut, Kosciuszko National Park, Dec 2021. Image: Mark Jekabsons

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About the Invasive Species Council

The Invasive Species Council is an independent donor-funded organisation that safeguards the Australian environment from invasive pests, weeds and diseases.

Formed in 2002, we have been at the forefront of efforts to strengthen biosecurity in Australia to better safeguard our land and seas from invasive species. We strive for a future in which invasive species are no longer a major cause of environmental decline and extinctions.

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the First Australians and pay our respects to their Elders past and present. Effective biosecurity and invasive species management must harness the deep knowledge and land and sea management skills of Indigenous Australians and facilitate their meaningful involvement in decision making.

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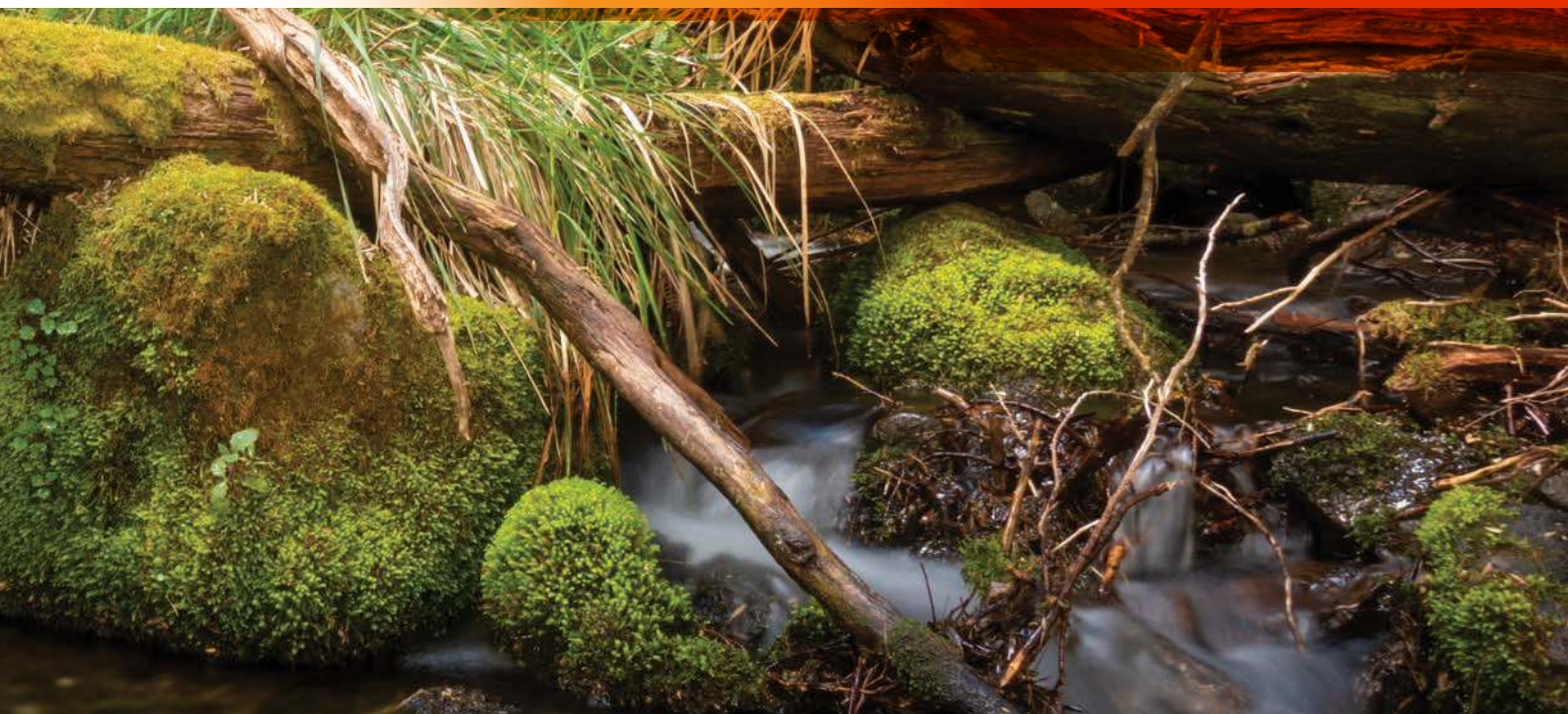


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NSW needs stronger action on invasive species

The recent NSW State of the Environment report showed that **the health of our state's environment is in significant decline**, and that, like the rest of Australia, we are in the grip of an extinction crisis. Having evolved in isolation from the rest of the world, Australia is a mega-diverse island nation and our unique wildlife have proved highly susceptible to invasive species. In NSW, **invasive species threaten more than 70% of threatened species and endangered ecological communities**.

Invasive species **continue to be the highest impact threat driving declines of our native wildlife and ecosystems**. Weeds like lantana and madeira vine smother native plants, feral foxes and cats prey upon our birds and small mammals, streams and wetlands are trampled by hard-hoofed feral deer and horses and red imported fire ants or tilapia fish could cause new extinctions if they make it into NSW.

On top of the environmental damage they cause, weeds in NSW account for **at least \$1.8 billion a year in lost production** and pest animals cost the NSW economy **more than \$170 million every year**. A foot and mouth disease outbreak could cost the Australian economy up to \$50 billion over 10 years, and the recent varroa mite outbreak has cost at least \$500,000 a day to contain and control in NSW.

It is clear that **we face a crisis** and current measures and **resources in NSW are insufficient** to halt and mitigate the impact of established invasive species and prevent the arrival and spread of new invasive species. In this document we detail priority actions the next NSW government can take that will **strengthen the NSW biosecurity system and address priority environmental threats** from invasive species.

The Invasive Species Council is calling on the next NSW government to commit to these policies for the sake of our environment.

Invasive species priorities

1. Invest in new frontline jobs in pest and weed control

- 1.1 Invest at least \$37.5 million/year to secure additional frontline capacity of 300 FTE, comprised of:
 - 110 new pest and weed officers with 10 in each Local Land Services region
 - 120 new dedicated NPWS pest and weeds field officers
 - 50 new local government weed control positions
 - 20 new DPI biosecurity officers

2. Increase First Nations leadership and employment in invasive species management

- 2.1 Appoint a NSW Indigenous Commissioner for Country to advise on the management of invasive species and their impact on indigenous culture and country.
- 2.2 Allocate dedicated positions and/or set a minimum proportion target for indigenous employment when recruiting and contracting for invasive species management.

3. Take action to reduce the threat of feral deer and feral pigs

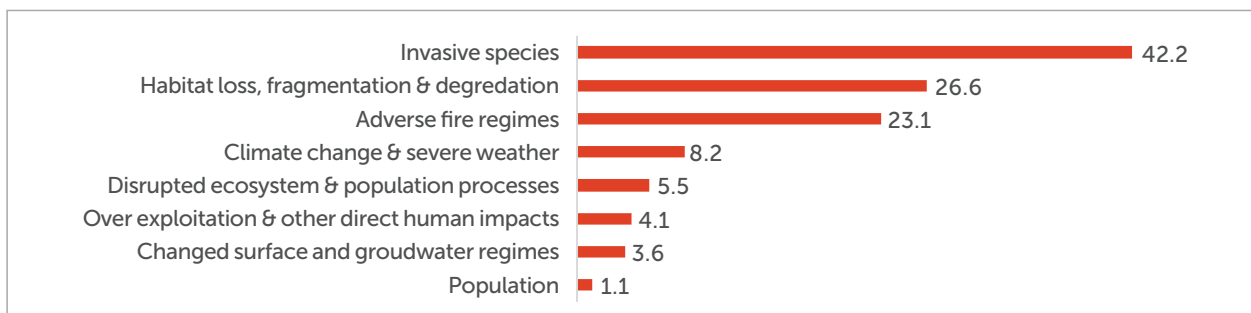
- 3.1 Employ state deer and pig coordinators who will have responsibility for coordinating cross agency and landholder efforts to implement regional and statewide environmental and agricultural deer and pig control priorities.
- 3.2 Commission a comprehensive Natural Resources Commission review of ungulate pest animal control in NSW, including control of deer, pigs, horses, goats and camels.
- 3.3 Provide additional dedicated annual funding of at least \$30 million over 4 years to implement the feral deer and feral pig priorities in the regional strategic pest animal plans.
- 3.4 Commit to a deer exclusion zone in the Northern Rivers and Western NSW regions, including funding to eradicate isolated populations and halt their spread.
- 3.5 Develop a comprehensive deer containment plan for the Greater Blue Mountains.
- 3.6 Retain and support the appropriate use of all tools in the tool box for feral animal control, including baiting, ground and aerial shooting.
- 3.7 Remove barriers preventing professional aerial shooting of pest animals in state forests and ensure sufficient shooter training and positions among NSW government agency staff for deployment across all tenures.

4. Protect the Snowy Mountains - strengthen feral horse control in Kosciuszko National Park

- 4.1 Repeal the *Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Act 2018* and ensure that feral animals are no longer prioritised over native species in a national park.
- 4.2 Commit at least \$30 million over the next 4 years to a restoration fund to repair the mountain catchments and restore eroding slopes, wetlands and mountain streams damaged by feral horses.
- 4.3 Accelerate the implementation of the current Wild Horse Heritage Management Plan to reach the 3,000 horse target by 2025.
- 4.4 Urgently expand the areas designated for full eradication of feral horses to include iconic areas like Currango Plains, Snowy Plains and the southern parts of Kosciuszko National Park.
- 4.5 Overturn the statewide ban on aerial culling of feral horses, a humane and effective control option when using RSPCA-approved protocols.
- 4.6 Develop eradication plans for other horse populations in protected areas including Barrington, Oxley Wild Rivers, Guy Fawkes, Yuragiyir and Torrington national parks.

5. Improve the management of cats to protect wildlife	
5.1	Amend the Companion Animals Act to allow local governments to introduce policies for cat containment.
5.2	Provide at least \$9 million over four years through a local government grant program to support councils to implement and enforce domestic cat containment.
5.3	Extend funding for and expand the RSPCA-led Keeping Cats Safe at Home program, including subsidised desexing, beyond the program's current expiry in 2024.
5.4	Introduce mandatory desexing for all cats by 4 months of age and assist local governments to enforce this.
5.5	Commission a Natural Resources Commission review of feral cat management.
5.6	Invest \$1.3 million to deploy felixer cat traps or other appropriate cat control tools.
6. Tackle noxious weeds and prevent the introduction of new weeds	
6.1	Ensure weedy plants are no longer sold in nurseries in NSW by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Committing to not purchase weedy plants in all state and local government plant procurement, including for street trees, revegetation and landscaping. - Ensuring at least 5,000 plants are assessed for invasive potential under the Gardening Responsibly scheme by the end of 2023 and at least 10,000 are assessed by the end of 2025. - Setting a deadline of 2025 for the nursery and garden industry to stop the sale of weedy plants and only sell plants assessed as low invasive risk. If this is not achieved and weedy plants continue to be sold, then switch to a mandatory scheme. - Adopting a 'Permitted List' approach to plant sale/movement, rather than the current Prohibited List approach.
6.2	Increase funding for the Weeds Action Program to \$20 million/year and provide a multi-year budget allocation over the forward estimates instead of the current annual budget decisions.
6.3	Increase investment in the Lord Howe Island Weed Eradication Program by at least \$3 million over four years.
6.4	Establish a dedicated High Risk Environmental Pest and Weed Eradication Fund to remove environmental weeds/pest threats that cover small areas of NSW, including sleeper invasives which have potential to expand into large new areas.
7. Strengthen the NSW biosecurity system and ensure environmental priorities are given equal weight to industry priorities	
7.1	Create a new statutory, independent Biosecurity Commissioner and associated State Biosecurity Advisory Committee.
7.2	Commission a comprehensive, independent review of the NSW Biosecurity Act 2015 and the implementation of the General Biosecurity Duty.
7.3	Develop an education program to build awareness of the general biosecurity duty and to build support and engagement from landholders in pest and weed management activities.
7.4	Establish an interdepartmental biosecurity agreement between the Department of Regional NSW and the Department of Planning and Environment (DPE) to ensure a strong focus on environmental priorities and effective cooperation between agencies.
7.5	Designate a lead chief environmental biosecurity officer within DPE and give DPE a clear leadership role in the administration of the Biosecurity Act.
7.6	Update the 2015-2021 NSW Invasive Species Plan with a new, more detailed state-wide plan which includes greater consideration of marine and freshwater invasive species.
7.7	Support and fund collaborative national research and innovation into environmental biosecurity such as weed biocontrols, alternatives to 1080, innovative new control options, identification of high-risk fungal pathogens, and improved surveillance and risk identification.
7.8	Support the 2021-2030 Decade of Biosecurity initiative proposed by major national industry, environmental and NRM groups and support increased long-term funding for the implementation of the collaboratively developed national biosecurity strategy.

Figure 1. The percentage of threatened taxa impacted to a high or medium degree by each major threat category



1. Invest in at least 300 new frontline jobs in pest and weed control

Current situation

The NSW agencies responsible for frontline invasive species management and biosecurity are **understaffed, underfunded and urgently need extra support** to sufficiently tackle the threat of invasive species to the environment and economy. Recent **natural disasters, including fire, drought, floods, covid and varroa mite**, have seen hundreds of staff pulled away from their normal roles. The recent **wet weather has also seen an explosion of pest animals and weeds** across the state. The varroa mite response alone has taken 200-300 staff away from their normal jobs every day for over 4 months. We know there are more disasters around the corner, with problems accelerating due to climate change and diseases such as foot and mouth disease and fire ants on our doorstep.

The cumulative effect of these pressures means that frontline agencies including National Parks and Wildlife Service, Local Land Services, Department of Primary Industries and local councils are rapidly running out of capacity and facing staff burnout. This is exacerbated when routine weed and pest control activities are deferred while agencies respond to the latest emergency.

Opportunity

Direct investment is urgently needed to increase the baseline level of staffing in frontline agencies responsible for pest and weed management. The NSW government is the state's largest land manager, and has responsibility for over 14 million hectares of national parks, state forests, crown reserves, roads, most beaches, estuaries and waterways. The government, through its frontline agencies, also plays a vital role in coordinating pest and weed activities across all tenures, educating landholders and the general public and monitoring outbreaks of new invasive threats.

A permanent increase of at least 300 new full-time equivalent staff across frontline agencies would allow regional biosecurity plans to be properly implemented, the places we love to be protected and new pest, weed and disease outbreaks to be prevented before they become costly and damaging ongoing problems.

The work of our frontline agencies in eradicating pests and weeds, preventing new incursions and assisting communities to take action is vital to the health of our society, the functioning of our economy and the recovery of our environment and threatened wildlife. A modest investment now will pay enormous dividends into the future.

Actions needed

The next NSW Government should:

1.1. Invest at least \$37.5 million/year to secure additional frontline capacity of 300 FTE, comprised of:

1.1.1. 110 new Pest & Weed officers - 10 in each Local Land Services region. These would be dedicated field positions, focussed on public land control and landholder engagement and coordination with a responsibility to work on crown lands, state forests, roadside and railway corridors and with private landholders.

1.1.2. 120 new dedicated NPWS Pest and Weeds field officers to increase NPWS capacity to tackle pest animals and noxious weeds

1.1.3. 50 new local government weed control positions, employed by local councils based on need and in addition to existing council capacity, to undertake weed coordination and control.

1.1.4. 20 additional DPI biosecurity officers to increase frontline surveillance and response capacity

Image: Michael Jarman/DPE



Image: A Cox



Common Dunnart. Image: John Lemon/DPE

2. Increase First Nations leadership and employment in invasive species management

Current situation

The impact of invasive species on Australia's environment is a direct threat to First Nations' cultural heritage and connection to Country. Weeds, feral animals and pests lead to the **destruction of sacred sites**, the **loss of native wildlife** and the **extinction of Indigenous totem species**. They reduce the availability of native food sources, prevent the regeneration of degraded landscapes and alter the characteristics of local ecosystems.

This can have deep and long lasting impacts on First Nations communities' culture and **connection to Country**. It should be unthinkable to continue to allow the collapse of culture through the destruction of Country and further extinctions caused by invasive species.

Opportunity

Australia's Indigenous people have a **deep knowledge and understanding of management of Country** and a Australia's Indigenous people have a deep knowledge and understanding of management of Country and a strong desire to be more involved. The role of First Nations people, knowledge and culture is central to our conservation challenges and providing **opportunities for leadership, employment and knowledge sharing** is vital if we are to tackle the deadly threat of invasive species.

Establishing a **NSW Indigenous Commissioner for Country** would be an important step in increasing First Nations leadership in invasive species management. This could be a co-commissioner role as part of the Natural Resources Commission or a stand alone position. It will need to be adequately resourced, staffed and empowered to engage with Indigenous people and the wider public and provide independent advice to government and the parliament on all natural resources issues, including invasive species.

Actions needed

The next NSW Government should:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>2.1. Appoint a NSW Indigenous Commissioner for Country to advise on the management of invasive species and their impact on indigenous culture and country.</p> | <p>2.2. Allocate dedicated positions and/or set a minimum proportion target for indigenous employment when recruiting and contracting for invasive species management.</p> |
|---|--|



As an Aboriginal nation it is our culture to care for Country and the species that evolved here over millennia.

We envisage a Country with flourishing sacred sites and an abundance of totem animals, our lands regenerated after being liberated from a 230 year siege of feral pests, weeds and exotic diseases. Successful breeding programs for native endangered animals are underway in protected areas where native plants thrive, creating shelter and food for wildlife.

With the hands of Indigenous people, and the hearts and minds of modern Australian communities, people care for our Country, together.

Richard Swain, indigenous river guide and Invasive Species Council Ambassador

3. Take action to reduce the threat of feral deer and feral pigs

Current situation

Deer are one of Australia's **worst emerging pest animal problems**, causing extensive damage to the natural environment and agricultural businesses. Populations in NSW have rapidly expanded their range and numbers in recent years, **increasing their extent by about 1 million hectares a year**. In 2009, they covered only 8% of NSW, but in 2020 they were estimated to cover 22% of the state. They are increasingly found in peri-urban environments, including around Sydney, Wollongong, Port Macquarie and Port Stephens, where they can cause vehicle crashes and damage to gardens.

Feral pigs are also a serious environmental and agricultural pest and are particularly found around wetlands and river systems across the state. As well as the damage feral pigs cause through **disturbing vegetation and waterways**, they also eat native animals such as frogs, lizards and small ground-nesting birds and their eggs.

Both feral deer and pigs are listed as a key threatening process under the *NSW Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*. They are also a significant risk factor for the spread of livestock diseases like foot and mouth and increase the grazing pressure on agricultural land. Browsing by deer and pigs damages and kills native trees and other plants, increasing costs for landcare groups, carbon and forestry plantings and preventing natural bushland regeneration.

The recent wet weather has seen the numbers of feral pigs, deer and other invasive animals explode, leading to an increased urgency to protect our native plants and animals.

Opportunity

With **well-resourced regional plans, coordination and ongoing support** for the full range of control methods across all land tenures, the impact of deer and pigs can be reduced and key threatened species and sensitive environments protected. For deer in particular we still have an opportunity to remove them from and prevent further spread into regions where they are not yet present in high numbers like the northern rivers and western NSW.

Actions needed

The next NSW Government should:

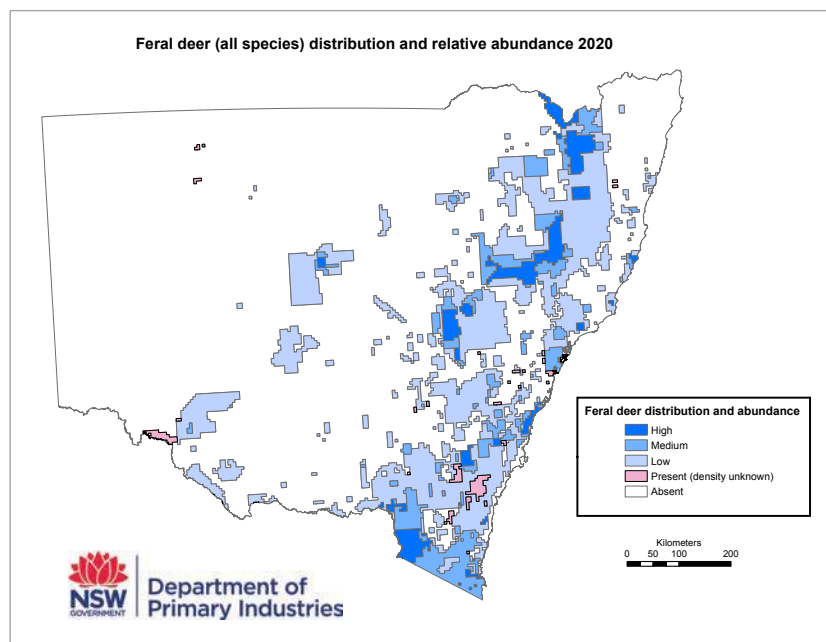
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">3.1. Commission a comprehensive Natural Resources Commission review of ungulate pest animal control in NSW, including control of deer, pigs, horses, goats and camels.3.2. Commit to a deer exclusion zone in the Northern Rivers and Western NSW regions, including funding to eradicate isolated populations and slow their spread.3.3. Employ state deer and pig coordinators who will have responsibility for coordinating cross agency and landholder efforts to implement regional and statewide environmental and agricultural deer and pig control priorities | <ul style="list-style-type: none">3.4. Provide additional dedicated annual funding of at least \$30 million over 4 years to implement the feral deer and feral pig priorities in the regional strategic pest animal plans3.5. Develop a comprehensive deer management plan for the Greater Blue Mountains.3.6. Retain and support the appropriate use of all tools in the tool box for feral animal control, including baiting, ground and aerial shooting.3.7. Remove barriers preventing professional aerial shooting of pest animals in state forests and ensure sufficient shooter training and positions among NSW government agency staff for deployment across all tenures. |
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Grazing and trampling caused by feral deer is listed as a Key Threatening Process in NSW under the Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016. Image: Francesca-Bowman

Feral deer in NSW

- There are six species of feral deer in NSW: sambar, Rusa, fallow, red, hog and chital. Under current management, one species or more is predicted to occupy all of NSW and Australia.
- Deer numbers remained in small areas until the 1990s when a drop in the price of venison resulted in a mass release in multiple sites from abandoned deer farms. Hunters also illegally released them. Their spread is now largely the result of breeding and lack of predators.
- Feral deer are now spreading across NSW at a rate of about 1 million hectares a year. In 2020 they were estimated to cover 22% of NSW. In 2009, they covered only 8%.
- NSW LLS regional pest animal strategies seek a mix of eradication, containment and control, however there are insufficient on-ground efforts and control tools to achieve these objectives.
- A national deer action plan due to be completed by early 2023 and this coordinated approach could slow and stop the spread of deer across Australia.



Feral deer occurrence in NSW 2020

4. Protect the Snowy Mountains - strengthen feral horse control in Kosciuszko National Park

Current situation

The sensitive alpine ecosystems of Kosciuszko National Park, Australia's largest alpine park, are being **rapidly degraded** by exploding numbers of highly damaging feral horses. Australia's alpine plants and animals did not evolve with **heavy, hard-hoofed animals** and feral horses cause damage through selective grazing, trampling, track creation, pugging, soil compaction, wallowing and dust bathing.

Water that flows from Kosciuszko's mountain springs delivers **almost a third of the Murray Darling Basin's annual water yield**, but feral horses are degrading the high water-holding capacity of alpine soils and vegetation which allow the slow discharge of water to keep streams flowing throughout the year. Streams that were once lined by precious sphagnum moss are now **scarred erosion channels**, the habitat of **critically endangered species like the corroboree frog** is being severely damaged, while rare alpine daisies and orchids found nowhere else in the world are directly at risk.

Feral horses also pose **safety risks to motorists and campers, carry diseases** and are spreading to neighbouring private land and ACT and Victorian national parks.

Opportunity

We can protect and restore the Snowy Mountains, **headwaters of the mighty Murray, Murrumbidgee and Snowy rivers** and home to **platypus and more than 50 threatened species**, if we dramatically reduce feral horse numbers now. Without effective control, the **feral horse numbers increase by 20% per year** meaning thousands of horses will need to be removed annually to stop the population from growing and reduce overall numbers.

We may not like it, but culling by highly trained professionals, using **RSPCA-endorsed protocols**, is the only viable way to reduce their numbers and save the national park and our native animals that live there.

After years of inaction, in 2021 the NSW Government set a target to reduce the Park's feral horse numbers from more than 14,000 to 3,000 by 2027. Accelerating the implementation of this plan will result in fewer horses culled, limit the damage they cause and allow the Snowy Mountains to begin to recover.

Actions needed

The next NSW Government should:

- | | |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">4.1. Repeal the <i>Kosciuszko Wild Horse Heritage Act 2018</i> and ensure that feral animals are no longer prioritised over native species in a national park.4.2. Commit at least \$30 million over the next 4 years to a restoration fund to repair the mountain catchments and restore eroding slopes, wetlands and mountain streams damaged by feral horses.4.3. Accelerate the implementation of the current Wild Horse Heritage Management Plan to reach the 3,000 horse target by 2025 (rather than 2027). This will result in fewer horses culled and limit the damage they cause. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">4.4. Urgently expand the areas designated for full eradication of feral horses to include iconic areas like Currango Plains (the state's largest montane peatland), Snowy Plains (just north of Jindabyne) and the southern parts of Kosciuszko National Park to prevent horses moving into Victoria.4.5. Overturn the state-wide ban on aerial culling of feral horses, a humane and effective control option when using RSPCA-approved protocols.4.6. Develop eradication plans for other horse populations in protected areas including Barrington, Oxley Wild Rivers, Guy Fawkes, Yuragyr and Torrington national parks. |
|---|--|



There is unequivocal evidence that feral horses are the single largest cause of widespread environmental degradation throughout their range in the alpine parks, even at low densities, and are a threat to many native species.
...Stream banks are being eroded, streams are becoming silted and bogs and fens that take millenia to form are being destroyed

Don Driscoll and others (2019)



Compare the pair: Exclusion fencing reveals the extensive impacts of grazing by feral horses in Kosciuszko National Park



Damage caused by horses to waterways and wetlands in Kosciuszko National Park, the headwaters of the Murray and Murrumbidgee rivers

5. Improve the management of cats to protect wildlife

Current situation

Feral cats have **helped push at least 27 native species into extinction** since colonisation and now imperil at least another **123 nationally threatened species**. Both feral and domestic cats are widespread, including in urban and outer-urban areas where they threaten the survival of native animals in nearby bushland.

Pet cats that are allowed to freely roam outside **kill an estimated 241 million native Australian animals every year** - an average of 186 animals killed each year per free-roaming, hunting pet cat. Research suggests that the majority of cat owners (70%) allow their cats to freely roam all or part of the day, with pet cats roaming over as much as **30 hectares** around their home base

NSW is the only state in Australia that does not enable local governments to introduce responsible pet ownership policies that would keep cats safe while preventing predation on wildlife.

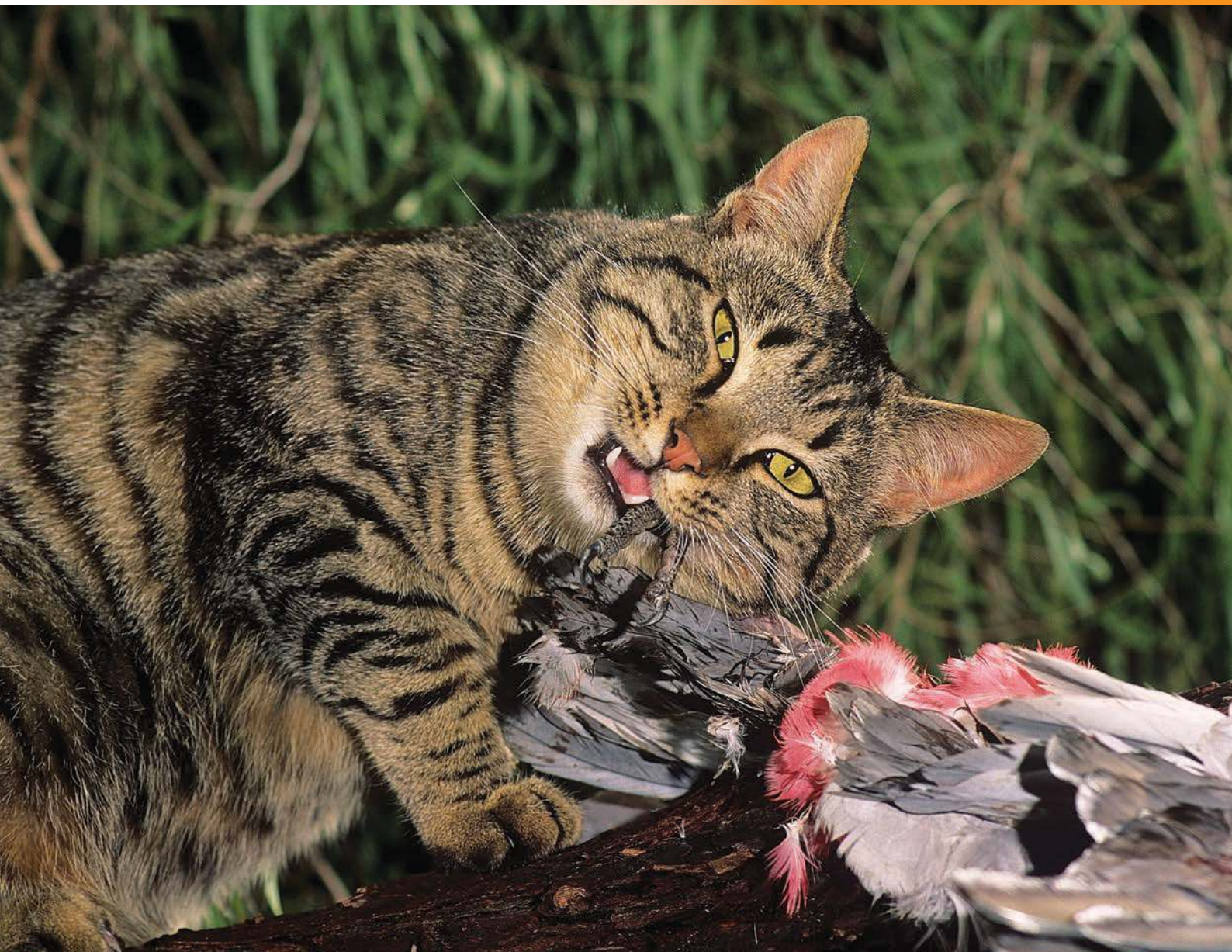
Opportunity

The *NSW Companion Animals Act 1998* sets out the duties and responsibilities of pet owners and these are enforced at a local government level. Many **local councils across the state are eager to introduce responsible cat ownership policies**, but they are prevented from doing so by outdated restrictions under the current NSW law. Minor changes to the law to allow local communities to make local decisions about the management of free-roaming pet cats would **bring NSW into line with most other states** and enjoy significant community support. In Victoria, for example, at least 37 local councils have implemented either a dusk to dawn or 24-hour cat containment policies.

Actions needed

The next NSW Government should:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">5.1. Amend the <i>Companion Animals Act</i> to allow local governments in NSW to introduce responsible pet ownership policies for cat containment (i.e. cats are required to be kept within the boundaries of an owner's property or on a lead).5.2. Provide at least \$9 million over four years through a local government grant program to support councils to implement and enforce domestic cat containment.5.3. Extend funding for and expand the RSPCA-led Keeping Cats Safe at Home program, including subsidised desexing, beyond the program's current expiry in 2024. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">5.4. Introduce mandatory desexing for all cats by 4 months of age and provide assistance to local governments to enforce compliance. This would bring NSW in line with WA, Tasmania and the ACT.5.5. Commission a Natural Resources Commission review of feral cat management.5.6. Invest \$1.3 million to deploy feline cat traps or other appropriate cat control tools across NSW national parks and public lands. |
|--|--|



Every year cats in Australia kill ...



1,067,000,000
mammals



399,000,000
birds



609,000,000
reptiles



92,000,000
frogs

Images from left to right: Helenabella / Wikimedia Commons. CC BY-SA 3.0
Steve Murphy / Flinders University. Josef Schofield. JJ Harrison. CC BY-SA 3.0

6. Tackle noxious weeds and prevent the introduction of new weeds

Current situation

Weeds are one of the most serious threats to endangered native plants and animals in NSW and the most expensive natural resource management problem for farmers. They imperil **more than 40% of all threatened species and almost 90% of endangered ecological communities** in NSW. The vast majority (about two thirds) of weeds are escaped garden plant varieties and a large proportion of these are still available for sale in nurseries in NSW.

Failing to take action to prevent the introduction of new weeds or to control the spread of existing noxious weeds has **profound environmental, social and economic costs**, but the current funding and regulatory arrangement are insufficient to meet the challenge.

Opportunity

Preventing the ongoing sale of weedy plants through wholesale and retail nurseries would go a long way towards stopping new weed outbreaks, avoiding significant environmental, industry and management costs. As a first step, the NSW government can take the lead in driving this change by committing to no longer purchase weedy plants for any state or local government projects, such as landscaping for new roads or revegetation.

A High Risk Environmental Pest and Weed Eradication Fund would allow certainty of resources for agencies to rapidly escalate an emergency response in the early stages of an incursion, avoiding delays caused by cost uncertainty, which can increase overall costs of eradication or allow an environmental pest, disease or weed to become established.

Actions needed

The next NSW Government should:

6.1. Ensure weedy plants are no longer sold in nurseries in NSW by:

- 6.1.1. Committing to **not purchase weedy plants in all state and local government plant procurement**, including for street trees, revegetation and landscaping.
- 6.1.2. Ensuring at least **5,000 plants are assessed for invasive potential under the Gardening Responsibly scheme by the end of 2023** and at least 10,000 are assessed by the end of 2025 (up from 724 plants assessed as of December 2022).
- 6.1.3. **Setting a deadline of 2025** for the nursery and garden industry to stop the sale of weedy plants and only sell plants assessed as low invasive risk. If this is not achieved and weedy plants continue to be sold, then switch to a mandatory scheme.
- 6.1.4. **Adopting a 'Permitted List' approach to plant sale/movement**, rather than the current Prohibited List approach, by 2025.

6.2. Increase funding for the Weeds Action Program to \$20 million/year and provide a multi-year budget allocation over the forward

estimates instead of the current annual budget decisions.

Current funding for this important program is about \$12 million per year, but funding is allocated annually, varies from year to year and there is no guarantee of ongoing funding.

6.3. Increase investment in the Lord Howe Island Weed Eradication Program by at least \$3 million over four years to ensure a fully resourced, multi-year program. This would complement recent rodent eradication efforts to protect Lord Howe Island's unique biodiversity and World Heritage values.

6.4. Establish a dedicated High Risk Environmental Pest and Weed Eradication Fund to remove environmental weeds/pest threats that only occur in small areas, including sleeper invasives which have potential to expand into large new areas.

The NSW Government should contribute at least \$1.5 million a year to the fund. Ongoing funding could be paid for by an annual flat rate contribution by all LLS rate payers of \$10, reflecting that all community members are risk creators, the public good value of preventing environmental degradation and that landholders will often be the primary beneficiaries. This would raise approximately \$1.3 million per year.



Top, Hudson Pear. Image: Craig Hunter. Bottom, Blackberry. Image: Dennis S. Hurd

7. Strengthen the NSW biosecurity system and ensure environmental priorities are given equal weight to industry priorities

Current situation

Environmental biosecurity is the protection of our natural environment from the harmful impacts of invasive species. It operates across the spectrum of the 'invasion curve', from prevention and early action to the containment and management of widespread pests and weeds.

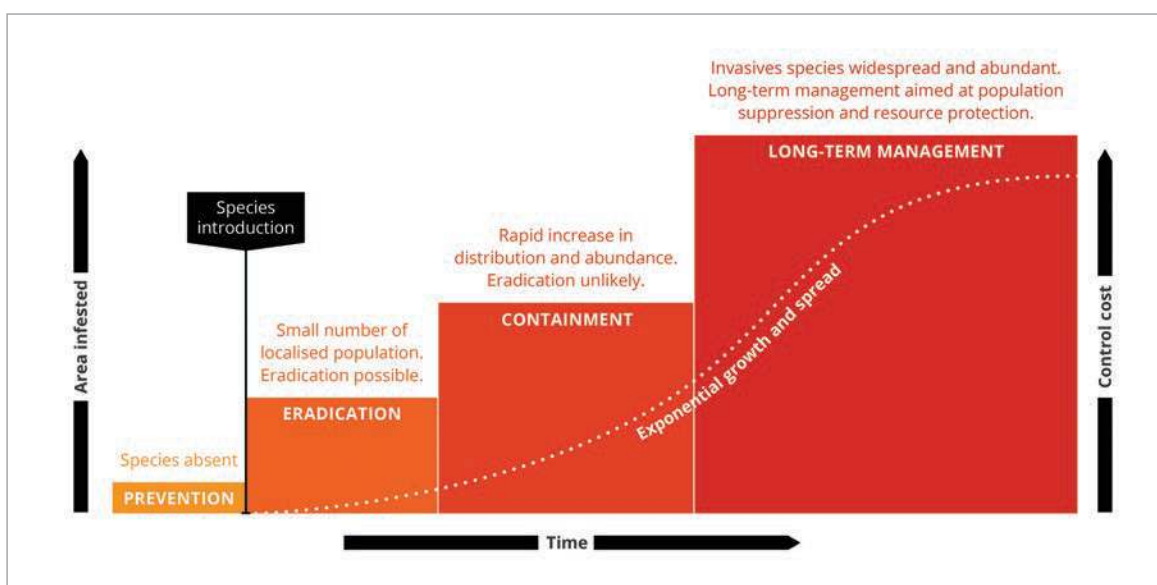
Invasive species and biosecurity in NSW are largely managed under the Biosecurity Act 2015, which came into force in 2017 and is administered by the Department of Primary Industries. This law incorporates a risk management framework for addressing pest, weeds and diseases of both agriculture and the environment and imposes a general biosecurity duty on all people to take action to prevent the introduction and spread of pests, diseases and weeds.

Unfortunately, there is no independent oversight and input into this system and the emphasis in application has been largely on protecting agriculture, with less attention given to addressing environmental threats.

Opportunity

A statutory, independent Biosecurity Commissioner, supported by an expert and representative advisory committee, would provide the leadership and oversight needed to allow NSW to more effectively tackle existing threats and be better prepared for new threats. The Commissioner would elevate the significance of biosecurity and invasive species management within government and the community, while ensuring agency accountability to their biosecurity responsibilities.

A more dedicated environmental focus is also needed within government to complement the existing agricultural focus in recognition of the significance of invasive species management to environmental health and threatened species conservation. The greater complexity of species interactions in the environment, the poorer knowledge we have of environmental risks and impacts and the more limited control options in natural environments mean that a dedicated biosecurity focus, clear responsibilities and capacity are required within the lead environmental agency as well as the agricultural agency.



Invasion curve – the stages of the invasion process and the four response strategies



Myrtle rust (*Puccinia psidii*) is an invasive fungus that entered Australia in 2010. It causes disease in plants in the family Myrtaceae, such as eucalypts. Image: Tim Low

Actions needed

The next NSW Government should:

- 7.1. Create a new statutory, independent **Biosecurity Commissioner** and associated State Biosecurity Advisory Committee
Ensure powers to independently investigate and report on compliance by government agencies with their biosecurity obligations and provide advice on biosecurity policy. The Committee should have scientific expertise and environmental, agricultural, indigenous and local government representative positions.
- 7.1. Commission a **comprehensive, independent review of the NSW Biosecurity Act 2015** and the **implementation of the General Biosecurity Duty**.
- 7.3. Develop an **education program to build awareness of the general biosecurity duty** and to build support and engagement from landholders in pest and weed management activities.
- 7.4. Establish an **interdepartmental biosecurity agreement between the Department of Regional NSW and the Department of Planning and Environment (DPE)** to ensure a strong focus on environmental priorities and effective cooperation between agencies.
- 7.5. Designate a **lead chief environmental biosecurity officer within DPE** and give DPE a clear leadership role in the administration of the Biosecurity Act.
- 7.6. **Update the 2015-2021 NSW Invasive Species Plan** and with a new more detailed state-wide plan which includes greater consideration of marine and freshwater invasive species.
- 7.7. **Support and fund collaborative national research and innovation** into environmental biosecurity such as weed biocontrols, alternatives to 1080, innovative new control options, identification of high-risk fungal pathogens, and improved surveillance and risk identification.
- 7.8. **Support the 2021-2030 Decade of Biosecurity initiative** proposed by major national industry, environmental and NRM groups and support increased long-term funding for the implementation of the collaboratively developed national biosecurity strategy.

