

Tackling invasive species

Priorities for the next Tasmanian government



MARCH 2024





Document details

Invasive Species Council. 2024. *Tackling invasive species: Priorities for the next Tasmanian government*. March 2024. ISBN 978-0-6488809-8-1.

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.

Intellectual property rights

© Invasive Species Council 2024

Unless otherwise noted, copyright and any other intellectual property rights in this publication are owned by the Invasive Species Council.



All material in this publication is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence is a standard form licence agreement that allows you to copy, redistribute, remix, transmit and adapt this publication provided you attribute the work, you do not use it commercially and you distribute your contribution under this creative commons licence. The licence terms are available from <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>.

Inquiries

Invasive Species Council

Address: PO Box 818, Katoomba NSW 2780, Australia

ABN: 27 101 522 829

Web: invasives.org.au

Email: isc@invasives.org.au



Cover Images: Top: Tasmanian Land Conservancy (left), Barry Brook (right). Bottom: Chris Fithall (left), John Sampson (right).

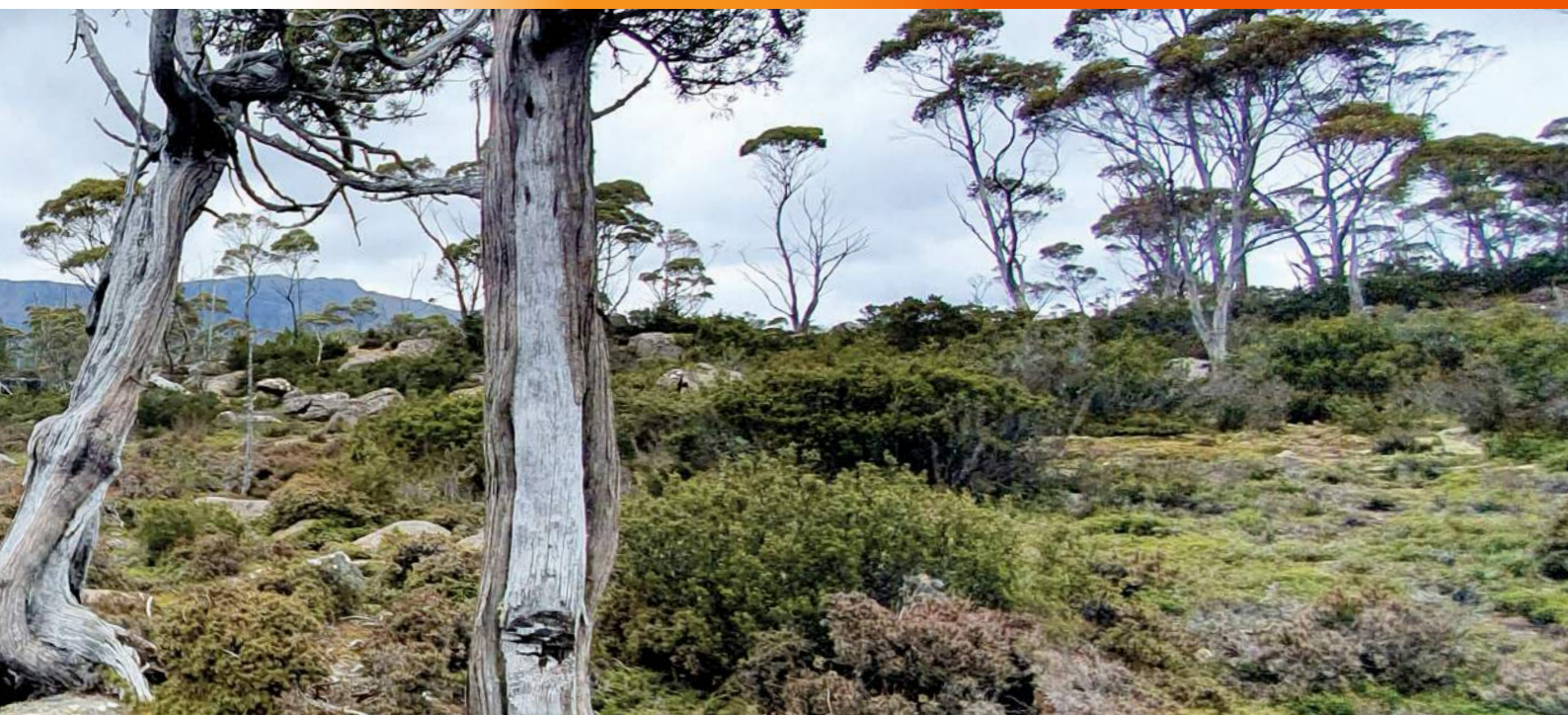


Table of contents

Tasmania needs stronger action on invasive species	2
1. Set an ambitious goal of no new extinctions in Tasmania	6
2. Take action to reduce the impacts of feral deer	8
3. Improve the management of cats to protect wildlife	10
4. Declare feral goats as pests, eradicate feral pigs and phase out ferrets as pets	12
5. Fund a dedicated island eradication and recovery program	14
6. Tackle noxious weeds and prevent the introduction of new weeds	16
7. Increase First Nations leadership and employment in invasive species management	18
8. Strengthen Tasmania's environmental biosecurity and threat abatement planning	20

Tasmania needs stronger action on invasive species

Tasmania is a remarkable island state with native animals and plants found nowhere else on earth, some of the most spectacular protected areas in Australia, and highly valued agriculture, forestry, and tourism sectors.

But the future health of our state's environment, agriculture, and economy is under threat from highly damaging invasive species.

Tasmania is in an extinction crisis, with at least 29 species recorded extinct to date and more being added to the threatened species list each year. Despite being less than 0.5% of Australia's land area, almost a quarter of Australian extinctions have been island species. Having evolved in isolation from the rest of the world, **our mega-diverse island is highly susceptible to the impact of invasive animals, weeds, and pathogens that can kill, outcompete, or overwhelm native wildlife and ecosystems.**

- Weeds like Spanish heath and gorse **smother our native plants**, and invasive grasses, like Chilean needle grass and serrated tussock, **devastate native grasslands.**
- Feral and roaming pet cats **hunt and kill our birds and small mammals.**
- **Trees are stripped bare, streams eroded and new vegetation is trampled** by feral deer, which are spreading at an alarming rate.
- Without urgent action, feral goats and ferrets could spread and devastate wildlife.
- **New threats like fire ants, new myrtle rust strains, or diseases such as crayfish plague and high pathogenic avian influenza are waiting on our doorstep** and could cause a wave of extinctions if they make it into the state.



Swift parrot. Credit: David Cook

Invasive species also reduce farming production, prevent natural regeneration of bushland, and are an increasing threat to human lives on our roads. **They cost Tasmania hundreds of millions of dollars each year in lost agricultural productions, increased insurance and management costs.**

It is clear that **we face a crisis** and current measures and resources in Tasmania are insufficient to halt and mitigate the impact of established invasive species and prevent the arrival and spread of new invasive species.

The good news is that, as an island, Tasmania also has a natural advantage. Islands offer a massive opportunity for eradicating and preventing the reintroduction of invasive animals, weeds, and pathogens. Tasmania also has over 50 offshore islands where **permanent eradication of invasive animals is possible, affordable, and would spark an ecological transformation.** This can be a **winning strategy** to future-proof biodiversity, revive world heritage areas and national parks and ensure our agriculture is a clean, green thriving sector.

In this document, we detail priority actions the next Tasmanian government can take that will **strengthen the Tasmanian biosecurity system** and **address priority environmental threats** from invasive species.

The Invasive Species Council is calling on the next Tasmanian government to commit to these policies for the sake of our environment, economy, and community.



The removal of feral cats, rats, mice and rabbits has led to a dramatic recovery of native plants and animals on Macquarie Island.



*'With investment and commitment, Tasmania could become a **wildlife revival success story**, free of the worst invasive species.'*

Andrew Cox, Invasive Species Council CEO.

Set an ambitious goal of no new extinctions in Tasmania

Set an ambitious goal of zero extinctions in Tasmania.

Commit to completing the statutory State of Environment reports every 5 years and including dedicated sections focussed on invasive species and environmental biosecurity.

Take action to reduce the impacts of feral deer

Remove the legal protection of feral deer under the Tasmanian Wildlife Act.

Commit to at least \$8 million for feral deer control over the next 4 years (up from \$2 million currently budgeted).

Commence control programs on satellite populations where eradication is still possible, including the Tasman and Freycinet Peninsulas, on Bruny and King Islands, around Hobart, Launceston, and in the northwest.

Appoint six regional feral deer coordinators to work with landholders and the community to scale up feral deer control activities.

Maintain the commitment to eradicate deer from the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area and ensure no new populations are allowed to establish.

Ensure stronger enforcement of deer farming regulations to prevent reinvasion or new populations of deer, including not allowing new deer farms in the 'no deer zones'.

Hold an impacted stakeholder roundtable to understand the costs to and management recommendations of key groups including **road users, farming and forestry, Landcare, NRM, private land conservancies** and other environment groups, **National Parks, local councils, scientists** and **tourism operators**.

Undertake a comprehensive study of the costs of feral deer to the Tasmanian economy and environment.

Improve the management of cats to protect wildlife

Mandate pet cat containment to protect wildlife and keep pet cats safe at home.

Update and fund a new state-wide 5 year cat management strategy and continue **to fund the Tasmanian Cat Management Project**, focused on responsible cat management.

Support local governments to enforce pet cat containment, desexing and pet registration.

Declare feral cats as a 'pest' species outside urban areas.

Commit to continued support of three regional cat coordinators to support community action and education.

Appoint a state-wide feral cat coordinator to implement and coordinate a state-wide feral cat control strategy.

Prioritise feral cat eradications on off-shore islands, such as lungtalanana/Clark Island.

Declare feral goats as pests, eradicate feral pigs and phase out ferrets as pets

Declare feral goats as a pest species and fund a dedicated state-wide eradication program.

Commit to eradicating feral pigs from Flinders Island.

Ban ferrets being imported into Tasmania and take steps towards phasing out ferrets being kept as pets to prevent their establishment in the wild.

Fund a dedicated island eradication and recovery program

Fund a dedicated island eradication and recovery program, with at least \$10 million invested in the first four years.

Commit to a program of eradications to be achieved by 2034, including:

- a. feral deer from Bruny Island
- b. feral cats from north Bruny and preventing reinvasion from south Bruny
- c. feral deer from King Island
- d. feral pigs from Flinders Island
- e. feral cats from Lungtalanana/Clark Island, through support of the Lungtalanana/Clark Island Cultural Restoration Project.

Develop island biosecurity plans for high-risk potential environmental invaders and best practice biosecurity management for high-value islands at particular risk from new incursions.

Tackle noxious weeds and prevent the introduction of new weeds

Increase funding for the Weeds Action Fund to \$20 million over the next 4 years and ensure funding is applied on a systematic threat prioritisation basis to achieve the best environmental outcomes.

Commit to a permitted list approach to stop the sale of weedy plants through nurseries, wholesalers, and online.

Establish a dedicated High Risk Environmental Weed Eradication Fund.

Undertake a systematic prioritisation for weeds in Tasmania to identify the existing and emerging highest priority environmental threats.

Increase First Nations leadership and employment in invasive species management

Commit \$million to the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre's Lungtalanana Cultural Restoration Project for cat eradication.

Establish a dedicated fund for Indigenous-led conservation projects, including the management of invasive species.

Consult with the Tasmanian Aboriginal community on the appointment of a **Tasmanian Indigenous Commissioner for Invasive Species** on protected and Indigenous land.

Strengthen Tasmania's environmental biosecurity and threat abatement planning

Establish Biosecurity Tasmania as a separate, independent agency within the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, on the same level as Primary Industries and Water and the Parks and Wildlife Service.

Create an Environmental Biosecurity Office within Biosecurity Tasmania, with dedicating staff and funding.

Commission a comprehensive, independent review of invasive species impacts and management and biosecurity in Tasmania.

Conduct a detailed analysis of key risk pathways for new environmental invaders, including online trading, shipping and boating, and the sale of weedy plants.

Develop a threat abatement planning framework and allocate dedicated funds for implementing state-based plans and relevant federal threat abatement plans.

Develop an avian influenza response plan to minimise the impacts on native birds, seals and other wildlife if the disease reaches Tasmania.

Appoint an environment representative on the Biosecurity Advisory Committee (BAC) and establish a separate Biosecurity Science Committee.

Support and fund collaborative 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.

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.

1. Set an ambitious goal of no new extinctions in Tasmania

Current situation

Tasmania, like Australia, is in an **extinction crisis** with **invasive species one of the leading causes and threats**. While the Tasmanian tiger or thylacine is the most high-profile example of the tragedy of permanent loss, **at least 29 plant and animal species are recorded as having become extinct in Tasmania in the last 200 years**.

There are currently **685 Tasmanian species of plant and animal listed as rare or threatened** under the Threatened Species Protection Act 1995. A further 38 species are listed as threatened under commonwealth legislation, including 24 birds and 8 fish. The status of thousands of other native species remains unknown. It is likely many face extinction but this status has simply not yet been formally recognised.

Iconic species at risk of extinction in Tasmania include the **swift parrot** and **orange-bellied parrot**, the **eastern quoll**, the **eastern-barred bandicoot**, the **New Holland mouse**, and the **Tasmanian devil**.

Having evolved in isolation from the rest of the world, our **mega-diverse island biodiversity** is highly susceptible to the impacts of invasive animals, plants and pathogens, which can kill, outcompete or overwhelm native wildlife and ecosystems. Fortunately, Tasmania's separation has also meant that the state is free from some of the pests and weeds that plague the mainland, like the red fox.

However, without **increased focus, funding, and improved policies** to address established and emerging invasive threats like feral deer, cats and weeds, we can expect more of Tasmania's wildlife to be pushed over the extinction cliff.

Opportunity

In October 2022, the Commonwealth Government set a goal of zero extinctions for Australia. This ambitious goal has been set as a benchmark for and driver of government funding, focus, and policies. **Tasmania has the opportunity to lead the nation and showcase its clean, green image by committing to zero extinctions at the state level** as well.

Averting the extinction crisis in Tasmania will require up-to-date information about the health of our species and ecosystems. This is supposed to occur through Tasmania's State of the Environment (SOE) Report, a mandatory requirement for the Tasmanian Planning Commission to produce every five years under the *State Policies and Projects Act 1993*. **However, since 1997, only three State of the Environment reports have been completed. The last was 15 years ago in 2009!**

Actions needed

The next Tasmanian government should:

1. **Set an ambitious goal of zero extinctions in Tasmania.**
2. **Commit to completing the statutory State of the Environment reports every 5 years** and including dedicated sections focussed on invasive species and environmental biosecurity.

All other Australian states regularly produce public SOE reports, recognising that they are essential to understand the major threats and trends, to inform investments and policy focus and to hold governments and agencies to account. **While an SOE report is due for release in 2024, it is vital that all parties commit to uphold the law and ensure State of the Environment reports are regularly completed and released publicly.**

Unlike in other states, the 2024 Tasmanian SOE report has no dedicated section on invasive species or biosecurity despite the importance of this issue to the health of Tasmania’s environment.

List of Tasmanian threatened species under the Threatened Species Protection Act 1995
as at September 2023

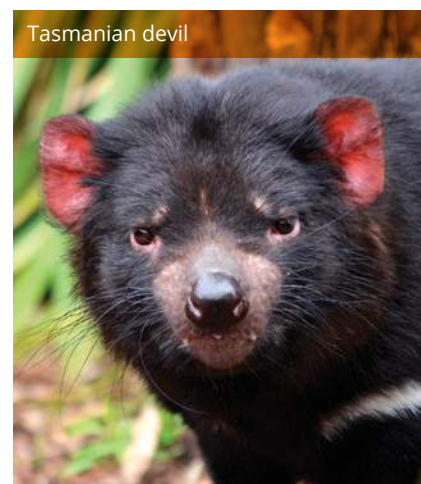
Group	Extinct	Endangered	Vulnerable	Rare	Totals
Amphibians	0	1	1	0	2
Birds	4	18	11	3	36
Fish	1	9	7	2	19
Invertebrates	3	36	19	61	119
Mammals	1	7	2	2	12
Reptiles	0	2	1	4	7
Broadleaf	14	69	54	145	282
Conifers	0	0	2	0	2
Ferns	1	9	4	8	22
Grasses, sedges	1	4	0	39	44
Lichens	1	9	4	16	30
Orchids	2	60	8	12	82
Other monocots	1	3	3	21	28
Totals	29	227	116	313	685



Eastern-barred bandicoot
Feral cats predation is a key threat to the fragmented populations of eastern-barred bandicoot. Credit: JJ Harrison.



Cider gum
As browsers, feral deer are a major source of tree mortality, threatening some populations of trees. Credit: Wouter Hagens.



Tasmanian devil
The decline of the Tasmanian devil due to the devil facial tumor disease has been linked to increases in feral cats numbers. Credit: Chris Fithall.

2. Take action to reduce the impacts of feral deer

Current situation

Feral deer are one of Tasmania's worst emerging pest animal problems. Fallow deer are the **largest** and now the **most dominant invasive herbivore** in the state. Traditionally treated as a hunting resource, feral fallow deer have now become a **serious environmental and agricultural pest** and a **threat to community safety and amenity**.

Feral deer numbers have **exploded** across much of the state, and can now be found inside many of Tasmania's national parks and reserves and within the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. With **no natural predators** and large areas of suitable habitat, there is compelling evidence that the growth in numbers and range of feral deer will continue. With a current population estimated at around **100,000 and an annual rate of increase of 11.5%**, it is clear that urgent changes to policies and funding for control are required.

Opportunity

Unlike on the mainland, **Tasmania still has a window of opportunity to stop the spread of feral deer.** Many of Tasmania's satellite feral deer populations are still eradicatable, including those on the **Tasman and Freycinet Peninsulas**, on **Bruny and King Islands**, around **Hobart, Launceston**, and in the northwest. The large population in the Midlands can be contained to the Midlands, preventing their continued spread into the World Heritage Area and to the east coast.

With well-resourced regional plans, coordination and ongoing support for the full range of control methods across all land tenures, the impact of feral deer on the environment, farming and human safety can be reduced and key threatened species and sensitive environments protected.

Actions needed

The next Tasmanian government should:

1. **Remove the legal protection of feral deer under the Tasmanian Wildlife Act.**
2. **Commit to at least \$8 million for feral deer control** over the next 4 years (up from \$2 million currently budgeted).
3. **Commence control programs on satellite populations where eradication is still possible**, including the Tasman and Freycinet Peninsulas, on Bruny and King islands, around Hobart, Launceston, and in the northwest.
4. **Appoint six regional feral deer coordinators** to work with landholders and the community to scale up feral deer control activities.
5. **Maintain the commitment to eradicate deer from the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area** and ensure no new populations are allowed to establish.
6. **Ensure stronger enforcement of deer farming regulations** to prevent reinvasion or new populations of deer, including not allowing new deer farms in the 'no deer zones'.
7. **Hold an impacted stakeholder roundtable** to understand the costs to and management recommendations of key groups including **road users, farming and forestry, Landcare, NRM, private land conservancies** and other environment groups, **national parks, local councils, scientists** and **tourism operators**.
8. **Undertake a comprehensive study of the costs of feral deer** to the Tasmanian economy and environment.

Feral Deer in Tasmania

- Feral deer are a major risk to Tasmania’s environment, cultural heritage, primary industries, and public safety, with the overall cost to Tasmanians estimated to be as high as **\$100 million per year**.
- Feral deer numbers have exploded across Tasmania, growing by forty-fold since 1985 up to potentially **100,000 across 27% of the state**. The majority of feral deer are in the Midlands, but satellite populations have emerged on the Tasman and Freycinet peninsulas, Bruny and King islands, around Hobart, Launceston, and in the northwest.
- Feral deer are causing damage to native vegetation and ecologically fragile areas through **overbrowsing, overgrazing, and trampling**, with negative impacts on biodiversity and the Aboriginal cultural landscape.
- Feral deer are **costing farmers an estimated \$10-80 million per year** in damaged crops and infrastructure
- Browsing by feral deer **increases costs for Landcare groups, carbon and forestry plantings and prevents natural bushland regeneration**.
- Feral deer are a major risk on the road with large males weighing upwards of 80kg. **Between 2013 and 2021, 68 deer-vehicle collisions were recorded**, with more being recorded elsewhere or unrecorded.
- **Feral deer are protected in Tasmania** as a game resource under the Wildlife (General) Regulations 2010. Tasmania and Victoria remain the last two states in Australia that continue to treat feral deer as a hunting resource instead of managing them as an invasive species.



Estimated 2023 distribution of feral deer in Tasmania. Data from the Tasmanian Fallow Deer Management Plan and Natural Values Atlas.



Possible distribution of feral deer based on habitat and climactic suitability based on data from Cunningham et al. 2022.



The Tasmanian Wilderness Heritage Area, home to fragile cushion plants and peatlands, is no place for feral deer. Credit: Rob Blakers



Feral deer in Tasmania. Credit: Tasmanian Land Conservancy

'When you add up the costs to farmers and forestry, as well as the road toll and environmental damage, it's clear protecting feral deer is costing Tasmanians millions. It's time for a big rethink.'

Simon Cameron, northern Midlands farmer.

3. Improve the management of cats to protect wildlife

Current situation

Feral cats have helped push **at least 27 native Australian species into extinction** in the past 200 years and now **imperil at least 50 Tasmanian species** including **15 threatened species**. Both feral and domestic cats are widespread in the state, including in urban and outer-urban areas where they **hunt and kill native wildlife** in nearby bushland and backyards.

Pet cats that are allowed to roam freely outside **kill an estimated 241 million native Australian animals every year** - an average of 186 animals killed each year per roaming pet cat. Research suggests that **most cat owners (70%) allow their cats to roam freely all or part of the day**, with pet cats roaming over as much as 30 hectares around their home base. The number of pet cats in Australia **increased by 34%** between 2019 and 2022.

Feral cats impact native wildlife through **predation, competition** and the **spread of diseases** such as **toxoplasmosis**. The absence of invasive foxes in Tasmania means that feral cats are the primary non-native predator threatening mammals, birds, reptiles and frogs. Evidence is also emerging that the threat of feral cats may be increasing as the Tasmanian devil populations have plummeted due to the devil facial tumor disease.

Toxoplasmosis is a disease transmitted by cats. **It kills native animals and can cause abortions in sheep and goats**. It can also be transmitted to humans and affects the eyes and brain as well as cause miscarriages. According to a 2014 CSIRO study, **Tasmania has one of the highest rates of toxoplasmosis in the world**, with over 80% of feral cats in Tasmania carrying the infection and a 50–62% infection rate in humans (compared with only 23–35% on the mainland). Toxoplasmosis is estimated to cost the state up to \$6 million a year.

Feral and pet cats are currently managed under the *Tasmanian Cat Management Plan 2017-2022*. In 2019, the Tasmanian government launched the Tasmanian Cat Management Project 'TassieCat' to contribute to the plan's objectives. In 2022, important amendments were adopted to improve the Cat Management Act. However, there is a need to update and commit continued funding to support the initiatives of the plan and project. Furthermore, as feral cats are not a focus of the TassieCat project, there is a need for dedicated feral cat management programs and planning.

Actions needed

The next Tasmanian government should:

1. **Mandate pet cat containment** to protect wildlife and keep pet cats safe at home.
2. **Update and fund a new state-wide 5-year cat management strategy** and continue to fund **the Tasmanian Cat Management Project** focused on promoting responsible cat ownership.
3. **Support local governments to enforce pet cat containment, desexing and pet registration.**
4. **Declare feral cats as a 'pest' species** outside urban areas.
5. **Commit to continued support of three regional cat coordinators** to support community action and education.
6. **Appoint a state feral cat coordinator to implement and coordinate a state-wide feral cat control strategy.**
7. **Prioritise feral cat eradications on off-shore islands**, such as lungtalanana/Clark Island.

Opportunity

Eradication of feral cats from the main island of Tasmania is currently unfeasible due to a lack of effective broad-scale techniques and continual recruitment from escaped or abandoned pet cats. However, **eradication is possible on islands** or small areas where barriers (e.g fences) can be erected.

With planning and resources, focused control efforts can **protect threatened wildlife** and areas of high conservation value from the impact of roaming cats. Tasmania needs an updated **state-wide feral and domestic cat strategy** and **dedicated funding**.

Improving the management of pet cats in Tasmania would save the lives of millions of native animals around our towns and cities every year. Currently, local councils can create 24/7 curfews for pet cats, but without **community education, funding for enforcement and consistent state-wide rules**, this tool is not being used effectively.

Every year cats in Australia kill ...



1,067,000,000
mammals



399,000,000
birds



609,000,000
reptiles



92,000,000
frogs



Ring tailed possum killed by feral cat. Credit: Barry Brook



Feral cats threatened Tasmania threatened mammals including eastern quolls. Credit: Ways.

4. Declare feral goats as pests, eradicate feral pigs and phase out ferrets as pets

Current situation

Feral goats

Feral goats can be **extremely destructive to native vegetation** as they browse a wide variety of native plants, including blackwood, drooping she-oak, native cherry, coffee berry, round-leaf riceflower, rough dogwood and forest germander. Trampling by goats can lead to **soil erosion and fouling of waterways**. Feral goat herds also act as **reservoirs for sheep parasites and diseases**.

In Tasmania, **more than 160 herds** of feral goats have been identified by Department of Natural Resources and Environment since 1991. Feral goats have been recorded in various areas, **including the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA) and on Bruny Island**. Currently, goats are considered to be domestic stock in Tasmania and ownership needs to be determined before any action can be taken to remove animals.

Feral pigs

Feral pigs are **found on Flinders Island**, in the Strzelecki National Park area in the southwest corner of the island, and through the wetlands along the east coast. Two of these wetlands are listed on the Register of the National Estate and as **international Ramsar sites**.

The Flinders Island feral pig population threatens at least 30 native plant and animal species. They cause damage to the environment through **wallowing, rooting for food and selective feeding**. They compete with native animals for food and destroy habitat. Feral pigs are also a **major agricultural pest**. They compete with livestock, destroy crops and fencing, foul water sources and transmit disease.

Ferrets

Ferrets have at times formed small populations in Tasmania, and there is an 'extreme' risk they will one day establish permanently in the wild (as assessed by the Environment and Invasives Committee). A short trip over the ditch to New Zealand shows how devastating they can be to native wildlife. Ferrets are **ferocious hunters of small ground-dwelling birds, reptiles, amphibians, mammals and invertebrates**. They would also compete with native carnivores for food and resources, further stressing their populations.

If ferrets were to become established in Tasmania, they could push native species like the **New Holland mouse, eastern barred bandicoot, Tasmanian devil** and **spotted-tail quoll** closer to extinction.

Despite these risks, **importation into Tasmania is legal** with a permit under the Animal Health Act 1995. **No permit is required to keep ferrets as pets** and there are **no limits to the number** that can be kept.

Actions needed

The next Tasmanian government should:

1. **Declare feral goats as a pest species** and fund a dedicated state-wide eradication program.
2. **Commit to eradicating feral pigs from Flinders Island.**
3. **Ban ferrets being imported into Tasmania and take steps towards phasing out ferrets being kept as pets** to prevent their establishment in the wild.

Opportunity

For feral goats and pigs, **eradication is likely still possible in Tasmania**, allowing our native wildlife to avoid the devastation they have caused on the mainland and in New Zealand. **Early, targeted and long-term action** to stop the spread of these invaders will be the most **efficient and cost-effective approach** and ensure eradication doesn't slip out of reach.

Tasmania is fortunate that ferrets have yet to establish, despite the lax legislation, but we **cannot afford to be complacent**. Moving towards a ban on ferrets in Tasmania will prevent this dangerous predator from ever establishing and permanently altering the balance of our environment. A permanent ban on keeping pets will take time and needs a staged approach in order to avoid perverse consequences like current owners releasing their ferrets to avoid them being seized and killed.



There are more than 150 invasive species in the Tasmanian World Wilderness Heritage Area. Feral goats or pigs would have devastating impacts on the native plants and animals if they are allowed to spread there. Credit: John Sampson



5. Fund a dedicated island eradication and recovery program

Current situation

Tasmania has **over 300 offshore islands. 56 of these have introduced and/or invasive animals present.** This includes serious invasive threats to some iconic islands like:

- Bruny Island – feral cats and deer
- King Island – feral deer
- Flinders Island – feral pigs
- Lungtalanana/Clark Island (declared an Indigenous Protected Area in 2009) – feral cats

Islands are particularly vulnerable to damage and extinctions by invasive species. Despite being less than 0.5% of Australia's land area, **island species have accounted for almost a quarter of Australia's extinctions.**

Opportunity

The good news is that **permanent eradication of invasive animals is possible, affordable and would spark an ecological transformation.** The eradication of invasive species from islands is a well-established success story around Australia, including:

- Feral cats, rabbits, rodents from Macquarie Island, Tasmania
- Feral cats from Tasman Island, Tasmania
- Feral goats and deer from Kangaroo Island, South Australia
- Rats and 80% of weeds (6 species) removed from Lord Howe Island, NSW
- Feral cats from Serrurier, Hermite, Faure and Rottnest Islands, Western Australia

Actions needed

The next Tasmanian government should:

1. **Fund a dedicated island eradication and recovery program**, with at least \$10 million invested in the first four years.
2. **Commit to a program of eradications to be achieved by 2034**, including:
 - a. feral deer from Bruny Island
 - b. feral cats from north Bruny and preventing reinvasion from south Bruny
 - c. feral deer from King Island
 - d. feral pigs from Flinders Island
 - e. feral cats from Lungtalanana/Clark Island, through support for the Lungtalanana/Clark Island Cultural Restoration Project.
3. **Develop island biosecurity plans** for high-risk potential environmental invaders and best practice biosecurity management for high-value islands at particular risk from new incursions.

As a **feasible and cost-effective** way to help achieve the ambitious goal of no new extinctions, an island recovery program would **make Tasmania a leader in the conservation of biodiversity**.

Eradications on populated islands is highly **dependent on local community and First Nations engagement and involvement in the design and implementation of the programs**. Once island eradications have been successful, their **benefits will need to be secured** by declaring biosecurity zones and **applying best practice biosecurity management**, so that the efforts of eradication are not undermined by new incursions.

Consideration should also be given to the creation of **'onshore' islands**, through the utilisation of natural barriers and targeted use of exclusion fencing.



Islands offer a real chance of success at invasive species eradication, like eradicating feral cats from Lungtalanana/Clark Island. Credit: Tristan Derham.

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 Tasmania** and **the most expensive natural resource management problem for farmers**. They smother and outcompete native plants, degrade habitat, remove food sources for native animals, and can alter waterways and fire regimes. With at least 886 plants naturalised in the state, **Tasmania has the highest number of introduced plants** per hectare of all Australian states and territories. Weeds cost Tasmania more than **\$58 million a year**.

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. The **current funding and regulatory arrangements are insufficient to meet the challenge**.

Opportunity

To reflect the seriousness of the weed issue for Tasmania's environment and agriculture, the next Tasmanian government should **rapidly scale up the level of funding** for weed management across the state and apply it based on systematic threat prioritisation to achieve the best environmental outcomes.

The Tasmanian government's Weeds Action Fund is an important initiative, but has only had an investment of \$1 million per year, limiting its scope and impact. **This funding runs out in 2024**, meaning that securing new funding is an urgent priority.

The majority of weeds in Tasmania are escaped garden plant varieties and a large proportion of these are still available for sale in Tasmania and online (e.g. garden plants such as Agapanthus species). Preventing the ongoing sale of weedy plants through wholesale and retail nurseries would go a long way towards stopping new weed outbreaks, thus avoiding significant environmental, industry, and taxpayer costs.

Tasmania also needs a dedicated fund that can be rapidly deployed by agencies to remove environmental weed threats that only occur in small areas, including sleeper invasives which have the potential to expand into large new areas. This would prevent new weeds from gaining a foothold and avoid huge costs for taxpayers in future.

Actions needed

The next Tasmanian government should:

- 1. Increase funding for the Weeds Action Fund to \$20 million** over the next 4 years and ensure funding is applied on a systematic threat prioritisation basis to achieve the best environmental outcomes.
- 2. Commit to a permitted list approach to stop the sale of weedy plants** through nurseries, wholesalers and online.
- 3. Establish a dedicated High Risk Environmental Weed Eradication Fund.**
- 4. Undertake a systematic prioritisation for weeds** in Tasmania to identify the existing and emerging highest priority environmental threats.

Foxgloves. Credit: Daniel Bohrer



Blackberry. Credit: Ragesos



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

Current situation

The impact of invasive species on Tasmania's environment is a direct threat to First Nations' cultural heritage and connection to Country. Invasive animals, plants, and pathogens 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.

These losses 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 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.

Providing direct funding to Indigenous-led conservation programs in Tasmania is vital. Not only will these programs deliver outstanding conservation outcomes but also important cultural outcomes for the Tasmanian Aboriginal community. Among these is the **Lungtalanana Cultural Restoration Project**, one of the most significant Indigenous community-led Healthy Country projects in Australia.

Establishing a Tasmanian Indigenous Commissioner for Invasive Species would be an important step in increasing First Nations leadership in invasive species management. The role will need to be **adequately resourced, staffed and empowered** to engage with Indigenous people and the wider public and provide independent advice to the government and the parliament on invasive species management on protected and Indigenous lands.

The Lungtalanana Cultural Restoration Project, if properly funded, will be **the first Indigenous community-led multi-native animal translocation project in Australia** and will **create the largest cat-and fox-free haven in southeastern Australia**. The project will have important benefits to the community with knowledge transfer, training, mentoring, skills, and certification for Aboriginal Rangers and community members.

Actions needed

The next Tasmanian government should:

1. **Commit \$1.7 million to the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre's Lungtalanana Cultural Restoration Project for cat eradication.**
2. **Establish a dedicated fund for Indigenous-led conservation projects**, including the management of invasive species.
3. Consult with the Tasmanian Aboriginal community on the appointment of a **Tasmanian Indigenous Commissioner for Invasive Species** on protected and indigenous land.



Indigenous-led conservation programs, like the Lungtalanana Cultural Restoration Project, not only deliver outstanding conservation outcomes but also important cultural outcomes for the Tasmanian Aboriginal community.

'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, Invasive Species Council Indigenous Ambassador

8. Strengthen Tasmania's environmental biosecurity and threat abatement planning

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.

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

Biosecurity strategy and governance

Tasmania has some of the strongest biosecurity legislation and policies in Australia, and has recently consolidated and modernised the out-of-date separate pieces of legislation into the Biosecurity Act 2019, complemented by a new Biosecurity Strategy 2023-2027.

Unfortunately, the new strategy remains vague on measurable and specific actions that will address invasive species and their impact on the environment. Tasmania still lacks its own threat abatement planning framework. There is also little transparency in reporting on environmental biosecurity and a strong environment voice is mostly absent from the Biosecurity Advisory Committee (BAC), which is primarily composed of forestry and industry representatives.

Actions needed

The next Tasmanian government should:

- 1. Establish Biosecurity Tasmania as a separate, independent agency within the Department of Natural Resources and Environment**, on the same level as Primary Industries and Water and the Parks and Wildlife Service.
- 2. Create an Environmental Biosecurity Office within Biosecurity Tasmania**, with dedicating staff and funding.
- 3. Commission a comprehensive, independent review of invasive species impacts and management and biosecurity** in Tasmania.
- 4. Conduct a detailed analysis of key risk pathways for new environmental invaders**, including online trading, shipping and boating, and the sale of weedy plants.
- 5. Develop a threat abatement planning framework** and allocate dedicated funds for implementing state-based plans and relevant federal threat abatement plans.
- 6. Develop an avian influenza response plan** to protect native birds, seals and other wildlife if the disease reaches Tasmania.
- 7. Appoint an environment representative on the Biosecurity Advisory Committee (BAC)** and **establish a separate Biosecurity Science Committee**.
- 8. Support and fund collaborative 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.
- 9. 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.

Within the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, Biosecurity Tasmania is structured as an agency under Primary Industries and Water rather than as its own entity. This can result in environmental threats not being given equal weight and focus as industry priorities.

Threat abatement planning

Despite being identified as a priority under the Tasmanian Threatened Species Strategy, **threat abatement plans have still not been developed for any threatening processes in Tasmania**. Threat abatement plans are essential for effectively targeting and mitigating specific environmental threats, like the spread of invasive species. They are an efficient, impactful and cost-effective way to recover many threatened species and prevent more from becoming threatened.

One current example where threat abatement planning would be needed is in preparation for **Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (H5N1)**. This bird flu, which reached Antarctica in 2023, will be **a grave threat to our native birds and seals if it arrives on our shores**. It is highly infectious and has killed millions of birds and mammals worldwide. In 2022, it **killed over 60,000 seabirds and 3,500 sea lions within weeks** of reaching Peru. **Tasmania does not have a detailed plan** for wild birds and at-risk mammals like sea lions.

Opportunity

Establishing Biosecurity Tasmania as a separate, independent agency within the Department of Natural Resources and Environment would see **long term cultural and structural changes to improve biosecurity preparedness and response capacity**. The new agency would elevate the significance of biosecurity and invasive species management within government and the community, while strengthening agency accountability.

A new **Environmental Biosecurity Office** and dedicated environmental representation on the BAC, would ensure a more dedicated environmental focus, to complement the existing agricultural focus, within the department.

Finalisation and implementation of a new threatened species strategy, currently under development, should be a high priority for the Tasmanian government. To stop extinctions and declines will require **the comprehensive identification and listing of key threats** through an independent scientific process and the development of threat abatement plans. Effective threat abatement and threatened species recovery will need a substantial boost in public funding and allocation based on transparent prioritisation.

