

# Evidence towards Australia's largest feral cat free island safe haven: Completion of the Dudley Peninsula feral cat eradication program

Funding is urgently required to complete the Dudley Peninsula feral cat eradication program on Kangaroo Island.

Since the program's inception in 2020, more than 1,500 feral cats have been removed from the Dudley Peninsula.

Today, as few as **150 feral cats remain** on the Dudley Peninsula following an intensive knockdown of the population in 2024.

The Dudley Peninsula feral cat eradication program is the largest in the Southern hemisphere and leads the nation in the adoption of cutting-edge technology, strong community support, highly skilled practitioners and engagement with First Nation practitioners.

To date \$6,940,410 has been spent on the program over five years. The allocation of these funds has been insufficient on an annual basis to achieve the level of desired knockdown for the program to transition to mop up, proof of absence and eradication confirmation.

To achieve eradication up-front funding is required now to reduce the remaining feral cat population by more than 90% over the shortest possible period. This will allow the program to transition to mop-up and proof of absence phases.

Recent evidence-based modelling shows that an intensive winter knockdown program in 2025 would achieve a 95% reduction in the remaining feral cat population on the Dudley Peninsula.

This program requires additional funding of \$1,933,570 in the coming 2025-26 financial year to complete this task.

\$4,290,018 is required for mop-up and proof of absence monitoring in years 2 and 3 of the program.

An intensive winter knockdown program provides the highest confidence of achieving eradication success, is the shortest and most cost-effective strategy being at minimum **\$1.1 million less** than ongoing multi-year programs.

The total required funding is **\$6,223,588 to complete** the program.



# The case:

Kangaroo Island is Australia’s third largest island (4405 km2). It is a priority place of national and international significance for its high conservation values, is a safe haven for threatened and endangered species, diverse primary production, a tourism hotspot and a vibrant island community. The island and its wildlife was severely impacted by the devastating 2019/20 black summer bushfires.

The Dudley Peninsula feral cat eradication is an Australian Government priority (Objective 2. Actions - cat-free havens, *Threat abatement plan for predation by feral cats 2024*). The TAP prioritises islands where feral cat eradication has been initiated, to protect cat-susceptible species and potentially support future island translocations.

Eradicating feral cats from Kangaroo Island will have enduring conservation, primary production and social benefits, including;

- Improving the trajectory and building climate change resilience in cat susceptible threatened species populations such as the Kangaroo Island echidna and dunnart. Feral cats kill 25% of young echidnas and are known to predate on over 50 native species on Kangaroo Island.

- Eliminating transmission of cat dependent diseases. Toxoplasmosis and Sarcocystis spread only by cats cost Kangaroo Island sheep farmers an estimated \$12 million p/year and compound the impacts of recent bushfires and current drought conditions.
- Cats are hosts to diseases and parasites that place the endangered Australian sea lion at increased risk of extinction. 85 percent of the sea lion population occurs in South Australia, with the three largest breeding colonies found at Dangerous Reef, The Pages and Seal Bay on Kangaroo Island. Sea lion populations have plummeted by over 60 per cent in the past four decades, emergency actions are required to protect these populations against climate and disease risks.
- Protecting the islands multi-million-dollar wildlife tourism economy. Kangaroo Island is internationally recognised for its unique wildlife and natural experiences found nowhere else in the world. Few places exist that offer such an immersive natural experience and must be preserved for future generations.

## Significant progress has been made including;

The **largest feral cat population knockdown** since the program commenced in 2020, as a result of intensive cage trapping from late autumn to early spring 2024, with almost 350 cats removed from the Dudley Peninsula and Pelican Lagoon. A 67% decline in relative abundance indexes (detections over time) of feral cats has been observed over the previous year, with detections at the lowest levels ever over the program’s history.

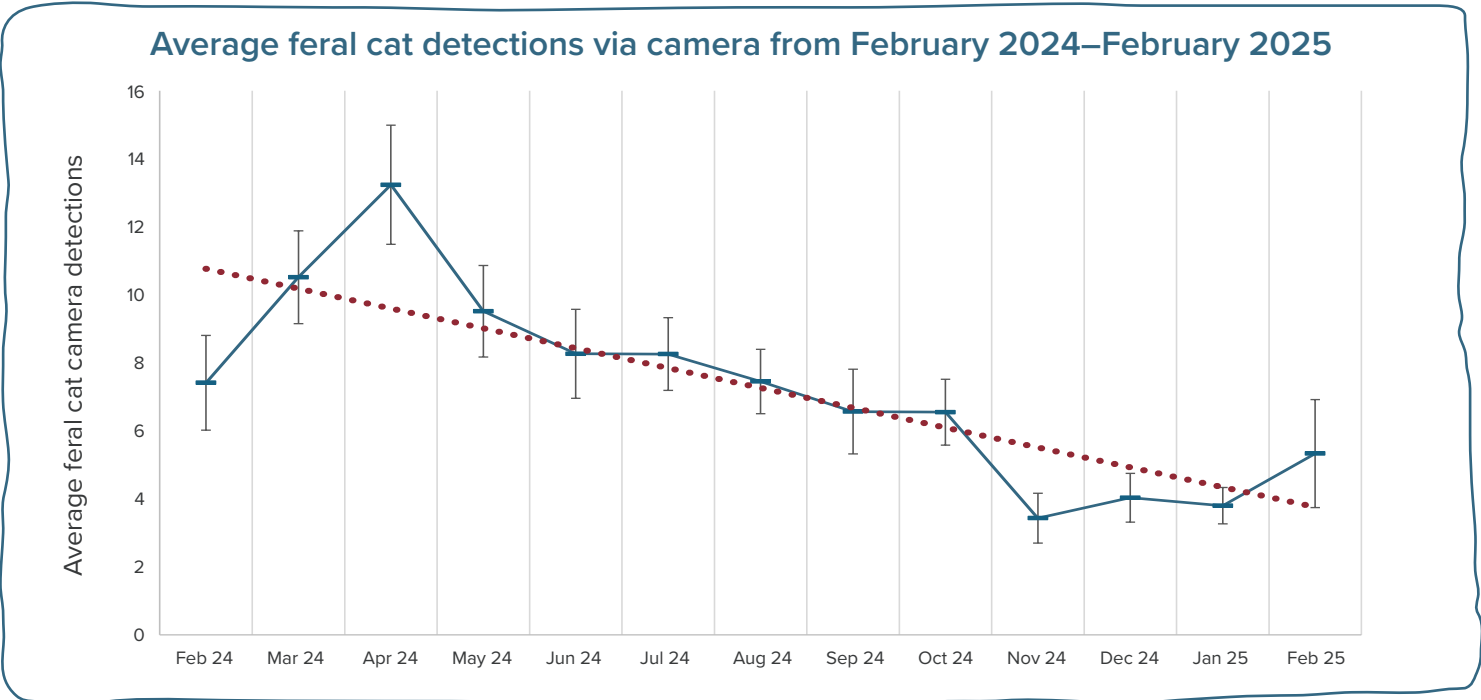
**Improved regulatory and legislative frameworks** have provided access to a full range of control devices critical for eradication success, most recently the use of soft-jaw leg hold traps. Changes to the types of control tools which can be used and their proximity to residences now means that 100% of the eradication area can be treated.

The **application of advanced technology** means the program is cost effective at scale, has increased target specificity, increased efficacy, improved humaneness and offers longer-term solutions.

4G connected cameras linked to AI for near real-time processing of images and trap sensors notifying when a trap is triggered has vastly increased efficiency and scale.

**Preventing reinvasion** following eradication will guarantee enduring conservation, primary production and social benefits. Approvals and funding have been secured to upgrade and improve the feral cat exclusion fence, which will prevent reinvasion. Upgrades include roadside cat corridors, high-tech camera activated audio deterrents and control devices, as well as Felixer grooming devices.

**Maintaining a cat free status** through public support for more progressive domestic cat legislation. Kangaroo Island Council (KIC) already has some of the most stringent domestic cat laws in the nation and there is strong community support for change. In September 2024, the KIC supported a last cat policy for Kangaroo Island, and along with other stakeholders, is calling for a legislative review for the declaration of cats on Kangaroo Island.





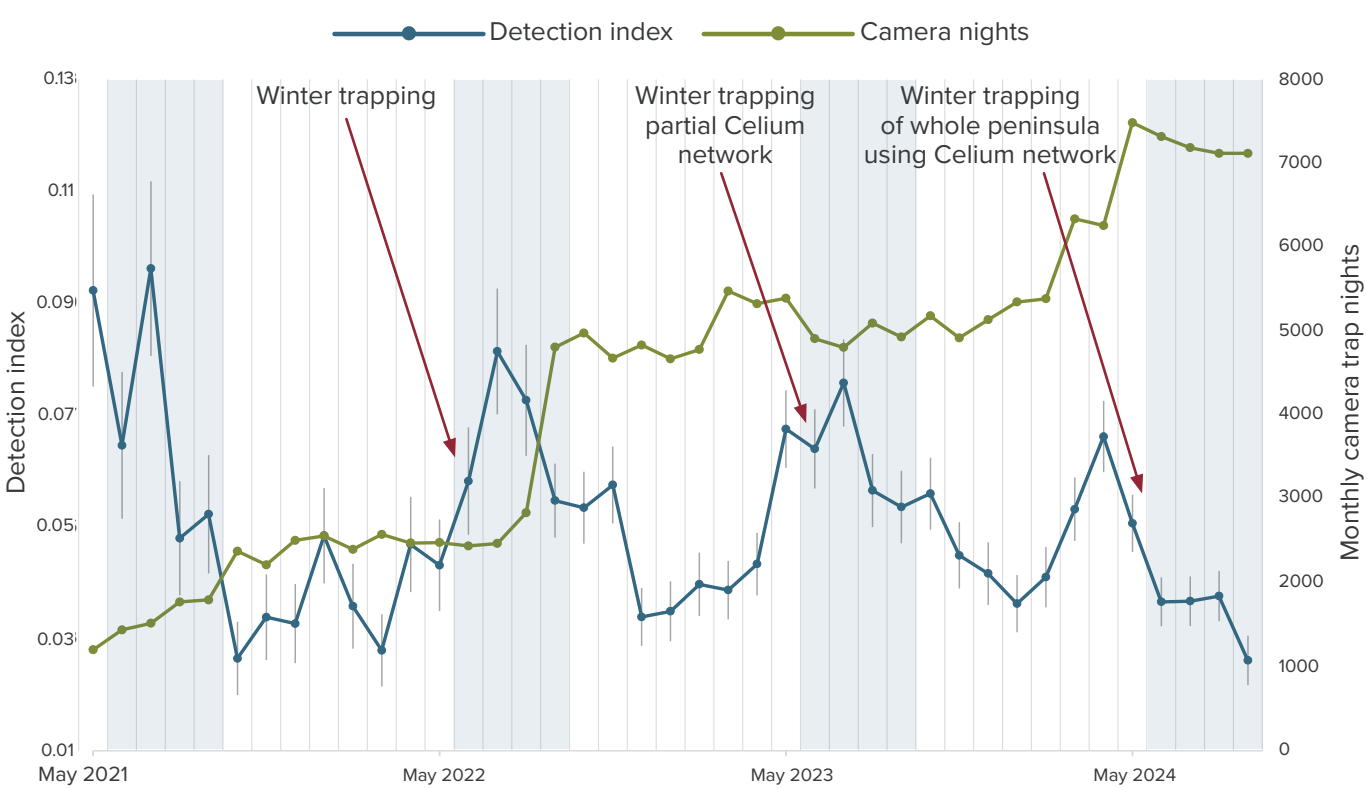
The **highest levels of community support and participation** for an eradication program of national significance. On the Dudley Peninsula, over 99% of landholders support or are actively participating in the program, by permitting access to their properties, supporting the use of control tools, reporting sightings, or trapping and removing cats.

**Application and refinement of specialised tools to remove every last cat.** Kangaroo Island has an impressive record when it comes to successful feral species eradications. The success of these programs has relied heavily on harnessing the most advanced and effective tools and technologies at the time and having highly skilled staff that are committed to getting the job done.

Specialist tools, such as ground, vehicle and drone thermal optics and gun scopes, feral cat detection dogs and soft-jawed leg hold traps set by experienced practitioners will be used to remove every last feral cat from the Dudley Peninsula.

**Technology and Tradition:** integrating Aboriginal knowledge and cutting-edge technology for feral cat management, Integration of Indigenous cultural knowledge and traditional practices with cutting-edge technology to exchange knowledge, skills, and experience to improve the delivery of vertebrate pest control and eradication programs in South Australia.

Monthly feral cat detection index and camera effort from May 2021–September 2024



Monthly feral cat detection index (blue line) and monthly camera trap nights (green line) between May 2021 and September 2024. Winter trapping across the whole of the Dudley Peninsula commenced in 2022. In 2023, Celium trap monitoring technology was partially deployed to increase efficiency and the number of traps that could be managed. Celium was deployed across the entire Dudley Peninsula in 2024. The scale and intensity of this winter trapping corresponded to the largest reduction in monthly feral cat detection indexes and the lowest in the program's history.

# The evidence:

Feral cat control is integral to improving the trajectories of many of the Action Plan's priority species, places and habitats (*Target 9. feral cats are managed in all priority places where they are a key threat to condition, using best practice methods for the location*). To optimise feral cat management across Australia, prioritisation and planning needs to be evidence based.

The Dudley Peninsula program was reviewed in early 2025 to identify the most feasible and cost-effective eradication strategy.

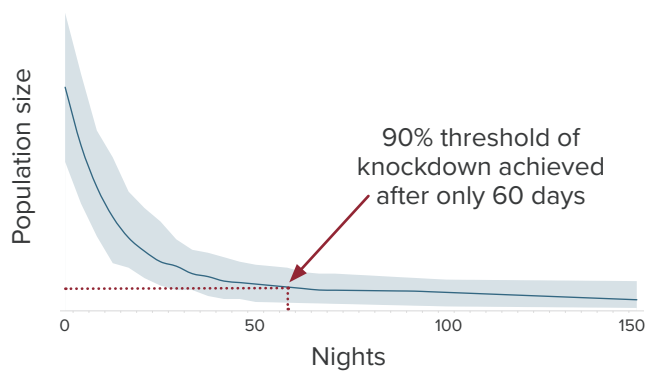
This evidence-based and adaptive management framework has broad stakeholder and community support.

The Eradication Feasibility Decision Support Tool (the tool) was developed by the Centre for Invasive Species Solutions through funding from Federal Government and in partnership with CSIRO.

Objective 3 of the tool is to provide support to deliver 'more successful and cost-effective eradications of invasive pests that maximises the economic benefits to industry and the environment'.

Five management scenarios were tested as part of the 2025 review. Modelling using the best-practice tool shows that an expanded and concentrated winter eradication program would achieve a 95% reduction in the remaining population providing the shortest, most cost-effective and lowest-risk pathway to full feral cat eradication across the Dudley Peninsula.

Population size estimates for Scenario 3





# The opportunity:

When complete, this will be the world’s largest feral cat eradication on an inhabited island.

As feral cat eradication programs become larger and more complex, the Dudley Peninsula program will provide an evidence-base and blueprint for future successes.

Through use of the tool, we found that the scenario in which a population knockdown of 95% was completed soonest, was the cheapest to fund in the long term.

No other options were identified that achieved the level of knockdown required in the first year to transition to mop-up operations. Other options are available. These will take longer and cost more.

The Kangaroo Island Landscape Board (KILB) has reviewed the necessary investment strategy required to deliver this model, with the outcome being full eradication across the Dudley Peninsula, delivered over the shortest time and at the least cost.

Eradication models delivered over extended periods have additional failure risks as animals are educated and become increasingly harder to detect and catch.



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# The funding required:

Undertaking the proposed winter program blitz would cost \$1,933,570. This approach would reduce the total program length by a full season and minimises the risk of a persistent cat population large enough to repopulate at scale.

Breakdown of funding shortfalls for Scenario 3 in comparison to existing project funding (all costs in AUD\$).

Year	Year 1 Knockdown (including winter blitz)	Year 2 Mop up	Year 3 Mop up/ proof of absence
Modelled amount	2,636,822	2,255,537	2,505,537
Funded amount	703,252	303,131	417,925
Shortfall	1,933,570	2,202,406	2,087,612



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## Further information

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