

SA Arid Lands Landscape Board

Biteback

Wild Dog Program Annual Report July 2019 – June 2020



Government of South Australia
South Australian Arid Lands
Landscape Board



SA Sheep
Industry
Fund



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Acknowledgments

The SA Arid Lands Landscape Board would like to acknowledge the partners who are essential in the successful delivery of wild dog management in the rangelands.

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

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

Primary Industries and Regions SA:

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

Department for Environment and Water:

- Minister for Environment & Water; who oversees the Landscape South Australia Act 2019 and regulations for the control of wild dogs in SA; and
- The support of park rangers in managing wild dogs on the national parks and reserves

The South Australian Wild Dog Advisory Group (SAWDAG): with a key role in providing advice to the government on management of wild dogs. Its terms of reference included the development and implementation of the SA Wild Dog Strategic Plan.

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

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

The Arid Lands Community:

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



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Introduction

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

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

This program supports Biteback local area groups and assists land managers in the SAAL landscape management region (then Natural Resource Management) to coordinate their wild dog control efforts, apply best practice control measures and significantly reduce wild dog numbers and impacts inside the Dog Fence.

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

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

This report provides an overview of the Biteback' program for the 2019-2020 financial year, including activities undertaken, monitoring data (reported in calendar year) on land manager involvement and wild dog activity, and a review of program outcomes. This report will be used by the SAAL Landscape Board to inform future planning and improve program outcomes. More details about the previous 10 years of the program can be found in the ["Biteback Wild Dog Program Report 2009-2019"](#).

Biteback Groups

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

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

- Coordinate group members and keep them informed about coordinated injection services, information sessions and training opportunities.
- Ensure information about wild dog activity is shared between group members.
- Liaise with the Wild Dog Project Officer about wild dog impacts and activity in their groups' area; and
- Encourage group members to monitor, report and control wild dogs.
- The shift to the *Landscape South Australian Act 2019* on the 1st July 2020 means that new groups will be created to include the Flinders Ranges Council and Port Augusta Council areas



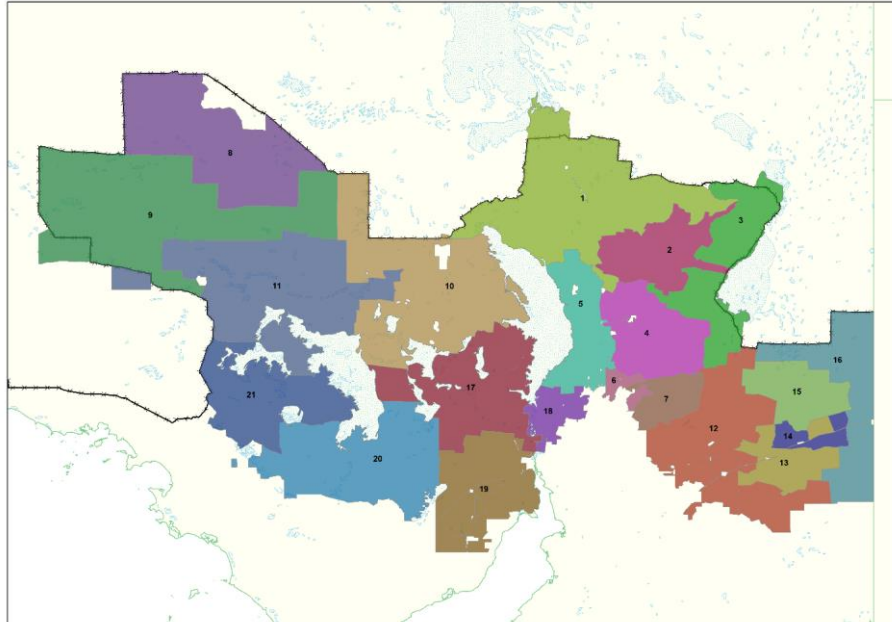


Figure 1: Biteback Groups (inside the dog fence)

Total Land Manager Participation in the Biteback Program

From 2009 to present the method used by the SAAL to assess progress was any landholder participation in managing will dogs. This was measured by participation in ground baiting, aerial baiting, provision of mapping data and reporting using the Wild Dog Scan app. From 2018-2019 to 2019-2020 there was a slight decrease from 83% to 76% in overall inside fence participation (Figure 2). This decrease is caused by a state wide meat shortage, properties destocking because of drought and COVID-19 travel restrictions for the 2019-2020 autumn injection service.

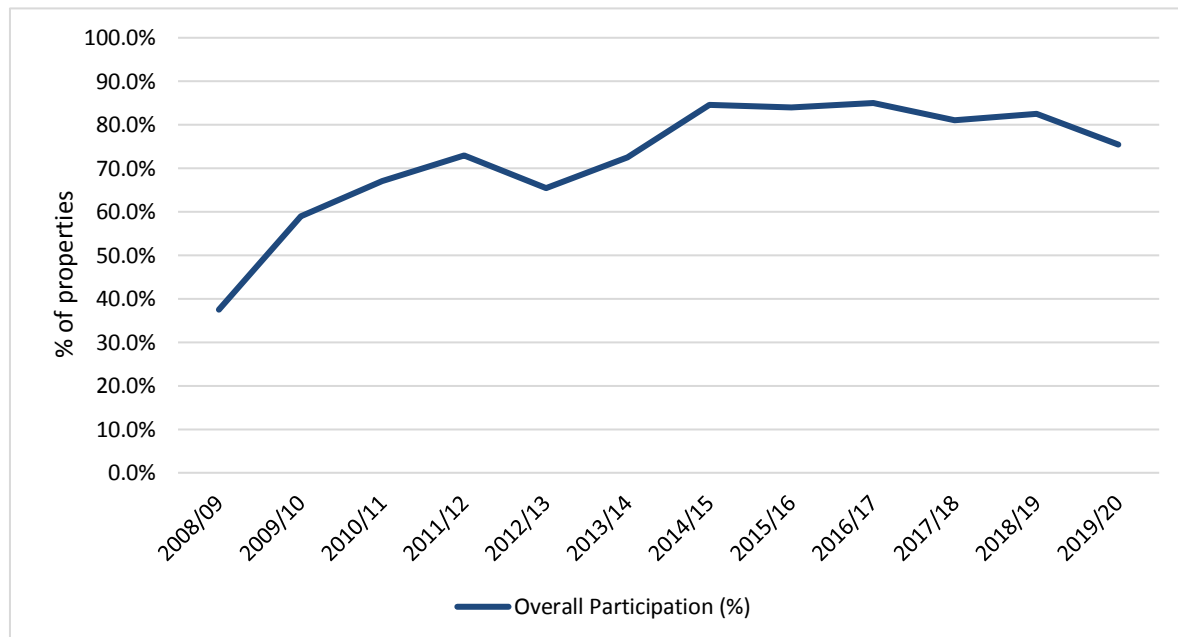


Figure 2: Overall inside Fence land manager participation in the Biteback Program

The Wild Dog Best Practice Guidelines

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

The proactive level of baiting sets the expectation that:

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

Measuring uptake of Best Practice Baiting

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

Figure 3 shows that 34% of properties were baiting at the proactive levels in 2019-2020, which is 2% lower than the previous financial year. This decrease in properties meeting the best practice level of baiting has resulted in a slight reduction in the number of properties not baiting and an increase in the number of properties not meeting best practice.

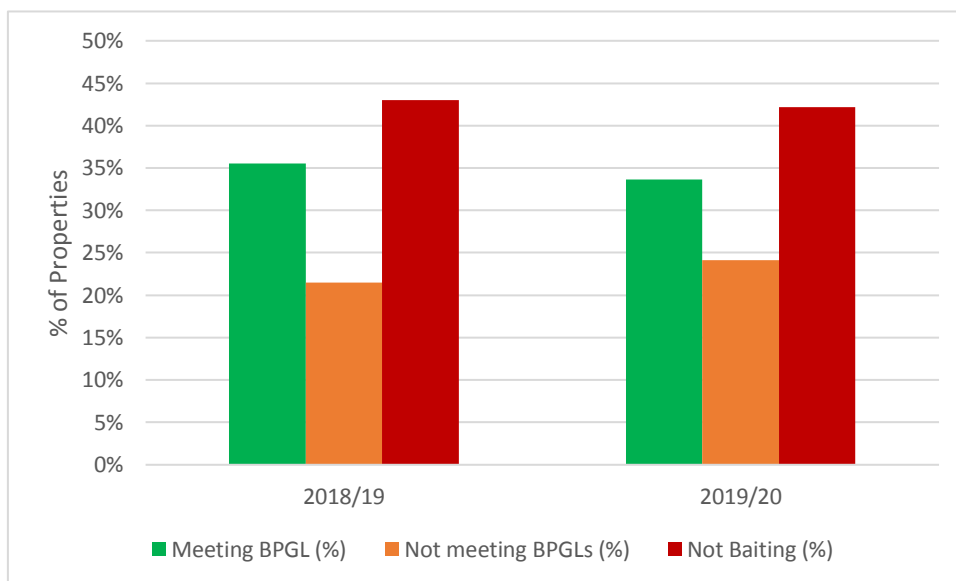


Figure 3: Properties meeting the Best Practice level of baiting

The Biteback program was aiming for a 5% increase in the number of properties baiting at the best practice proactive level from the 2018 baseline (36%). Figure 4 shows that in the 2019-2020 financial year the program was 7% short of the target increase (41%). This shortfall is attributed to the landholder reported state wide meat shortage that resulted in fewer attendees (particularly in the North East Pastoral) because they could not get enough meat.

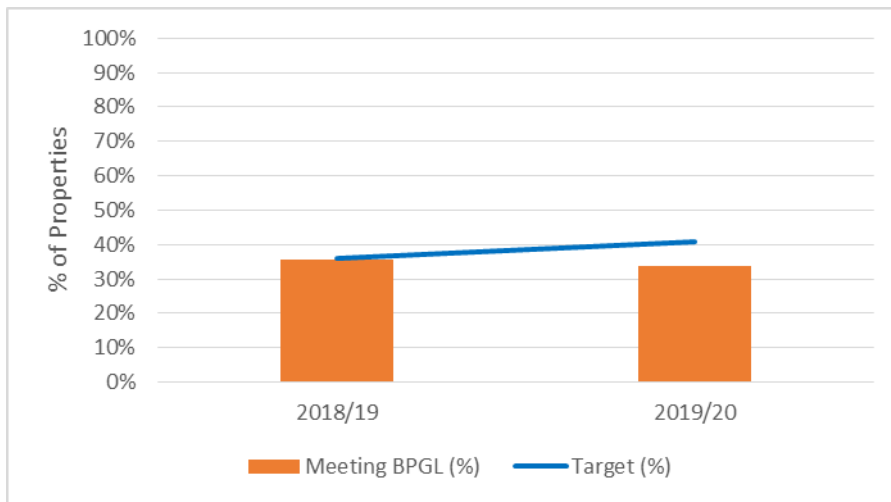


Figure 4 Properties meeting the Best Practice level of baiting compared to the 5% target increase.

Ground Baiting

SA Arid Lands Inside Fence Baiting

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

Figure 5 shows land manager participation in ground baiting efforts and the total amount of baits distributed to land managers for ground baiting since the program began in 2009. Since the program began the total number of baits distributed for ground baiting has steadily increased. The decrease in 2019-2020 from the previous financial year is attributed to the cancellation of the Kingoonya Autumn injection service due to COVID-19 restrictions and the state wide meat shortage that resulted in fewer attendees (particularly in the North East Pastoral) because they could not get enough meat.

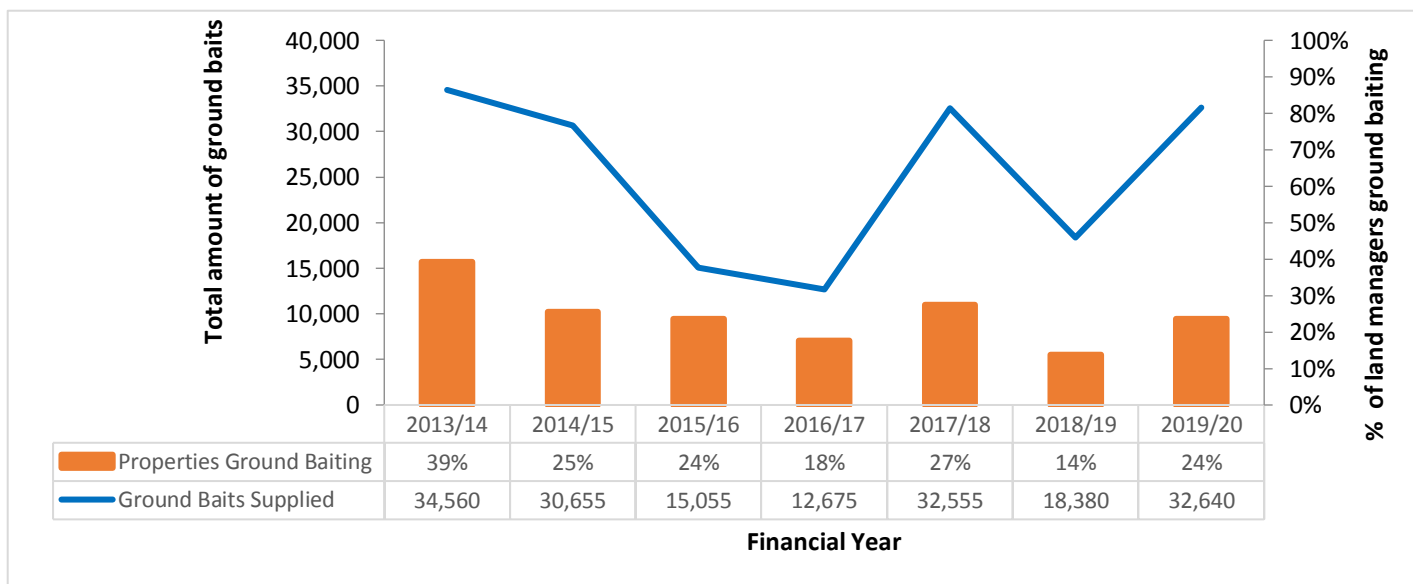


Figure 5: Ground baiting effort (outside the dog fence)

The total amount of baits displayed in Figure 5 includes:

- Injected meat baits (fresh and semi-dried).
- Manufactured baits (land managers can purchase these from the SA Arid Lands Landscape Board at subsidised prices).
- Canid Pest Ejector (CPE) dog strength capsules (these became available for purchase since 2016).
- The 94,250 free manufactured baits distributed to land managers in the SAAL region (inside the dog fence) for 2018.

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

SA Arid Lands Outside Fence baiting

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

Land managers in this part of the region, who are experiencing wild dog impacts can bait if they are experiencing high impacts to cattle, but are limited to one bait per 2km² annually, based on property size. This limitation was implemented to ensure wild dog numbers could be reduced to manageable levels, without affecting the species ecological role as the apex predator. Property managers who have met their maximum bait quota in a 12 month period, and are still experiencing a high level of impacts from wild dogs can apply for additional baits to reduce wild dog numbers to a manageable level.

Figure 6 shows the land manager participation in ground baiting efforts and the total amount of baits distributed to land managers for ground baiting outside the dog fence since 2009. Maximum baits that could be laid annually outside of the fence is 156,461 based on one bait per 2km².

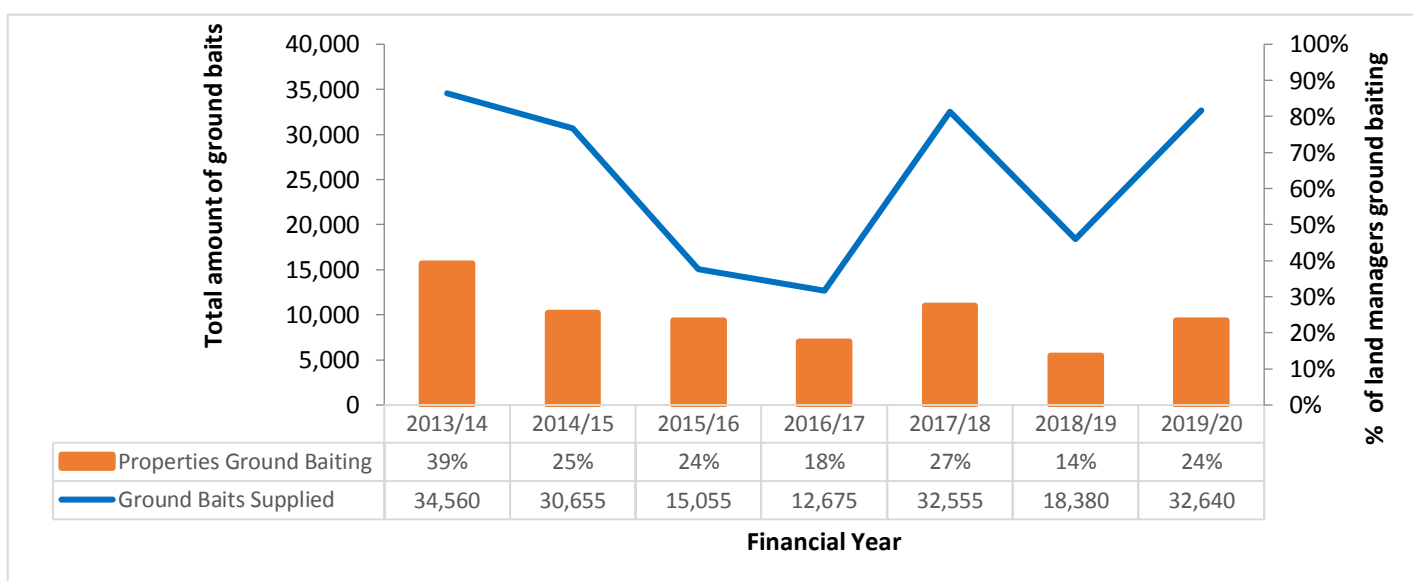


Figure 6: Ground baiting effort (outside the dog fence)

Aerial Baiting

The aerial baiting program began in 2012 to target areas of the region (inside the dog fence) that are inaccessible for ground baiting, and is a supplementary baiting program only offered to properties already ground baiting. Aerial baiting is undertaken in a fixed wing aircraft with a baiting rate of five baits per kilometre on selected areas. The 2019-2020 Autumn aerial baiting program (92 properties) was postponed

until spring due to COVID-19 restrictions, but a shortened emergency aerial baiting program (67 properties) was completed in May by PIRSA.

Figure 7 shows the percentage of properties involved in the aerial baiting program, and the total baits distributed aerially.

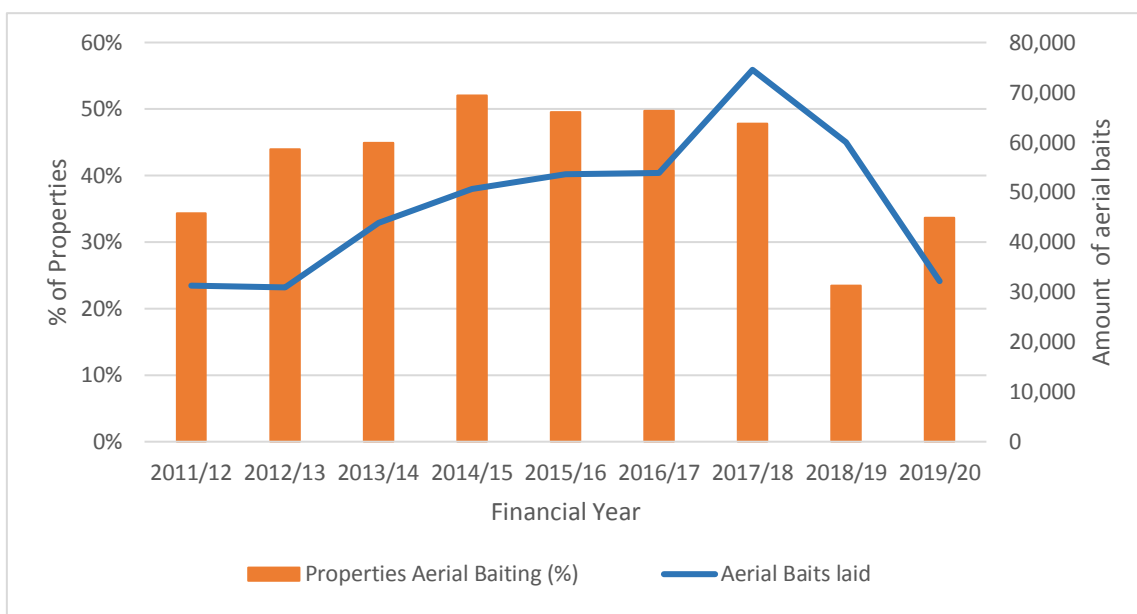


Figure 7: Aerial Baiting Participation and Total Baits Deployed

Monitoring (inside the dog fence)

Wild dog control activity mapping

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

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

Wild Dog Scan (WDS) Application

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

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

Figure 8 shows the total percentage of properties returning wild dog control and activity information (inside the dog fence) from both the hard copy mapping program and the WDS app. In 2019 there was a 6% increase in properties using the WDS app for reporting. This data also includes wild dogs shot or trapped by professional trappers through the PIRSA managed Trapper Program.

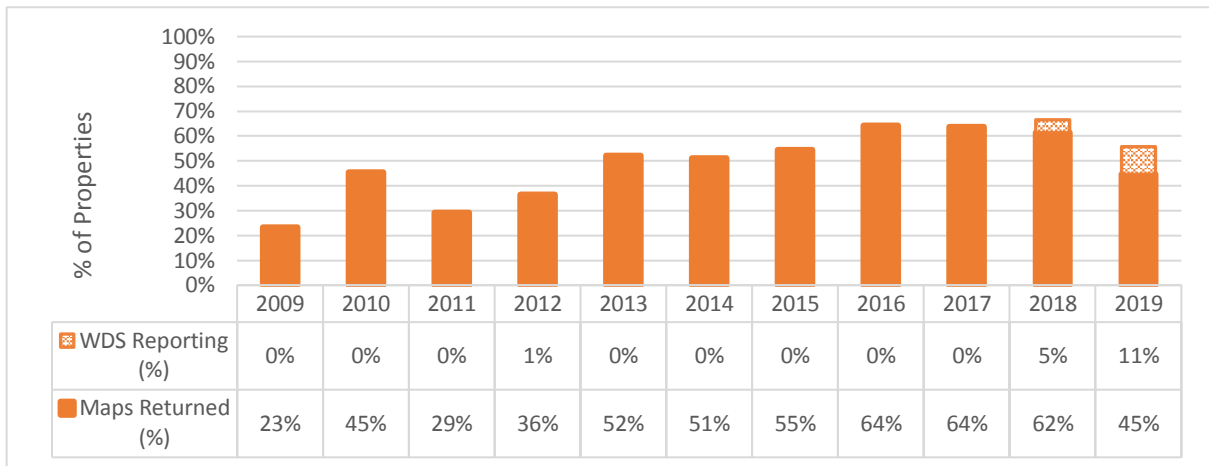


Figure 8: Properties returning maps and reporting through WDS

Trapping

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

Figure 9 shows reported property trapping effort, including PIRSA managed professional trappers and the total amount of wild dogs trapped. The most significant increase that resulted from Biteback delivered trapper training courses in 2015 was the amount of wild dogs successfully trapped. This increase has continued each year since this time.

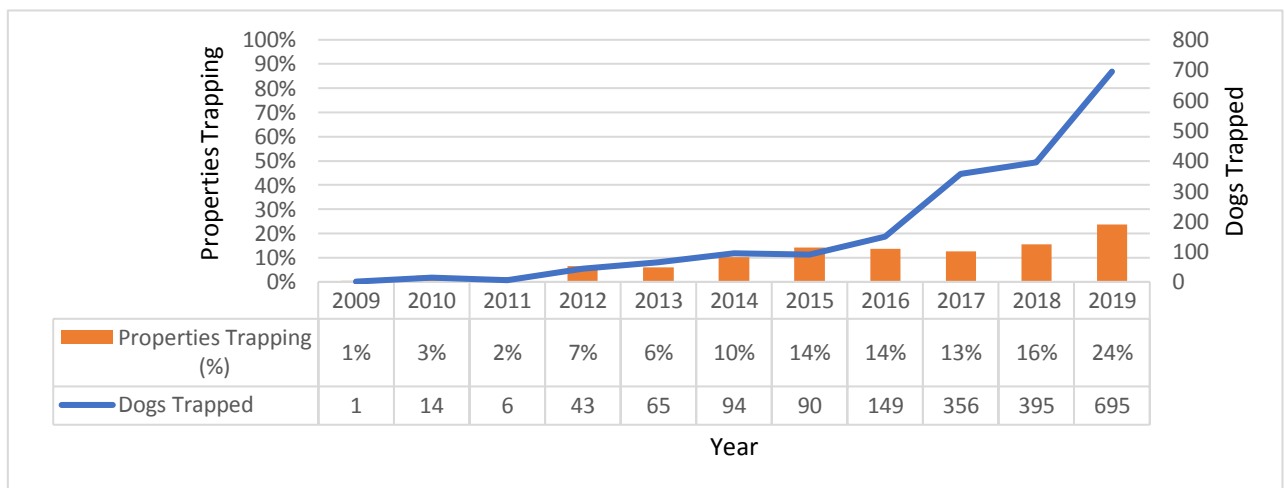


Figure 9: Reported trapping information (inside the dog fence)

State Government and Industry funded wild dog trappers.

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

Key outcomes during 2019-2020:

- The wild dog trapping program removed 287 dogs across 56 properties.
- In addition to trapping and shooting, the wild dog trappers have also spent the equivalent of 46 days of on-the-job training of land managers.

Shooting

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

In 2019, the largest number of wild dogs were shot in the North Flinders/Marree district. However, these were lower numbers than in 2018 that were shot in the North East pastoral district. This data coincided with an increase in reported wild dog activity during this period, particularly near the dog fence.

Figure 10 shows reported property shooting effort and the total amount of wild dogs shot. Most of the reported shooting effort by land managers is opportunistic.

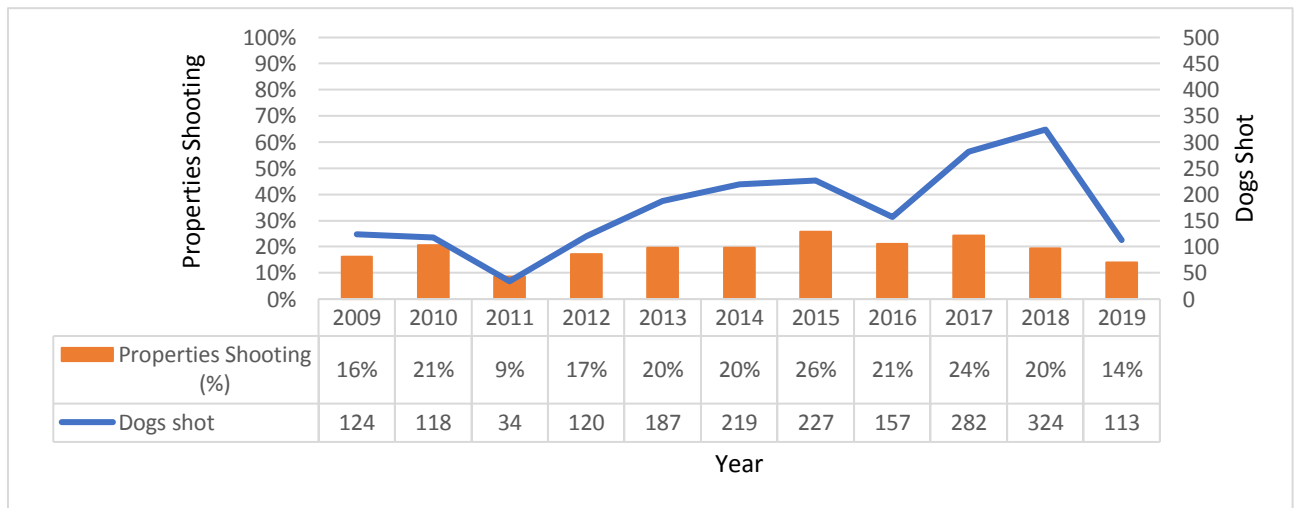


Figure 10: Reported shooting information (inside the dog fence)

Stock loss

Figure 11 shows the percentage of properties reporting stock loss and the total number of stock reported to have been killed by wild dogs. Although this information is valuable in assessing land manager beliefs about causes of stock loss, limitations to the accuracy of reporting techniques by land managers has showed high variability in the data based on the perceived impacts from wild dogs instead of actual impacts.

The high number of stock loss in 2019 was localised to three Biteback groups within the North Flinders/Marree, Kingoonya and North East Pastoral districts.

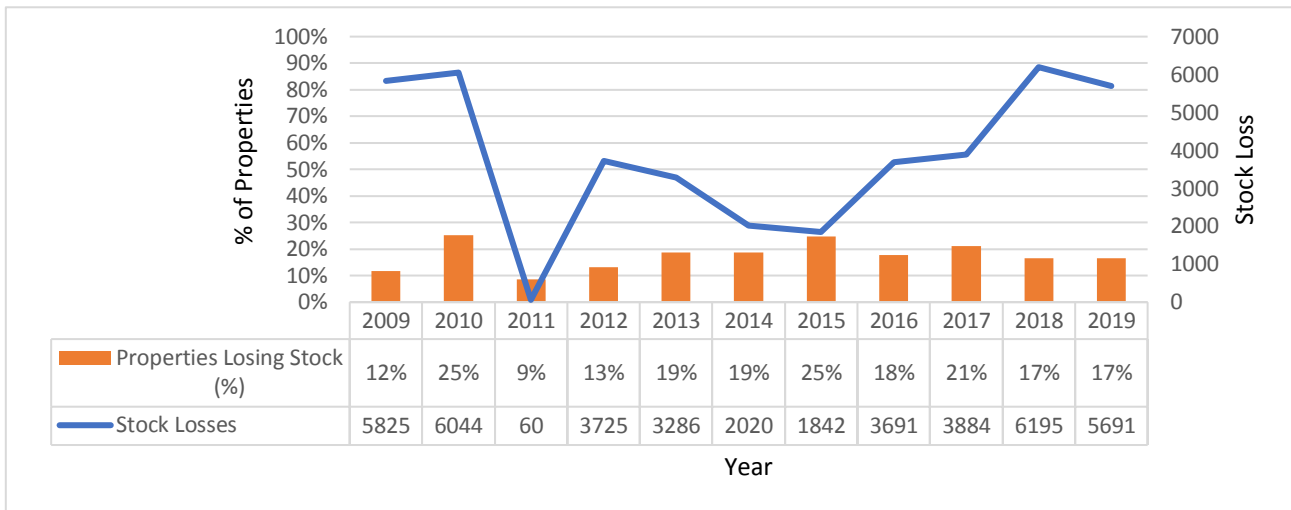


Figure 71: Reported stock loss information (inside the dog fence)

Future Priorities

- On the back of the Dog Fence rebuild (started Autumn 2020), Biteback will be working with landholders towards virtual eradication of wild dogs in the SAAL region inside the Dog Fence
- Continue to seek secure funding sources for delivery of Biteback including support services, extension activities, skills development workshops and aerial baiting.
- Expansion of Wild Dog Scan adoption across the SAAL region.
- Increase adoption of Best Practice standards across the region and the integration of the mandatory baiting requirements under the Landscape Regulations.
- Improve landholder participation and engagement in the program
- Implement compliance to ensure all land managers are managing wild dogs.
- Community engagement, and development of new Biteback groups to include the Flinders Ranges and Port Augusta Council areas in the SAAL region.