

**PILBARA REGIONAL
BIOSECURITY GROUP INC.**

ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16

1. INTRODUCTION

About the Pilbara Regional Biosecurity Group

The Pilbara RBG is a not for profit association formed under the *Associations Incorporation Act* 2015, providing declared pest control programs for land managers, particularly in the pastoral zone. The associations' primary purpose is the control of declared pests using funding from Declared Pest Rates paid by landholders on pastoral stations. These Declared Pest Rates funds are matched dollar for dollar by the WA Government to reflect the public benefit of controlling declared pest animals and weeds. The association is formally recognised by the Hon Minister for Agriculture and Food as a recognised biosecurity group (RBG).

Membership of the Association

Full membership of the Association is open only to ratepayers within the area and full membership is automatically bestowed upon the individual or entity in whose name the relevant Declared Pest Rate assessment is issued, provided also that the relevant assessment is paid in full within 12 months of its issue date.

Committee of management members (as at 30 June 2016)

OFFICE HELD	OFFICE HOLDER NAME	LOCATION
Chairperson	Geoff Mills	Wallal Downs Station, Port Hedland
Vice Chairperson	Dave Rutherford	Karratha Station, Karratha
Treasure/Secretary	Kim Parsons	Coolawanyah Station, Tom Price
1. Full Member	Jamie Richardson	Mt Florence Station, Tom Price,
2. Full Member	Digby Corker	Red Hill Station, Pannawonica
3. Full Member	Vacant	
4. Full Member	Vacant	
5. Associate Member	Andrew Turner	Rio Tinto Pastoral, Tom Price
6. Associate Member	Ian Cotton, Project Manager/delegate Pilbara Corridors Project	Como WA
7. Associate Member	Nigel Wessels, Regional Manager/delegate Department of Parks and Wildlife	Karratha, WA
8. Associate Member	Linda Anderson, Project Manager/delegate Pilbara Mesquite Management Committee	Karratha, WA

How the group is funded

The Pilbara RBG's main source of funding is from Declared Pest Rates paid by pastoral leases that are matched equally by the WA State Government. The Pilbara RBG also partners with the Pilbara Corridors Project and the Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPaW), with operational support and agreements with DAFWA, to undertake donkey collaring control programs and opportunistic aerial culling of camels and feral horses. DPaW also contribute to wild dog aerial baiting on wild dog leads (movement corridors) from pastoral stations into DPaW managed properties.

2. PILBARA RBG AIMS AND AREA OF OPERATIONS

The Pilbara RBG aims to:

- Foster the control of declared pests throughout the Pilbara, via the formulation, implementation, and review of appropriate management plans and programs;
- Encourage integration, coordination, and general collaboration of Pilbara stakeholders in pest management matters;
- Promote the adoption of best practice invasive species control throughout the area.

The Pilbara RBG annual operational plan for 2015/16 focused on minimising the impact of declared weeds and pests on industry, environment and the community. This is primarily delivered through funding for:

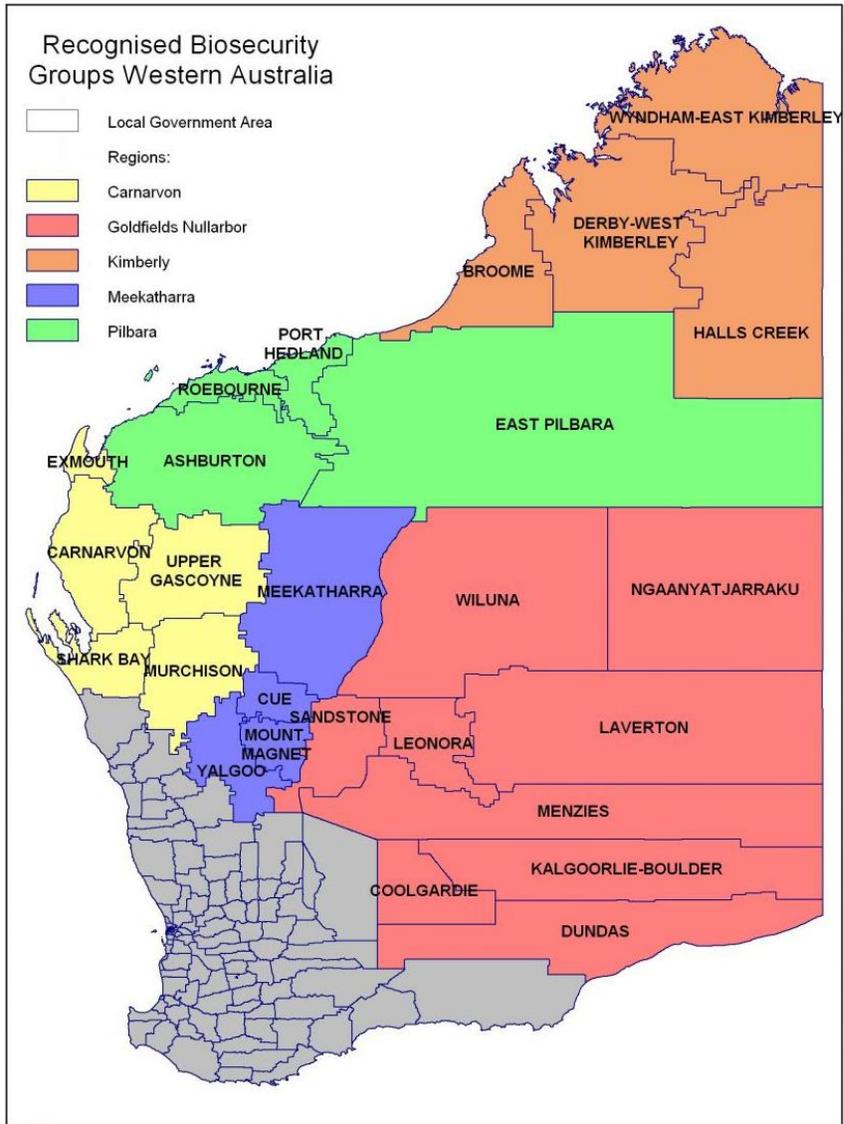
- An annual community aerial and ground coordinated baiting program for wild dogs. Landholders are also encouraged to undertake ground control throughout the year as a primary method of wild dog management;
- A Radio Telemetry program for Feral Donkey control in the east and central Pilbara; and
- Working with Pilbara Mesquite Management Committee in the management of Mesquite and Parkinsonia; providing herbicide and sprayers for declared plant control programs.

These activities provide pastoral businesses with the bare minimum level of control required to prevent negative impacts of priority declared pests.

Area of operation

The Pilbara Regional Biosecurity Group Inc (Pilbara RBG) region includes four local government areas - the City of Karratha, Shires of Ashburton and East Pilbara and the Town of Port Hedland. The major towns of the region are Port Hedland and Karratha. Other towns are Roebourne, Dampier, Onslow, Pannawonica, Paraburdoo, Tom Price, Wickham, Newman, Marble Bar and Nullagine. The Pilbara RBG region extends east to the Northern Territory border and includes Jigalong and other Aboriginal communities in desert country. The region also includes pastoral stations along Eighty Mile Beach – Pardoo, Wallal Downs, Mandora and Anna Plains. There are about 60 pastoral leases in the area.

Map showing Pilbara RBG region in relation to other RBGs in Western Australia



3. CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT – GEOFF MILLS

Thank you to the Management Committee, and organisations including DAFWA, DPaW, the Pilbara Mesquite Management Committee, Pilbara Corridors, and Rio Tinto for your support and participation in the Pilbara RBG's meetings and programs.

Thank you to the participating stations in our wild dog and feral herbivore control programs, including making airstrips and accommodation available, and making that extra effort to help control declared pests and weeds.

In the 2015/16 the Pilbara RBG was totally reliant on DAFWA to deliver both the wild dog aerial baiting and donkey telemetry programs. With a changeover of local biosecurity officers, and a reduction in DAFWA staff that were trained and qualified to deliver the aerial shooting, the Pilbara RBG's program were at risk of not being delivered. Apart from the missed opportunity to control declared pests, having Declared Pest Funding building up in the bank account and not being spent has other implications for the RBG, with DAFWA reluctant to keep releasing new funds.

Fortunately Andrew Longbottom (DAFWA – former Biosecurity Officer in Karratha) was able to come back to the region for a few weeks to coordinate and deliver the wild dog aerial baiting across the region in September 2015, and to involve the new DAFWA Biosecurity Officer Lara Martin in the aerial baiting exercise.

The Pilbara RBG had budget to run five large feral herbivore exercises in 2015/16, mainly continuing the donkey "Judas" telemetry program and opportunistic aerial shooting of feral camels and horses. The RBG had contracts with DPaW and Pilbara Corridors to deliver two of these five exercises through DAFWA. With a loss in capacity within DAFWA only one Donkey Telemetry Run occurred during the 2015/16 financial year in November 2015. This exercise identified that many of the tracking collars were old with flat batteries, meaning new collars are needed to be placed on donkeys to get the program fully operating again.

Finally, thank you to our Executive Officer Bill Currans, who has greatly assisted the RBG's operations and my role as Chairperson.

Geoff Mills, Chair, Pilbara RBG

4. PILBARA RBG OPERATIONS 2015-16

The Pilbara RBG has a Declared Pest Account into which the Department of Agriculture and Food WA (DAFWA) deposits the declared pest rates paid by pastoralists and the government's matching contribution. The Pilbara RBG also partners with the Pilbara Corridors Project and the Department of Parks and Wildlife (DPaW), with operational support and agreements with DAFWA, to undertake donkey collaring control programs and opportunistic aerial culling of camels and feral horses. DPaW also contribute to wild dog aerial baiting on wild dog leads (movement corridors) from pastoral stations into DPaW managed properties.

In 2015/2016, operational income (excluding GST) was:

• Operational Funding*	\$191,023.82
• Grant Funding **	\$139,764.00
• Interest Received	\$1,111.03
• Other Income	\$0.00

Total Operating Income **331,898.85**

*Only one of two payments of DPA funds was made.

**Includes \$130,000 Capacity Building grant and \$9,764.00 EO support from Pilbara Corridors.

2015/16 operational activities and expenditure covered:

• Advertising and promotion	\$0.00
• Audit fees	\$1,400.00
• Baits, Collars and Traps	\$141,389.32
• Bank Fees And Charges	\$0.00
• Bookkeeping expenses	\$1,754.09
• Contract payments	\$38,849.90
• Fines (ATO)	\$540.00
• Fuel & oil	\$11,864.43
• Helicopter charter	\$52,022.73
• Insurance	\$2,689.62
• Management fees	\$9,294.18
• Presentation expense	\$500.00
• Sundry expenses	\$0.00

Total Operating Expenses **\$261,389.55**
Surplus from ordinary activities **\$70,509.30**

During the 2015/16 financial year the large feral herbivore control work, mainly through the donkey collaring program, was significantly reduced due to DAFWA capacity issues. Reflecting this drop in capacity, the helicopter charter costs reduced from around \$139,000 in 14/15 to around \$52,000 in 2015/16. Most of the budget surplus was unspent helicopter charter and related fuel. The Pilbara RBG has reviewed the donkey collaring program and will look for opportunities to spend this budget surplus on expanding the donkey collaring program the western/southern Pilbara region.

The Pilbara RBG relies heavily on pastoral lease holders to play an active role in undertaking pest animal and plant control on their own stations as part of their individual responsibility to

manage pests. The Pilbara RBG also relies on members from each pastoral station to distribute dried meat baits across their station(s), trap/shoot wild dogs where required, and to monitor and report on sightings of large feral herbivores, including donkeys, camels and feral horses on their properties.

Voluntary roles performed by Pilbara RBG members include:

- Participation on the Management Committee;
- Distributing dried meat baits across their station(s);
- Trapping and/or shooting wild dogs where required; and
- Pastoral stations that make airstrips available for the aerial baiting plane to use, along with providing meals and overnight accommodation for the charter plane pilot during aerial baiting programs.

2015/16 Large Feral Herbivore Operations

The Donkey “Judas” radio tracking telemetry program has been in operation since 1998, delivered by DAFWA under agreement with the Pilbara RBG, with the RBG funding the program. The Judas program currently includes over 16 Pastoral stations and 4 DPaW managed estate (2 reserves, 2 UCL), noting that donkeys move across areas and are not confined to where they are collared.

The Judas program started in the north-west area of the Pilbara and over time has moved east across the top of the pastoral land to the eastern edge of the pastoral zone, and has then started to cover more area to the south. The program has been very successful overall, with donkeys in the northern section of the Pilbara classified as ‘locally eradicated’, with the area around Marble Bar to Nullagine having low donkey numbers.

The program has 82 current active collars, with collar numbers fluctuating between 80 - 95 in total. A large number of the existing collars will need to be replaced due to reaching the end of the collar battery life.

Results from the 16th – 20th November 2015 Donkey Telemetry operation:

- 56 donkeys culled from 31 collars, where 21 of these collars were paired or tripled up.
- The number of active donkey collars is 85 of which 54 were tracked (plus an additional seven collars with unknown frequencies that were with other collared donkeys). Around 38 of total collars were old (i.e. greater than 5 years 2007-2009, and anything pre-2008 was unlikely to transmit due to battery life, hence not tracked or received no signal).
- A number of donkeys were paired/tripled up so will need re-collaring as well as replacing old collars; and a review of distribution may be required for next year’s program.
- 3 donkeys were recorded as dead (collars not transmitting).

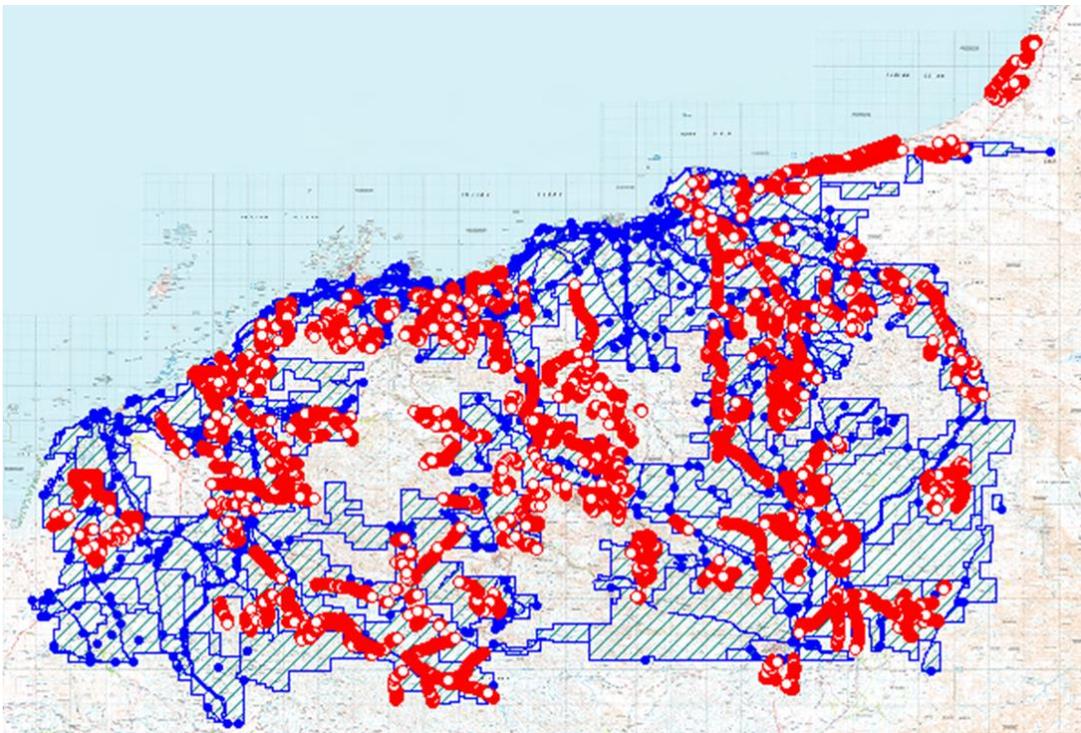
2015/16 Wild Dog Aerial and Ground Baiting Operations

DAFWA arranged and delivered regional wild dog baiting across the Pilbara region during the period 4th September – 18th September 2015.

Overall participation of pastoral properties in the regional baiting was around 88%. 49 stations participated in aerial baiting. Eight stations not participating in the aerial baiting for a range of reasons. Some stations decide to take the baits allocated to them and place them out on the ground themselves in areas of wild dog activity. 442 bags of baits or 132,600 dried meat baits were laid through aerial and ground baiting. Some stations close to major town centres did not participate due to uncontrolled public access with a high risk of pet dogs taking baits when on station pastoral lease land. Some stations with organic status were not able to bait due to organic certification requirements.

The WA Water Corporation allowed aerial baiting in the Harding dam property, and DPaW supported aerial baiting of dog leads in areas adjoining pastoral properties to assist with a regional, tenure-neutral declared pest control program.

Pilbara aerial baiting flight paths – September 2015. The clear spaces are mostly DPaW properties, and some pastoral stations received baits to ground baits themselves rather than participate in the aerial baiting.



Signed:

Kim Parsons, Secretary/Treasurer, Pilbara Regional Biosecurity Group