

MEEKATHARRA RANGELANDS BIOSECURITY ASSOCIATION INC
ANNUAL REPORT 2022/2023

INTRODUCTION

The Meekatharra Rangelands Biosecurity Association Inc (MRBA) is an industry body with a membership of all pastoralists in the Shires of Yalgoo, Mount Magnet, Cue and Meekatharra. The Association is established under the Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007 with a charter to manage and control declared pests, both animal and plant.

The MRBA Constitution provides for a Management Committee of up to eleven members, with the responsibility of overseeing the operation of the Association. The Management Committee (with dates elected) as at the October 17, 2023 Annual General Meeting was as follows:

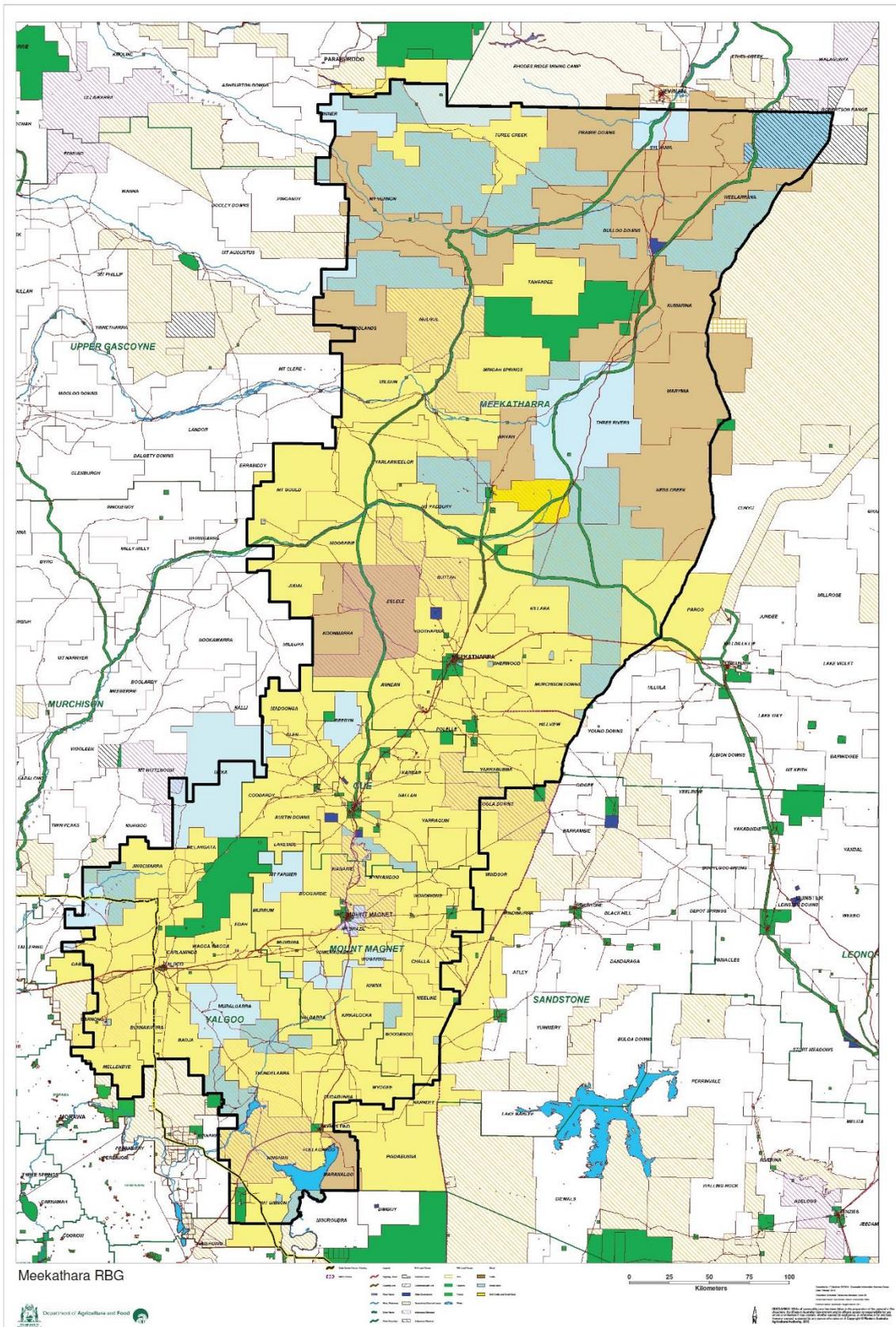
- Chairman – Liam Johns (2021)
- Vice Chairman – Murray Pens (2021)
- Secretary/Treasurer – Mayne Jenour (2023)
- Clyde Hall (2023)
- Angus Nichols (2023)
- Jarrad Blair (2022)
- Jorgen Jensen (2022)
- Rob Lefroy (2022)
- Corey Folezzani (2022)
- Ashley Dowden (2021)
- Greg Watters (2021)

MRBA operations are funded from annual declared pest rates paid by pastoralists, which are matched by the State Government and also by one-off grants from State and Federal NRM programs, Royalties for Regions and other sources.

The MRBA area covers approximately 184,000 square kilometres and incorporates 93 pastoral properties. There are also other landholdings with a mix of tenure including mining leases, UCL, national reserves and indigenous managed pastoral leases.

The following map (Figure 1) shows the extent of the MRBA area.

Figure 1: Map showing MRBA Area of Operation



Note: Land tenure changes may have occurred since this map was developed.

GENERAL OPERATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The main focus of the MRBA is on control of wild dogs and large feral herbivores. Declared plant populations, when detected, must be managed at the cost of individual pastoralists, or other land managers, since there is no budget available to support on ground actions through MRBA.

Wild Dogs are managed through the activities of Licensed Pest Management Technicians (LPMTs or 'doggers') who are contracted directly by the MRBA.

LPMTs must undergo rigorous training, checks and hold all the required certifications, insurances, etc, in order to meet their contractual requirements. They are independent operators who have excellent skills to enable them to operate effectively and safely in remote areas.

Each LPMT reports to a "coordinator" who is a local pastoralist with a thorough knowledge of the local area. Each coordinator and LPMT liaise regularly to ensure that current local knowledge of wild dog activity is shared.

In addition, MRBA undertakes two baiting programs each year – one in Autumn and one in Spring, with the aim being to target wild dogs at specific breeding times. There are seven bait racks located on pastoral leases across the MRBA region, with a designated pastoralist acting as the coordinator for each.

Bait meat is ordered (from Geraldton and/or Perth) in bulk quantities, then freighted to distribution centres in (or near) towns from which it is transported to each bait rack location on the planned community bait rack days. Pastoralists in each area surrounding their local bait rack attend the bait rack day/s, helping to cut meat into suitable sizes, inject each piece with the correct amount of poison, bag and distribute the baits. Only those with the correct and current training to be an "injector" may carry out that part of the program. Quantities of baits are meticulously recorded against each pastoral lease, and then the baits are laid by pastoralists and LPMTs, depending on each individual situation. Each property being allocated baits must have their manager, or other approved person, who holds a Restricted Chemical Product Permit take delivery of their baits.

Bait rack days require enormous commitment from pastoralists, but they believe that it is critical that these programs continue. In the previous year one bait program was missed, and the feedback from pastoralists and LPMTs alike indicated that the observed increase in wild dog numbers was a direct result of this reduced program.

The cost of bait meat is now over \$6.00 per kilogram, which is considerably more than the price that pastoralists receive for their livestock at market. Freight is also a major financial outlay, with the need for refrigerated transport to carry between 9 and 12 tonne of meat distances of more than 600 kilometres.

All pastoral properties in the MRBA region must have one designated person (e.g.: owner, manager, caretaker) who holds a current Restricted Chemical Product permit issued by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) in order for baiting and for LPMT work to be carried out on that property.

Where wild dog control is carried out on land managed by the Department of Biosecurity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA), our LPMTs are required to hold the permit for that property instead of DBCA staff.

Large Feral Herbivores are the other main category of declared pests that MRBA endeavours to manage. Animals such as feral camels, donkeys and horses can breed up to substantial herd numbers if left unchecked. The damage that these feral herbivores can do to both the natural environment and infrastructure is keenly noticed by pastoralists.

Camels are particularly strong and can damage, and even destroy, water troughs, pipelines, tanks, fences and yards. Horses and donkeys, both requiring daily water, will often remain on or near a water hole during hot weather, preventing livestock from accessing drinking water and frequently fouling the water by pawing.

The physical damage that these large feral herbivores can do to the natural environment impacts many native birds and animals. Their hard hooves can easily destroy burrows, nests and other habitat features needed by our native fauna. They also compete with livestock for food, yet offer no returns to the pastoralist as the cost to muster and transport them to market, if markets for these animals did exist, make such endeavours financially impractical.

Declared Plants are also of importance, but the MRBA has no budget allocation for declared pest plants. Fortunately, there is only one plant family that the group concentrates on, that being Cactus.

When a cactus population is reported, MRBA provides control information to the relevant land manager, however, they have no jurisdiction to insist that the control works are carried out.

A recent example of this occurred when a population of cactus was reported by a member of the public to the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. DPIRD then forwarded the report to MRBA who ascertained that the population was situated on a major road reserve and therefore the responsibility of Main Roads WA.

After discussion with a Main Roads staff member responsible for this area, there has been no action yet taken to control this cactus population. It is extremely frustrating to see a government agency refusing to take responsibility for a declared plant, especially when individual pastoralists work hard to ensure that any declared plant populations on their own leases are immediately dealt with.

DECLARED PEST ACCOUNT FUNDING

The MRBA has established a Declared Pest Account (DPA) into which the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) deposits the declared pest rates paid by pastoralists and the government's matching contribution. In 2022/2023 DPA receipts were \$412,679 with an expenditure, excluding GST, of \$467,783. The shortfall had to be covered by external funds from a commercial entity who granted the MRBA a one-off sum of money through their Community Sponsorship program.

The principal activities and costs funded from the Declared Pest Account were:

2022/2023 Community Wild Dog Baiting Program

In 2022/2023 the MRBA conducted two community bait rack programs - one in May and one in September/October. The MRBA operates seven bait racks with the program for 2022/2023 detailed below:

Location	Spring Baiting Dates 2022	Quantity/Type of Bait
Pullagaroo	12 th October	690kg bulk 150kg bulk for DBCA
Challa	3 rd October	1,400kg bulk
Melangata	13 th October	1,250kg bulk 150kg bulk for DBCA
Killara	TBD	750kg bulk 150kg bulk for DBCA
Yarraquin	12 th October	640kg bulk
Yarlarweelor	7 th Oct	2020kg bulk
Ilgarrarie	September 16 th /17 th	1,640kg bulk
TOTALS		MRBA: 8,390 kg DBCA: 450 kg
Location	Autumn Baiting Dates 2023	Quantity/Type of Bait
Pullagaroo	27 th May	1,000kg
Challa	31 st May	2,000kg
Melangata	30 th May	1,000kg 300kg for DBCA
Killara	19 th May	700kg 300kg for DBCA
Yarraquin	2 nd June	640kg
Yarlarweelor	26 th May	3,000kg
TOTALS		MRBA: 8,340kg DBCA: 600kg

Meat quantities are determined in consultation with Rack Co-ordinators and in 2022/2023 expenditure was approximately \$111,500.

In September 2022, a specially fitted-out aircraft was hired from Denham to enable baits prepared at the Ilgarrarie bait rack to be laid in inaccessible country in the north of the MRBA area. The cost of this aerial baiting aircraft was \$12,794.

As can be seen from the table above the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) was involved and they had staff in attendance at the Pullagaroo, Melangata, and Killara bait racks for the Spring program. In 2022/2023 DBCA purchased 1050kg of baits prepared on their behalf from the MRBA at a cost of \$8,775.

The MRBA community baiting program operates on the basis that a coordinated approach, where all pastoralists lay baits within the same time frame, is an essential basis of a successful wild dog reduction program. Further details of the community baiting program are contained in the MRBA Wild Dog Management Plan which is available on request.

Employment of Doggers

In 2022/2023 the MRBA employed five Licenced Pest Management Technicians (LPMTs) (or 'doggers') utilising Declared Pest Account funding. The role of the doggers is to support pastoralists in their efforts to control wild dogs by trapping and also to assist with laying wild dog baits.

The areas of operation of the doggers are Yagahorn, Meekatharra West, Cue, Mount Magnet and Mount Magnet East. The five doggers worked on either a part-time or full-time basis (depending on individual contracts) at a total cost of \$288,010.

In addition to trapping and baiting, MRBA's doggers maintain close contact with pastoralists and provide technical advice on wild dog management when required.

ROYALTIES FOR REGIONS DOGGER FUNDING

The MRBA also receives funding under the Royalties for Regions Program for the employment of four additional doggers. These doggers operate on lands under the control of the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions and adjoining pastoral lease buffer zones. Areas of operation are Doolgunna (northeast of Meekatharra), Paynes Find North, Paynes Find South and Yalgoo.

The continuation of Royalties for Regions funding was approved by the Minister up until 30 June 2025. This arrangement has been extended as part of the WA Wild Dog Action Plan to 30 June 2025 with funding of \$250,000 each financial year. This makes no allowance for increased costs and does not even cover CPI increases.

Expenditure in 2022/2023 totalled \$250,000, which completely expended this funding.

EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Our Executive Officer, Margi Weir, commenced in this role in November 2022. Margi has made good progress with the task of refining the association's administrative systems, whilst simultaneously learning all the requirements for operations of the MRBA's programs.

CHAIRMAN'S STATEMENT

It is a pleasure to submit this annual report and in so doing I acknowledge, with thanks, the contribution over the last twelve months of all Committee Members, the Secretary-Treasurer Mayne Jenour and Executive Officer Margi Weir.



Liam Johns
Chairman
Meekatharra Rangelands Biosecurity Association
17 October 2023

For further enquires please contact the
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