

Feral camel management across remote Australia – a successful outcome

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A mob of camels at Docker River. Credit: Ninti One

Landscapes, people, industries and cultural assets, are safer and healthier as a result of a complex project to manage one of the nation's pests - feral camels.

When roaming in unmanaged numbers feral camels threaten vegetation,

wildlife and Aboriginal cultural assets, damage community and pastoralism infrastructure and become a risk to human safety.

The achievements and outcomes of the Australian Feral Camel Management Project (AFCMP), which recently concluded after four years' intensive survey and management activity across remote Australia, will be outlined in Canberra this week. The Managing Director of Ninti One, which coordinated the AFCMP, Ms Jan Ferguson said that the \$19m program had achieved a significant reduction in feral camel densities around the 18 environmental sites targeted, especially in the Simpson Desert and Pilbara regions.

"As a result of feral camel management, native vegetation, wildlife and waterholes are in better condition over large tracts of landscape, the pastoral industry has experienced reduced camel pressure on its grazing lands and Aboriginal communities have seen their cultural heritage protected," she said.

The program was designed to

- Reduce camel impacts at 18 known biodiversity sites
- Reduce the impacts of camels in pastoral areas
- Improve the information on feral camel population

"Before the program, native wildlife, pasture, water resources and cultural heritage were all at considerable risk from a growing herd of feral camels, numbering hundreds of thousands.. These were introduced as transport animals more than 100 years ago and turned loose when other forms of transport replaced them. They were, until recently, causing havoc across large swathes of the inland as their numbers increased."

Among its outcomes, the AFCMP has:

- removed over 160,000 feral camels, achieving low density targets at key environmental sites
- reduced the impact on pastoral leases
- conducted extensive surveys that now estimate the current population to be in the vicinity of 300,000
- established landholder consent across 1.3 million sq km of priority management areas for commercial and/or non-commercial feral camel removal
- built strong collaborations across federal, state and local government agencies, natural resource management bodies, pastoralist and Aboriginal stakeholder groups
- strengthened relationships between the commercial camel industry and landholders
- built the skills and infrastructure for ongoing commercial and non-commercial forms of removal
- significantly improved scientific knowledge about feral camels, their impacts and their management in Australia
- delivered the project \$4 million dollars under budget.

The AFCMP contracted extensive aerial surveys in 2013 to derive an improved estimate of the feral camel population, being around 300,000. The reduction in the feral camel population from previous estimates is attributed to: increased survey information and improved knowledge about feral camel population dynamics; removal under the AFCMP and by individual landholders and; natural mortality due to drought and fire.

"It was a huge effort in many ways," says Ms. Ferguson. "It involved building relationships and collaboration across several state borders, government agencies, the private sector and hundreds of different landholders and Aboriginal communities. But it has paid off, and shows

what can be achieved when the will, the evidence and the resources are there."

"We will present details on the findings and outcomes of the project, as well as on the prospects and necessity for continued control measures to keep camels in check across our precious inland landscapes."

Provided by Ninti One

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