

PILBARA REGIONAL BIOSECURITY GROUP INC.

ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17



Refuelling and loading baits into plane – Pilbara aerial baiting September 2016
(Photo: Jaime Gratte)

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.

Management Committee Membership as at 30 June 2017:

NAME	OFFICE HELD	ORGANISATION	DATE APPOINTED TO COMMITTEE	EXPIRY DATE OF TERM
Ian Hayes	Chairperson	Yandeyarra Station	2-Nov-16	2-Nov-19
Annabelle Coppin	Vice Chairperson	Yarrie Station	2-Nov-16	2-Nov-19
Kim Parsons	Treasure/Secretary	Coolawanyah Station	4-Nov-14	3-Nov-17
Jamie Richardson	1. Full Member	Mt Florence Station	7-Nov-13	2-Nov-19
Joe Armstrong	2. Full Member	To be confirmed – possibly Yanrey	2-Nov-16	2-Nov-19
Clint Thompson	3. Full Member	Wyloo Station	13-Jun-17	2-Nov-20
VACANT	4. Full Member			
VACANT	5. Associate Member			
Vince George	6. Associate Member	Fortescue Metals Group	13-Jun-17	2-Nov-20
Alicia Whittington	7. Associate Member	Department of Parks and Wildlife	11-Mar-10	2-Nov-19
Jo Kuiper	8. Associate Member	Project Manager/delegate Pilbara Mesquite Management Committee	11-Mar-10	2-Nov-19

**** NOTE: The official Constitution of the Pilbara RBA (Inc.) provides that the Management Committee comprise a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Secretary/Treasurer and not less than 5 and not more than 8 other persons, all of whom must either be a full member, or an associate member, of the Association. The Constitution also limits the Management Committee to a maximum of 4 associate members at any one time.**

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 Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) [ex Parks and Wildlife], with operational support and agreements with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD), to undertake donkey collaring control programs and opportunistic aerial culling of camels and feral horses. The DBCA also contribute to wild dog aerial baiting on wild dog leads (movement corridors) from pastoral stations into DBCA 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 2016/17 focused on minimising the impact of declared weeds and pests on industry, environment and the community. This is primarily delivered through funding for:

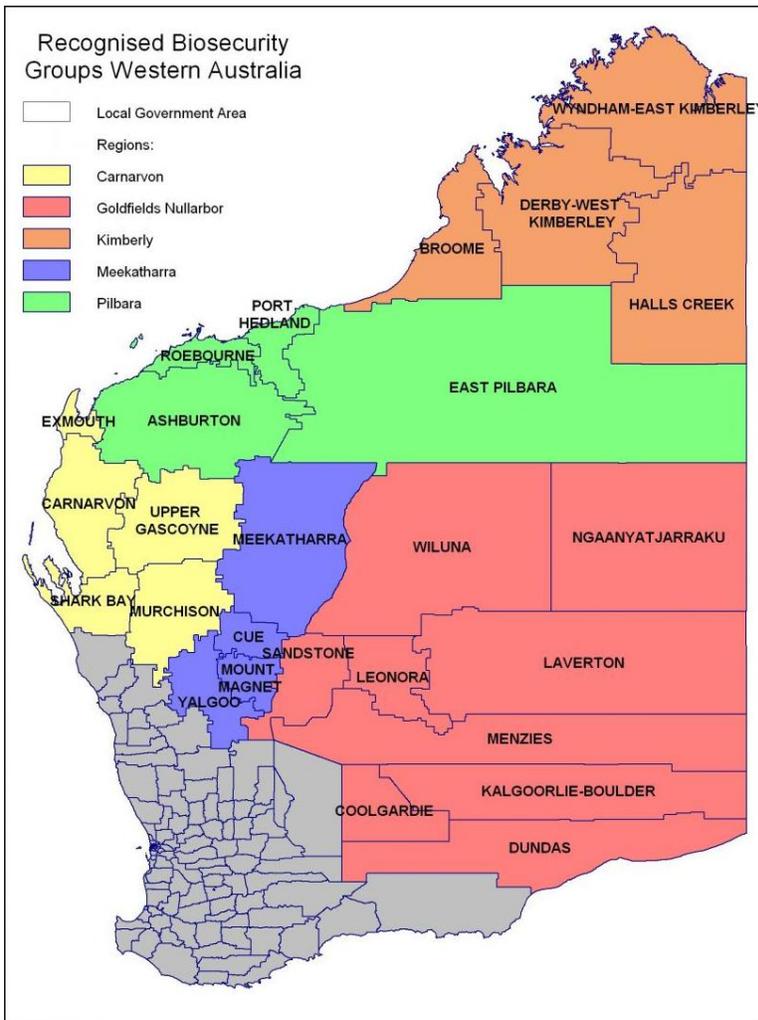
- An annual community aerial and ground coordinated baiting program for wild dogs. Landholders are also encouraged to undertake ground control throughout the year as a primary method of wild dog management;
- A Radio Telemetry program for Feral Donkey control in the east and central Pilbara; and
- Working 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 – IAN HAYES

I joined the Management Committee at last year's AGM as a Committee member, when Dave Rutherford stepped into the Chairperson's role with the resignation of Geoff Mills due to Geoff moving away from the region. After Dave Rutherford's resignation in April this year, also due to moving from the region, I became the Chairperson late in May this year.

Thank you to the Management Committee, and organisations including DAFWA, DPaW, the Pilbara Mesquite Management Committee, 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.

The Pilbara RBG's Executive Officer, Bill Currans, coordinated the regional wild dog aerial and ground baiting program in September 2016 for the first time, taking over from DAFWA who had run the regional baiting program over previous years.

The Pilbara RBG had budget to run four large feral herbivore exercises in 2016/17, mainly continuing the donkey “Judas” telemetry program and opportunistic aerial shooting of feral camels and horses. The RBG has a contract with DPaW to deliver one of these four exercises through DAFWA. DAFWA delivered three Donkey Telemetry Runs during the 2016/17 financial year, with a fourth run deferred from June 2017 into the 2017/18 financial year. DAFWA invested in training additional staff in aerial shooting to build staff capacity in aerial shooting of large feral herbivores, and training in using the radio telemetry project to collar and locate donkeys. The effort made by DAFWA to build capacity and deliver the Pilbara RBG’s “Judas” program is appreciated.

I look forward to seeing the Pilbara RBG continuing to move forward in the 2017/18 financial year.

Ian Hayes, Chair, Pilbara RBG

4. PILBARA RBG OPERATIONS 2016-17

The Pilbara RBG has a Declared Pest Account into the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) deposits the declared pest rates paid by pastoralists and the government’s matching contribution. The Pilbara RBG also partners with the Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) [ex Parks and Wildlife], with operational support and agreements with the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD), to undertake donkey collaring control programs and opportunistic aerial culling of camels and feral horses. The DBCA also contribute to wild dog aerial baiting on wild dog leads (movement corridors) from pastoral stations into DBCA managed properties.

In 2016/2017 operational income (excluding GST) was:

• Operational Funding*	\$191,174
• Grant Funding	\$0
• Interest Received	\$692
• Other Income	\$0
Total Operating Income	\$191,866

*Only one of two payments of DPA funds was made from DAFWA to Pilbara RBG.

2016/17 operational activities and expenditure covered:

• Accounting adjustments	\$1,374.14
• Advertising and promotion	\$521.24
• Audit fees	\$2,400.00
• Baits, Collars and Traps	\$222,719.13
• Catering	\$469.41
• Bank Fees And Charges	\$0.00
• Contract payments	\$30,000
• Executive Support	\$64,760.41
• Fines (ATO)	\$0.00
• Fuel & oil	\$41,413.32
• Helicopter charter	\$111,062.50
• Subscriptions	\$135.00
• Telephone	\$97.02
Total Operating Expenses	\$478,437.06
Surplus (deficit) from ordinary activities	(\$286,570.97)
Net surplus (deficit) attributable to the association	(\$286,570.97)
Total changes in equity of the association	(\$286,570.97)
Opening retained surplus	\$642,174.07
Net surplus (deficit) attributable to the association	(\$286,570.97)
Closing retained surplus	\$355,603.10

During the 2016/17 financial year the large feral herbivore control work, mainly through the donkey collaring program, was significantly increased due to DAFWA addressing capacity issues and conducting three donkey telemetry runs. Reflecting this increase in capacity, the helicopter charter costs increased from around \$52,000 in 15/16 to around \$111,063 in 2016/17. The \$285,175 of negative operating profit was drawn from DPA funds held in the Pilbara RBG's bank account.

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.

2016/17 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.

Summary Table:

Dates of Operation	No Donkeys culled from collars	No Feral Horses culled - opportunistic	No Camels culled - opportunistic	Comments
18-23 July 2016	91	40	31	The focus of the July Pilbara donkey telemetry run was re-collaring of old collars (pre-2010) and getting the program back on track to be an effective Judas animal program. Many were paired or tripled up, and these have now been shot off and new collars fitted where required. 10 new collars fitted and 9 existing collars transferred into areas of “no signal”.

Dates of Operation	No Donkeys culled from collars	No Feral Horses culled - opportunistic	No Camels culled - opportunistic	Comments
31 Oct – 4 Nov 2016	106 (plus 3 opportunistic)	213	15	The focus of the October/November run was to complete radio telemetry on existing collars and undertake other Large Feral Herbivore (LFH feral camels/feral horses) density reductions based on station intelligence and/or opportunistic targets. 2 new collars fitted and 2 existing collars transferred. Majority of feral horses culled were on Roy Hill and Corruna stations.
1-5 May 2017	61	4	62	The focus of the May run was to complete radio telemetry on existing collars, culling of animals found with Judas animals; and undertaking opportunistic culling of Large Feral Herbivore (LFH feral camels/feral horses) during the aerial work. 5 new collars fitted and 1 existing collar transferred. This run also included a training exercise on Monday 1 May, to train additional DAFWA staff in telemetry work, to improve capacity. DAFWA purchased fuel and an additional helicopter to undertake this work.
June 2017				Deferred to 2017/18
2016-17 TOTALS	261	257	108	

The program has around 80 current active collars. A number of existing collars were replaced due to reaching the end of the collar battery life, and some new collars introduced during 2016/17.

2016/17 Wild Dog Aerial and Ground Baiting Operations

In previous years DAFWA had arranged and delivered regional wild dog baiting across the Pilbara region. DAFWA's role covered RCP permit completion, ordering and holding 1080 concentrate, ordering meat baits for delivery to Karratha, injecting 1080 into pre-cut meat baits to prepare 1080 dried meat baits at the Karratha Station racks, arranging the aeroplane and aerial baiting program, purchasing avgas, and providing ground support to the aeroplane during baiting by driving avgas and baits to station airstrips across the region.

September 2016 was the first time the Pilbara RBG arranged and delivered regional wild dog 1080 aerial and ground baiting. This was an agreed arrangement with DAFWA when the Pilbara RBG had an Executive Officer in place with the capacity to take over the regional wild dog baiting arrangements.

From 1 July 2016, DAFWA introduced an administration fee for the processing and issuing of Restricted Chemical Product (RCP) permits. A current RCP permit is required for a property to receive and use 1080 chemicals and products including field prepared dried meat baits. Strychnine for use on wild dog traps is also allocated and supplied where required via the RCP permit system. The Pilbara RBG Executive Officer assisted Pilbara pastoralists with preparing five-year RCP permit applications and station maps, and the application process with DAFWA.

The DAFWA administration fee, along with stations being asked to complete/submit forms and maps, was a significant change to previous years and some stations decided against obtaining RCP permits (and therefore participating in regional wild dog control) based on the reasoning that there should not be a State charge involved where pastoralists have a legal obligation under State agricultural legislation to control wild dogs as declared pests, and that stations were also paying Declared Pest Rates and objected to having to pay an administration fee on top of their Declared Pest Rates. One station objected to having to prepare a new property map as part of their application, when they had owned the station for many years and there were no changes to their operations including wild dog baiting programs.

To comply with the 1080 Code of Practice, the Pilbara RBG:

- Placed baiting notices in regional newspapers, the Executive Officer spoke about the pending baiting program on regional ABC radio, and warning notices were emailed to tourist centres and roadhouses to warn local residents and tourists about the risk to domestic dogs from uncontrolled access to pastoral properties.
- Contracted a Licenced Pest Management Technician (LPMT/dogger) to inject 1080 concentrate into fresh meat baits at the regional bait racks situated on Karratha Station. To comply with the requirement to not leave 1080 meat baits unattended, the contracted LPMT camped at the racks overnight for nearly two weeks to ensure the baits drying on the racks were not left unattended. Employees of Medina Pet Meats who supplied the meat baits provided labour assistance at the racks with handling the baits (not injecting), with 1080 handling permits issued by DAFWA. This was a new and significant expense for the Pilbara RBG, compared to previous years when DAFWA was responsible for bait preparation.
- Ensured the contracted LPMT was named on every RCP permit as a User/Receiver, and the same contracted LPMT was the "bombardier" in the plane, dropping every bait from the plane and handing over baits for ground baiting to comply with RCP permits and 1080 Code of Practice requirements. This was a new and significant expense for the Pilbara RBG, compared to previous years when the charter aircraft company provided a bombardier.

- Ensured all 1080/strychnine chemical issued to stations (and baits on DPAW lands too) complied with RCP permit quantity limits, with the contracted LPMT delivering unused chemical back to the S7 Retailer at the conclusion of the baiting program. LPMTs are required to securely store and hold chemical as part of the LPMT licence requirements, along with keep records of chemical use and provision.
- Contracted a truck driver with a 1080 handling certificate as a Courier under the 1080 Code of Practice requirements to drive the 1080 meat baits and chemicals around the region, under supervision from the LPMT, during the regional baiting program. This was a new and significant expense for the Pilbara RBG, compared to previous years when DAFWA transported baits around the region during the regional baiting program.

DAFWA Karratha was the S7 Retailer in 2016/17 until June 2017. The S7 Retailer is responsible for storing 1080 and strychnine products under a S7 Retailer Licence issued by the Department of Health, and is also responsible for providing chemical to RCP permit holders within the conditions and limits of the current RCP permit. The Pilbara RBG pays for the chemical eg 1080 concentrate, and the Pilbara RBG owned chemical is held by the S7 Retailer. The S7 Retailer is listed on the RCP permits in the region, and all chemical must be supplied by the listed S7 Retailer.

About five years ago in other biosecurity group areas in the WA rangelands, regional biosecurity groups, under pressure from DAFWA to no longer use DAFWA as an S7 retailer and for biosecurity groups to develop independence from the Department, established commercial or business arrangements with S7 Retailer arrangements such as agricultural chemical suppliers or pest control businesses. In June 2017, the Pilbara RBG established an arrangement with a regional pest control business in Karratha to take over the S7 Retailer role from DAFWA, which brought the Pilbara RBG region in line with DAFWA's decision to exit the role of S7 retailer.

Summary of September 2016 regional wild dog baiting program

- 158,100 (or 527 bags of) field prepared dried meat baits were produced at the Karratha Station racks over a two-week period.
- RCP permit applications and supporting maps were prepared and submitted for 49 pastoral properties and ten DPaW properties to allow these properties to participate in the regional baiting.
- Four stations did not obtain a RCP permit as they objected to having to pay a permit fee to DAFWA, or objected to having to prepare a map as part of their application when identical maps should be held on file by DAFWA from the previous annual permit.
- Five stations decided not to participate for other reasons, mainly proximity to major centres of Karratha and Port Hedland where there was a high risk that domestic dogs would be taken onto stations and would take baits.
- Some stations decide to take the baits allocated to them and place them out on the ground themselves in areas of wild dog activity.
- 506 bags of baits or 151,800 dried meat baits were laid through aerial and ground baiting, with 21 bags left over which were stored at the DAFWA depot and later disposed of as baits were too old to risk being used and being sub-lethal and causing wild dogs to become unwell but survive and become bait shy.

- Some stations with organic status determined they were able to bait without affecting their organic certification requirements.
- DPaW supported aerial baiting of dog leads in areas adjoining pastoral properties to assist with a regional, tenure-neutral declared pest control program.
- Stirrup Iron Contracting (Jamie Gratte) was contracted to provide a truck with a ventilated container and a skid-steer machine to transport the 1080 meat baits and avgas around the Pilbara region for around 11 days during the aerial baiting. The skid-steer machine eliminated manual handling of 200 litre drums of avgas, and made plane refuelling very efficient with avgas and baits moved to the plane with the skid-steer.
- Norwest Airworks (Eric Roulston) was contracted to provide the plane and pilot for the aerial baiting. Eric Roulston’s experience with the Pilbara region, and knowledge of airstrip locations and conditions was invaluable. 84.1 hours were flown to complete the aerial baiting.
- Adam Robinson, LPMT was contracted to both prepare the 1080 wild dog meat baits, and be the “bombardier” in the plane to drop the baits. Adam Robinson was listed on every RCP permit as a Nominated Person – LPMT to be able to drop/lay baits on participating stations.

Signed: Date:

Ian Hayes, Chairperson, Pilbara Regional Biosecurity Group