

## Recreational hunting and feral animal control

*The Invasive Species Council supports programs that effectively and humanely control feral animals to reduce their damage to the environment. Such programs may sometimes benefit from the contribution of skilled recreational shooters. However, ISC does not support open access for recreational hunters on public lands, for this is generally ineffective for feral animal control, and may encourage the translocation and protection of feral species and undermine professional control efforts.*

To protect the environment from feral animals such as pigs, foxes and rabbits, it is often necessary to reduce their numbers. But this does not mean that every feral animal killed equates to a reduction in population numbers or conservation benefits.

Killing feral animals can be futile because there is usually a large “doomed surplus”, which means that population levels remain high when some are killed.

Most young foxes do not survive long unless an adult fox dies, creating a vacancy for them to occupy. In most cases, killing one feral animal means that another will survive to take its place, and population reduction is not achieved.

In the case of foxes, it is often the young and inexperienced animals that are shot, and these individuals might well have died anyway.

Research has shown that population reduction often requires killing more than half a population annually to exceed the rate at which those killed can be replaced by immigration or survival of those who would have otherwise died.

Killing a few feral animals can sometimes be of benefit in small areas or to protect particular assets. A farmer can benefit from the killing of a few foxes to protect lambs. But to protect large environmental areas is very difficult and most unlikely to be achieved by granting recreational hunters access to state forests and national parks.

Genuine reductions in numbers are only achieved when sustained control efforts meet specified targets that exceed replacement rates. Shooting is not usually the best method of achieving reductions.

Government codes of practice, which are based on decades of experience, specify that ground shooting is ineffective to control most feral animals, including foxes, pigs, goats and rabbits (see <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive/publications/humane-control.html>).

<http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/invasive/publications/humane-control.html>).

However, shooting can be used to supplement other more effective methods and skilled recreational shooters may be of assistance in such programs. The Invasive Species Council commends their voluntary assistance where it contributes to achieving environmental benefits.

The Invasive Species Council opposes providing recreational hunters general access to public lands with conservation values.

There is the risk of governments withdrawing from targeted control programs in the belief that recreational hunters provide an equivalent service. There are also serious risks that maverick hunters will introduce feral animals onto public lands to create better hunting opportunities, as has occurred with deer and pigs, and that they will undermine professional control efforts.

For further information about hunting and feral animal control, see [www.invasives.org.au/home](http://www.invasives.org.au/home).