

Kimberley Rangelands Biosecurity Association

Invasive Species Activity Report 2023/24



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Large Feral Herbivores

Overview: The Kimberley Rangelands Biosecurity Association (KRBA) has an annual Large Feral Herbivore (LFH) culling program that includes feral donkeys, horses and camels along with other animals such as water buffalo and pigs that are targeted opportunistically when located. The program focusses primarily on donkeys, using the Judas program's radio telemetry techniques with horses and camels culled opportunistically during the tracking process. Currently there are approximately 45 active collars spread throughout the Kimberley, but focussed mainly in the Central and North Kimberley regions.

Occasionally and as required dedicated management culls are enacted for feral horses and camels. An example of this is an annual cull of feral horses in the East Kimberley focusing on the Great Northern Highway and adjacent pastoral leases. The cull's primary role is dual in nature, firstly to reduce the impact of the horses on pastoral land and secondly to reduce the risk of traffic accidents and the subsequent potential injury to road users as a result of horses gravitating to water points and better grazing opportunities immediately adjacent the highway.

Achievements as per operational plan: After the suspension of all programs in the 2022-23 year due to Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) Biosecurity Officers having their authority to shoot suspended limited culling was undertaken in 2023-24 using both DPIRD



Feral donkeys and horses make up the bulk of the KRBA's annual LFH cull program in the Kimberley.

and private shooters. DPIRD shooters undertook two culls over 15 days focussing primarily on donkeys in the North and West Kimberley regions and there was a further three-day cull of horses in the East-Kimberley undertaken by a private contractor. Results of animals culled on those runs are as follows (see Table 1) –

Donkeys	Horses	Camels	Pigs
150	852	nil	nil

Table 1

In addition to the culls a total of five new collars were deployed on donkeys over the year and zero DNA samples were taken.

It is recognised by the KRBA that land managers also contribute to controlling feral herbivores with both opportunistic and planned culling programs of their own however no figures of those programs are available.

No aerial shooting operations were carried out over Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) managed land by the KRBA. However, DBCA did undertake its own management shoot over the Drysdale National Park, the Ord River Regeneration area and other reserves. Their data is provided to the KRBA annually.

Analysis: A cost benefit analysis was undertaken of the Judas Program by the KRBA in 2019 to assist in determining the direction of the program over the next 30 years. It was found that the program to date had generated a Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) of 3.8 for every dollar spent on the program. It should be noted that the ratio was for the Judas Program, any management cull that controlled comparatively large numbers of animals in a relatively short period of time would be expected to generate a much better BCR. A specific example of this is the 2021-22 year where donkey cull numbers represented only 26% of total number of horses culled but in a time span of 7.5 times longer.

On that basis it could be reasonably expected that of the \$125,000 spent on LHF control in 2023-24 there would have been a \$475,000 benefit to the pastoral industry on top of the expected benefits to the numerous high value public environmental assets such as National Parks, Nationally Important Wetlands, Ramsar Sites and recognised Wild Rivers situated in the Kimberley that the cost benefit analysis was unable to take into account in its calculations.

Performance indicators: In 2018 DPIRD carried out an evaluation of the Judas feral donkey management program in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions of Western Australia 1994 – 2017. Data from that evaluation has been utilised in addressing some of the following indicators. However, it is accepted that the problems encountered in the program over the past two years will more than likely take two additional years to rectify given the lost ground in terms of collar battery life failing as the collars were not relaxed when required, reacquiring contact with the donkey still with active collars and the loss of experience in the program due to changes in personnel.

Reduction in feral donkey populations: Whilst we have good data on the numbers of LFH animals culled we still are unable to confirm populations at the start of the program and the present day. However, using the cull data (see Figure 1) it has been estimated that when the program began in 1978 there were an estimated 250,000 animals in the Kimberley region and the current population is estimated at between 3,000 and 5,000 animals.

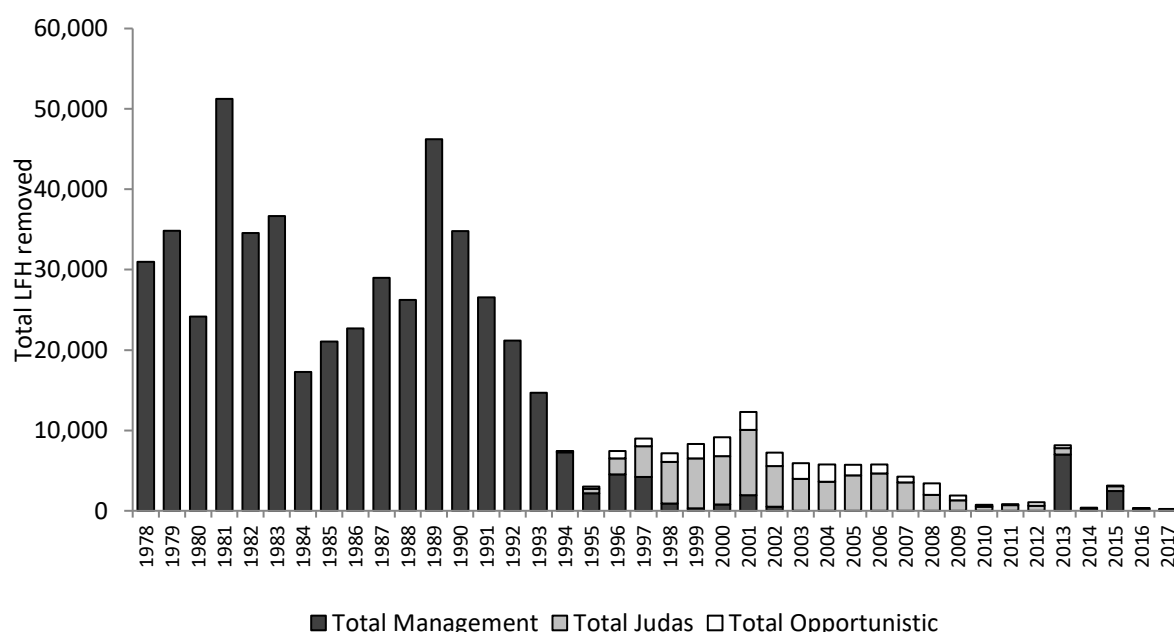


Figure 1: Annual removal of LFH in the Kimberley during the management program (1978 – 2017); black bars – management shoots; light grey bars – Judas program, and white bars – opportunistic shoots associated with the Judas program.

Number of properties locally eradicated: In 2017 it was believed that nearly 75% (n = 58) of all properties participating in the Judas program have reached the stage of being considered eradicated. It took on average 9.2 (± 4.5) years to achieve local eradication (see Table 2, Figure 2A). On that basis 25% (n = 19) properties are considered to be under the Judas control program. Some are nearly

eradicated and some are under a monitoring phase to confirm localized eradication (see Table 2 and Figure 2B).

The number of donkeys controlled diminished considerably, which indicates that the Judas program has been highly successful. The relative cost per donkey controlled now is considerably higher than during the initial phases of the Management shoots and the beginning of the Judas program.

Shire	Properties participating in Judas program n	Properties considered eradicated n (%)	Properties considered to be under control (nearly eradicated) n (%)
West Kimberley	32	23 (72%)	9 (28%)
Halls Creek	23	21 (91%)	2 (9%)
East Kimberley	22	14 (64%)	8 (36%)
Total	77	58 (75%)	19 (25%)

Table 2: Number of properties that participated in the Judas program, properties that have been considered eradicated, and properties that remain under the control program

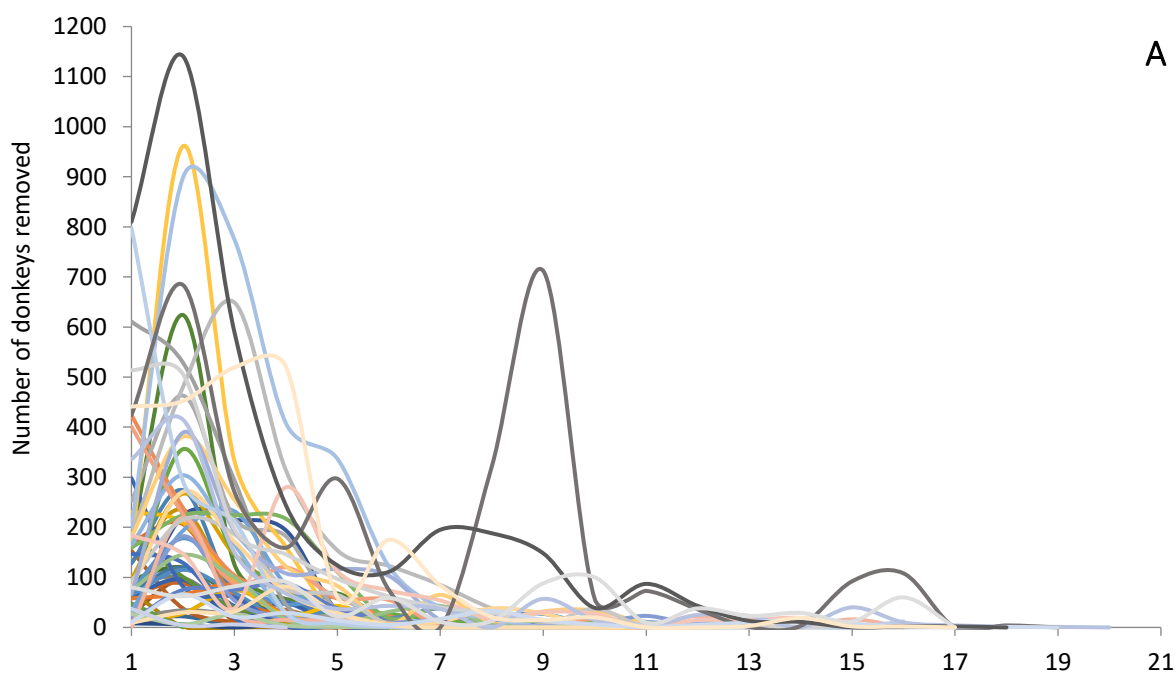


Figure 2A

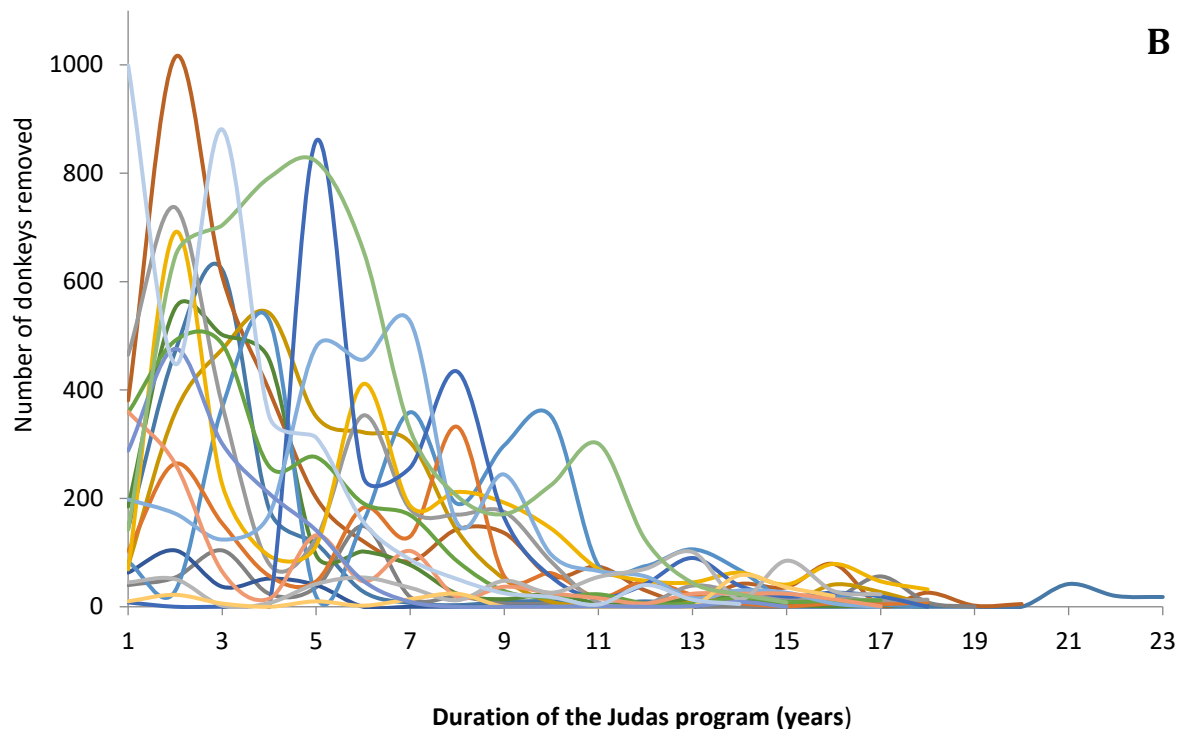
B

Figure 2B: Properties (n = 58) that are considered eradicated, and properties (n = 19) which are under control with low donkey numbers; each line represents one pastoral property

Reduction in feral camel and horse populations: There is not the data at this stage to indicate the full extent of culls on both the camel and horse populations in the Kimberley as their culling programs are less intensive than the donkey program. However anecdotal evidence from land managers indicates that these culls have been extremely effective at a local level.

Recommendations: Given the experiment using private contractors was unsuccessful in 2023 and as it does appear that DPIRD'S issues in providing shooters will have come to an end by November 2024 the recommendation is to reestablish DPIRD shooters as the priority contractor but work with local businesses to find an alternative option for shooting personnel in the longer term.



The Judas program tracks collared donkeys from the air using radio telemetry techniques employed by the shooter and pilot.

Wild Dogs

Overview: The KRBA runs two aerial baiting programs a year to support the individual ground baiting programs run by pastoral stations. They are usually programmed for April and September to avoid rains that will render the baits useless. The programs are coordinated by a contractor. In addition to the baiting service the contractor also provides according to the demand bait injection courses for pastoralists as part of the baiting service provided by the KRBA.

Achievements as per operational plan: The September 2023 program covered 22 stations baiting on 33 leases. No stations cancelled on this run and there were no new stations coming on board that had not participated previously. This resulted in the following bait quantities dropped or supplied to pastoralists –

- 77,000 baits were injected by the contractor.
- 7,000 pre-made field prepared dried meat baits were supplied to stations by the contractor.
- 2 Litres of 1080 CLC were supplied to pastoralists to inject their own baits.
- Average time baits sat on the racks after injecting was 2.8 days.
- 10% of respondents replied to the initial yes/no enquiry (poor).
- Bait quality (rated out of 10) ranged between 6 and 10 with five stations below 8.

The May 2024 program covered 23 stations baiting on 35 leases. No stations cancelled or forgot/ran out of time to do baits after the commencement of the program and there were no new stations that participated in the May program that had not participated previously. This resulted in the following bait quantities dropped or supplied to pastoralists –

- 75,100 baits were injected by the contractor.
- 2,000 pre made baits were supplied to stations.
- 5 litres of 1080 concentrate was supplied to pastoralists to inject their own baits.
- Average time baits sat on the racks after injecting was 2.6 days.
- 25% of respondents replied to the initial yes/no enquiry (about average).
- Bait quality (rated out of 10) ranged between 6 and 10 with four stations below 8.

Analysis: A cost benefit analysis was undertaken for DPIRD'S WA Wild Dog Action Plan 2016 – 21. It estimated that dog control in the Kimberley had a Benefit Cost Ratio of 5.1. On that basis it could be reasonably expected that the \$243,000 funds spent of wild dog control in the 2023-24 year gave a benefit to industry of \$1,215,000.

In 2021 Murdoch University, Western Australia carried out a year-long study on the diet of dingoes in the West Kimberley. In scat samples cattle were detected in 65.3% of those samples. Compared with the



Contractors demonstrating how baits are made at one of the KRBA's training days.

national average diet of cattle being present in 13% of samples for the arid and tropical regions of Australia, the consumption of cattle (live and carrion) in the West Kimberley is very high, with greater consumption in the control and treatment sites at the end of the dry season compared to the early dry season the researchers noted. The concern from land managers is that if dingo numbers are not managed adequately there is huge potential for increased calf predation at the end of the dry season.

Performance indicator: No data is available to verify what calf survival rates are due to the program at a regional level however in the 2024 membership survey carried out by the KRBA it was identified that sixteen managers who regularly used the plane as part of their baiting program generally rated the threat of wild dogs lower than those who didn't and the twenty managers that rated the aerial baiting program service gave it an average score of 9.1/10, much the same as the 2022 rating of 9.25/10. Both these observations indicate that the satisfaction level with the program is extremely high.

Recommendations: Maintain wild dog program as per 2023-24 Operational Plan.

Pigs

No work was undertaken on pigs this year.

Recommendations: Initiate a pilot control program in two locations within the Kimberley region once a suitable contractor can be found.

Prickly Acacia

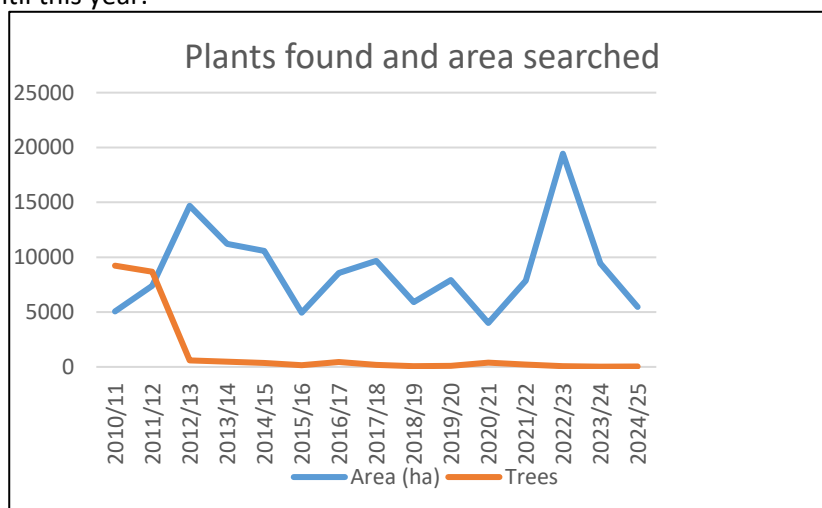
Overview: Prickly acacia is known to exist in two locations in Western Australia, both in the East Kimberley region. The KRBA runs the control program on the Nulla Nulla site and monitors the Gordon Downs site where control has been undertaken by the land manager. The Nulla Nulla site covers 10,578 hectares and work has been ongoing on that site since approximately 2004. The KRBA has supported this work in terms of funding since the onset and took control of the operational aspects of the program in 2017.

The Gordon Downs site was first identified by a DPIRD Biosecurity Officer in 2012 when a small number of juvenile plants were found. A number of monitoring runs have been undertaken since that time with no further plants found until this year.

Achievements as per operational plan:

Two control runs were carried out on the Nulla Nulla site over the 2023/24 year. In total 24 plants were controlled over a 9,441ha area. For reference, at the start of the program in November of 2010 9,230 plants were controlled in that year (see Graph 1).

Survey work was carried out on the Gordon Downs site with two mature plants found in October 2023. A second survey was conducted in February 2024 that covered 1,407 ha but found no more plants on the Gordon Downs site.



Graph 1

Analysis: No benefit cost analysis has been carried out on impact of Prickly Acacia on this site however the economic impacts of Prickly Acacia on QLD's grazing industry was estimated at \$5 million per year (2003). Even at medium densities, it halves productivity of grasslands, interferes with mustering and restricts access to water. This comes on top of the expected ecological benefits the removal of this weed from the Landscape would provide to the numerous high value public environmental assets such

as National Parks, Nationally Important Wetlands, Ramsar Sites and recognised Wild Rivers situated in the Kimberley.

Performance indicator: The performance indicator will be the eventual eradication of prickly acacia from the Kimberley region. This work is ongoing and confidence is reasonably high that the target is achievable given the results to date.

Recommendations: Maintain eradication program as per 2023-24 Operational Plan.

Mesquite

Overview: Mesquite is known to exist in four locations in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. The KRBA ran a control program over the Nicholson site until 2020 when it was handed over the lease owner Heytesbury Cattle Company after eight years of work had reduced the infestation down to a manageable size. At that same time the KRBA took on the operational work from DPIRD of the Yeeda and Thangoo infestations as well as previously providing financial support to those programs.



A mature mesquite plant found on coastal flats on the Thangoo lease.

Achievements as per operational plan: In 2023/24 the following field work was undertaken –

- 44,242ha was surveyed on the Yeeda site with 262 plants controlled over two trips involving four days' work.
- 3,552ha was surveyed on the Alexander Island site on Jubilee Downs with 3 plants controlled on one day trip.
- 3,568ha was surveyed on Thangoo with 5 plants controlled on one day trip.
- 3,594ha was surveyed on the Nicholson site with 159 plants controlled over two day trips.

Analysis: No benefit cost analysis has been carried out on impact of mesquite on these sites however it is well known that the Pilbara mesquite infestation covers in excess of 55,000ha and creates a significant cost to production and for control annually. This comes on top of the expected ecological benefits the removal of this weed from the Landscape would provide to the numerous high value public environmental assets such as National Parks, Nationally Important Wetlands, Ramsar Sites and recognised Wild Rivers situated in the Kimberley.

Performance indicator: The performance indicator will be the eventual eradication of mesquite from the Kimberley region. This work is ongoing and confidence is reasonably high that at least in some locations the target is achievable high given the results to date.

Recommendations: Maintain eradication program as per 2023-24 Operational Plan.

Rubber vine (*Cryptostegia grandiflora*)

Background: Rubber vine control in the Kimberley has been supported by the KRBA since 2009. There are two distinct programs, one in the East and the other in the West Kimberley managed by a

partnership group made by of the following organisations –

- DBCA
- DPIRD
- KRBA

Both programs are run by a single management and operational group (Western Australian Rubber Vine Advisory Group – WARVAC). Ground work is largely undertaken by contractors but partner organisations also provide in-kind as well as financial support. Coordination of the programs is provided to the group by DPIRD on a fee for service basis.



Contractors working to pull down a mature rubber vine plant to ensure there are no seed pods present. If found they would be destroyed on site.

The KRBA provides both funding and in-kind support to both programs. In 2020 the KRBA agreed to take on the role of sponsor organisation for SNRM

funding applications and to provide financial management to the programs. Other partner organisations also provide funding and in-kind contributions such as personnel to carry out the control and survey work. In 2023-24 the KRBA on behalf of the group was successful in applying for two grants. One was through the SNRM Community Stewardship Grants for \$261,000 and the second through the Environment Heritage and Culture Flexible Grants for \$362,400. These grants came on top of an initial successful application in 2021-22 through Community Stewardship Grants for \$267,500. These grants have enabled WARVAC to forward plan their operations until 2028-29.

Achievements as per operational plan: - Survey and control East and West Kimberley:

Description	East Kimberley	West Kimberley
Aerial survey	23000 ha	55000 ha
Area controlled (est)	280 ha	650 ha
Person days	134	154
Plants controlled	11391	36396
Seeders	68	152

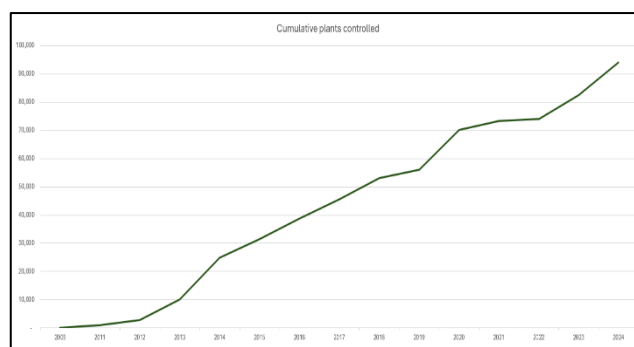
Table 3

Achievements as per operational plan: - Remote survey

“As a part of the remote sensing (RS) project for rubber vine, a second survey across several areas (approx. 30 ha) infested by rubber vine was conducted in the West Kimberley. The areas were selected based on medium and high density of rubber vine detected during aerial surveys conducted earlier in the year.

Whilst the aim of the first RS survey, conducted in 2023, was to capture flowering vines to develop the ‘AI flowering model’ for rubber vine, the aim of the second RS survey was to collect further images of flowering vines to further train the AI model. In addition, the 2024 survey tested a variety of flying speeds and elevations, as well as examined numerous image capture parameters to evaluate image data quality for further model training. Collected data will be used in the coming months by the subject matter experts to re-train the AI model for rubber vine.

Analysis: A 2014 DAFWA benefit-cost analysis, estimated that the eradication of current infestations in the Kimberley would prevent damage of \$10.9 million/year over a 30-year period based on agricultural impacts alone. This comes on top of the expected ecological benefits the removal of this weed from the landscape would provide to the numerous high value public environmental assets such as National Parks, Nationally Important Wetlands, Ramsar Sites and recognised Wild Rivers situated in the Kimberley. It is on this basis that the three organisations have agreed to undertake the program in partnership.



Graph 2

Performance indicator – Eradication of rubber vine: Ideally the performance indicator would be the eventual eradication of rubber vine from the Kimberley region. Data, particularly generated in the East Kimberley program demonstrates that eradication is achievable at local levels, particularly utilising the control methods learnt in that program. On that basis the work is ongoing and there is some confidence that the target is achievable high given the results to date. See Graph 2 indicating how the cumulative total of plants controlled flattened between 2022 and 2022.

Recommendations: Maintain eradication program as per 2023-24 operational plan.

Gamba grass

Overview: Eradication of the gamba grass infestation on El Questro Station has been supported by the KRBA since 2013 and is managed by a partnership group made by of the following organisations –

- DBCA
- DPIRD
- KRBA

Work is largely undertaken by contractors but partner organisations also provide personnel on the ground as well as financial support.

The KRBA provides both funding and in-kind support to the program. In 2020 the KRBA agreed to take on the role of sponsor organisation for the group's SNRM funding applications and to provide financial management to the program. Other partner organisations also provide funding and in-kind contributions such as personnel to carry out the control and survey work.

Achievements as per operational plan: A total of 90 plants were found, a significant increase on last year's 10 plants. Although the total numbers have increased, Gamba Grass was found in three locations only. The one plant that was found in the 'Township' site highlights the importance of continued vigilance and education. This area was previously deemed clean.



Gamba grass mixed amongst native vegetation.

A new area within the Nimberline East site was located. This area has been burnt on several occasions and the surrounding area is extremely rocky and barren. It has been on the edge of previous aerial and foot surveys. The discovery offers an explanation to the plants that have continued to emerge downstream. This site was visited three times and new growth was removed, a total of 88 plants were removed. No seeders were present on the site this year.

In this project it was agreed by the committee that for gamba grass to be considered fully eradicated from the location it must not be observed for a period of five consecutive years.

At the close of the 2024 survey and control program –

- 5 out of 15 regions had achieved the fifth year of 'no Gamba Grass plants found.
- 9 out of 15 regions had achieved the fifth year of 'no seed bank' contributions.

Analysis: No benefit cost analysis has been carried out on the impact of gamba grass on this site however a quote from the executive summary of the report – Economic Impacts of Gamba Grass in the Northern Territory states – Insufficient resourcing of gamba grass control efforts costs the Northern Territory tens of millions of dollars annually, most significantly in fire management and weed control, but also in lost opportunities from the growing carbon sector. These costs will continue to increase if gamba grass expands further across the Territory.

Performance indicator: The performance indicator will be the eventual eradication of gamba grass from the Kimberley region. This work is ongoing and confidence is very high that the target is achievable given the results to date.

Recommendations: Maintain funding to the Gamba Grass Steering Committee in the 2024-25 Operational Plan.

Weed selection criteria

As a means to determine what weed programs the KRBA will support the following criteria is used as a guide –

- Has to be a **Declared Weed** in Western Australia.
- **Potential impact:** what were the projected costs to industry and environment if the weed became widespread?
- **Physiology:** (distribution, density, seed longevity, maturity, seed production etc.) What were the plant's strengths, can they be overcome? What are its weaknesses, can they be exploited?
- **Program length:** How long would the program be expected to run for? Some weed seed has a viability of one-year others can remain viable in the soil for over twenty years i.e. *Mimosa pigra*.
- **Costs:**
- **Support partners:** Are there other organisations willing to be a partner in the program over its lifetime?
- **Strategic nature of infestation:** Where, or over what area is it located?
- **Chances of meeting funder expectations:** Does the program have a good chance of being successful, will it be money well spent?

Subsidies

Overview: A 100% chemical subsidy was first introduced for control of parkinsonia in May 2000 by the Kimberley Zone Control Authority (that was later to become the KRBA in 2010), later it was opened up to all declared plants. In 2004-05 the annual budget allocation for the subsidy was \$12,000; that amount has increased to \$100,000 for the KRBA 2021-22 budget with amounts of up to \$7,500 available for individual leases. An ammunition subsidy was also established from 1st November 2019,

members are entitled to claim up to \$1,000 each year per entity.

Achievements as per operational plan: \$30,000 was allocated to four leases for weed subsidies and just over \$2,222 to four entities for ammunition subsidies in 2023-24.

Analysis: Parkinsonia control has been ongoing under this subsidy program on leases that Sturt Creek flows through for a number of years. This has reduced the impact of the weed on the pastoral activities on those leases as well as reducing the seed burden flowing downstream onto other leases and Lake Gregory. It should be noted that the Lake Gregory system is recognised as one of the best examples of a large brackish system, with inland (terminal) drainage lakes in Australia which has regular inflow and is near-permanent. It has been identified as meeting four Ramsar Criteria for listing as a



Parkinsonia has been the highest priority weed for land managers in every survey undertaken to date.

Wetland of International Importance and is considered by DBCA to be a Significant Western Australian Wetland.

In addition, neem control under this program on Spring Creek Station over a number of years has reduced that weed's impact on pastoral land on that lease and the adjacent Lake Kununurra- Lake Argyle Ramsar site.

Recommendations: Maintain funding to the subsidy program based on 2023-24 operational plan budget.

Risk Management

A number of initiatives were undertaken in the 2023/24 financial year to reduce risks associated with the organisation's programs and membership activities; they were –

- Insurances maintained for 2023-24.
- EO attended and documented two helicopter training sessions in 2023-24.
- EO updated CPR certification in 2023-24.
- Insurance and licensing details for 2023-24 obtained from contractors.
- Risk management maintained as permanent agenda item at committee meetings.
- Review of the KRBA Work, Health, Safety and Environment Management Plan implemented.

Recommendations: Maintain all of the above activities into 2024-25.

Member/stakeholder engagement

Overview: Since its activation as a Regional Biosecurity Group in 2010 the KRBA has steadily increased its engagement with its members, stakeholders and the wider community through the following initiatives –

- 2013: The organisation started to send newsletters out to the membership and stakeholders, initially two per year; that was increased to four per year in 2019.
- 2017: The Committee further increased its engagement by undertaking to carry out membership surveys every two years to formalise a two-way information flow between the organisation and the membership. The role of the surveys is to provide the committee with an understanding of the current pest priorities at station and regional levels, how they align with current KRBA programs and feedback on the effectiveness of those programs.
- 2017: 'Kimberley Cattle' information pamphlets were created to advertise biosecurity and production activities such as wild dog control that were routinely undertaken on pastoral land. They are targeted at visitors to the region and are distributed through Visitor's Centres and some roadhouses throughout the Kimberley.
- 2018: Signage was placed at 20 sites across the Kimberley including 24-hour rest sites warning the general public of baiting activities been undertaken on pastoral land.
- 2019 the group's website was established to provide information to the wider public of the KRBA's activities.
- 2024: Weed posters, A2 in size and laminated were produced and made available to land managers.



In 2018 24 signs similar to above have been placed in 24-hour rest sites and some regional roads in the Kimberley.

Achievements as per operational plan: The following engagement strategies were implemented in the 2023/24 financial year –

- Quarterly newsletters were sent to members and stakeholders.
- Website was updated.
- Pamphlets distributed to Visitor's Centres (ongoing activity).
- A survey was carried out between January and March 2024 with a total of twenty-nine surveys completed. This provided data on forty-seven, or approximately half of all Kimberley leases. The area was divided into four sub-regions – Central, East, North and West Kimberley as per previous surveys. By far the most widespread and prioritised pest at a station level was wild dogs rated at 71/100 dropping from 80/100 or above in the 2022 and 2019 surveys. Next came parkinsonia and noogoora burr equal on 38/100. Rubber bush, neem, donkeys, horses, cats, bellyache bush and pigs followed on in that order with very little difference between the final seven.
- 48 weed identification posters were sent to land managers.

Analysis: Information from the 2024 survey showed that of the managers surveyed 76% indicated that they had good knowledge, or were reasonable familiar with the role of the KRBA, much the same figure as the 2022 survey and up from the 65% in the 2019 survey. The percentage of managers that had no idea of what the KRBA does increased from 0 to 24% since the 2022 survey likely correlating

with the increase of new managers to the Kimberley that had increased to 38% of all surveyed in 2024.

From the SWOT analysis undertaken in early 2023 the following points regarding engagement were identified –

Strengths

- The committee/organisation has good relations with Government departments it works with, in particular DBCA and DPIRD. In some respects, this sets it aside from some other Regional Biosecurity Groups in WA.

Opportunities

- Collaboration with other groups (KPCA etc.) should be explored.
- The membership survey is best done face to face.
- The committee should seek membership from a wider audience through associate and full membership. EO to contact Shires for representation.
- The organisation should attempt to become a regular presence at Kimberley workshops/seminars/conferences/meetings i.e., National Rangelands Conference, KPCA AGM, PGA meetings etc.

Recommendations: Maintain all of the above activities into 2024-25.



Committee members working through the SWOT analysis workshop in January 2023.