

Annual Report

For financial year
2022-2023

Southern Biosecurity Group



Pests and Weeds

Your environment · Your responsibility · Your legacy

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

*Unity is strength... when there is teamwork and
collaboration, wonderful things can be
achieved.* Mattie Stepanek

Chair Report - 2022-23 Annual Report

Our primary mission remains steadfast: to minimize the environmental, economic, and social impacts of animal pests and weeds on agricultural industry, landscapes, and biodiversity values within the Ravensthorpe Shire. Additionally, we are committed to fostering a culture of sound biosecurity practices among all stakeholders.

1. **Project Coordination and Biosecurity Agricultural Management Act Review:**

Throughout the year, the Management Committee and Executive Officer have dedicated significant effort to coordinating declared pest and weed control projects. Alongside this, we had the additional responsibility of addressing the Biosecurity Agricultural Management Act review. Our joint submissions, with contributions from all Recognised Biosecurity Groups (RBGs) and individual submissions from various RBGs, underscored our concerns about potential alterations to the initial RBG structure as recognized by the Minister for Agriculture.

2. **Collaboration with Stakeholders:**

We have actively collaborated with the Department of Primary Industry and Regional Development (DPIRD), specifically the Talking RBG team, to introduce new reporting requirements and address additional changes post RBG establishment.

3. **Unallocated Crown Land (UCL) Permit Issue:**

All RBG' encountered challenges related to how the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation, and Attractions (DBCA) viewed applicants for Restricted Chemical Permits. Unfortunately, this led to the non-renewal of permits for UCL after December 31, 2022. We worked diligently to resolve this issue and reached a positive outcome through a Memorandum of Understanding between DBCA and individual RBGs. However, the period between December 2022 and April 2023 when wild dog control or fox control was not permitted on UCL, led to increased sightings and stock loss due to attacks from wild dogs.

4. **Project Achievements:**

Despite facing permit delays, we successfully coordinated wild dog control on UCL and private land where permits allowed. Continued, coordination of fox control programs at Cheadanup and Longcreek Reserves was completed.

5. Rabbit Control and Management:

Our efforts were somewhat limited due to the scarcity of the rabbit hemorrhagic disease virus. Nevertheless, we secured a limited number of vials to carry out a project in the Krystal Park Estate, Hopetoun. Our objective is to reduce rabbit numbers to a manageable level, empowering individual landholders to undertake rabbit control on their property. We firmly believe that a coordinated approach is the most effective method to manage this pest.

6. Declared Weed Projects:

Continuing our commitment to environmental stewardship, we focused on Bridal Creeper control at the Hopetoun foreshore area. The impact on the weed's corn viability and previous seed dispersal will take several years of sustained control activity to achieve eradication. We are pleased to have collaborated with Main Roads on treatment of the weed along the Ravensthorpe Hopetoun Road.

7. Apple of Sodom and Cactus Control:

In our dedication to eradicating harmful weeds, we rechecked previously treated Apple of Sodom weed sites and addressed new plant growth. We encourage everyone to report sightings to aid in coordinating control activities. However, we need further collaboration from Water Corporation for the removal of plants on their land tenure.

Similarly, we continued control efforts against the Drooping Tree Pear species in the Oldfield River system, aided by the successful establishment of the biological insect *Dactylopius ceylonicus*, which continues to spread. Combined with manual removal and spraying, these efforts are positively impacting the river system.

8. Monitoring Animal Movements:

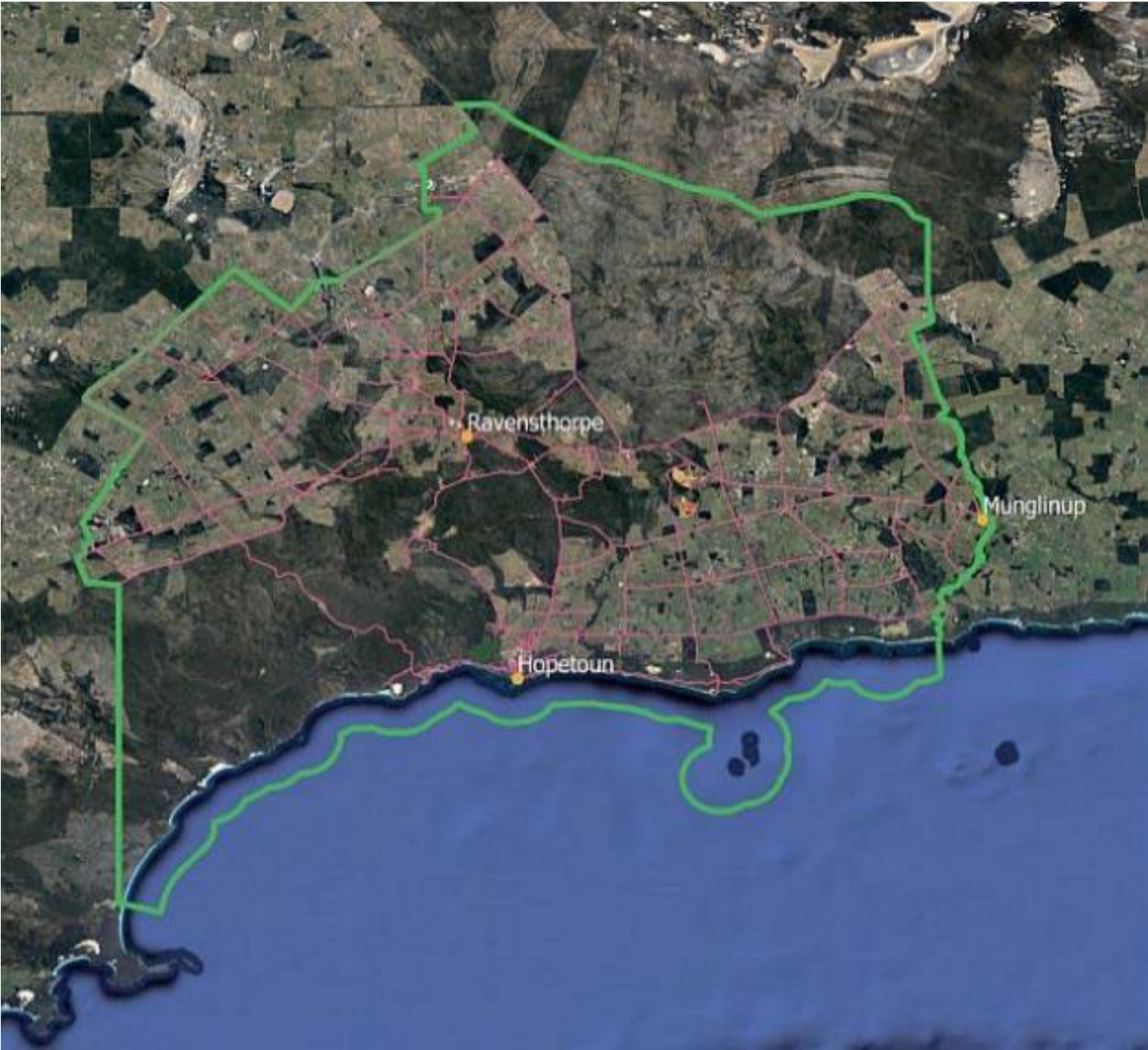
Thanks to the support of The Sheep and Goat Industry Fund, we effectively have been monitoring various animal movements before the completion of the Esperance Extension of the State Barrier Fence. Remote sensing cameras were installed to create a baseline of animal usage along potential corridors for wild dogs and emus to enter agricultural land. Monitoring will continue until 2025, providing valuable data for post-fence construction.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the SBG Management Committee for their valuable time and dedication to ensuring the group's positive impact on widespread declared species within the Shire of Ravensthorpe. I also acknowledge the invaluable contributions of our Executive Officer in managing the day-to-day operations of the group. Lastly to landholders for recognizing their responsibility for controlling declared animal and weed species on their land tenure. Working collaboratively can achieve results.

Sincerely,

K. Tuckett

SOUTHERN BIOSECURITY GROUP AREA OF OPERATION



KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Wild dogs – numbers through uptake of dried meat baits will not be reflected in the table below, as it is very rare to locate an animal following this event.

Wild dog baits laid	Wild dog shot	Wild dog trapped	Fox trapped or shot	Feral cats trapped or shot	Reported stock losses
758	0	2	3	0	3

(The delay in permit renewal for accessing crown land during the 3rd quarter (January to April) not only affected the implementation of wild dog control measures but also resulted in lower statistics on bait laying activities.)

Foxes – The integrated control program at Longcreek and Cheadanup Reserves was conducted from the end of April 2023 to the beginning of May 2023, overseen by Licensed Pest Management Technician Gavern House from Alpha Pest Management Solutions. Prior to commencing the baiting program, the condition of 1080 baiting signs at all entry points was assessed and replaced as necessary. Additionally, supplementary signage was installed at track road entrances to the reserves to provide additional public information. A total of 190 baits were deployed across both projects during this period.

We also had a very successful Red Card Fox Shoot in March in collaboration with the Hopetoun Clay Target Club as well as SouthCoast NRM. The tally added up to 106 foxes, 4 feral cats, 20 rabbits and 1 deer.

Rabbits – It is important to highlight the challenges faced in rabbit control activities during the 2022 – 2023 financial year. One of the significant obstacles encountered was a severe delay caused by the unavailability of the RDH virus, which is essential for effective rabbit control in areas where 1080 baits cannot be utilised. However, despite these challenges, our dedicated pest technician was able to secure 10 vials of the virus towards the end of the financial year. To ensure efficient allocation of limited resources, priority was given to Krystal Park, an area identified as requiring urgent control measures. The project primarily focused on releasing the virus on the shire verges within the Krystal Park vicinity, aiming to mitigate the impact of rabbit populations in the area.

Control Program and Release Areas

Control Program and Release Areas Location	Street Name	Treated Council Verge Both Sides
Krystal Park	Cambewarra Dr	Yes
Krystal Park	Banksia Rd	Yes
Krystal Park	Willow Lane	Yes
Krystal Park	Boronia St	Yes
Krystal Park	Rosea Wy	Yes
Hopetoun	Esplanade	Yes
Hopetoun	Scott St	Yes
Hopetoun	Dawn St	Yes
Hopetoun	Chambers St	Yes
Hopetoun	CWA hall	Grounds around Building
Hopetoun	Sports Oval	Remnant Vegetation Area
Hopetoun	Price St	Yes

RHDV Release Areas

Hopetoun Townsite RHDV Release Transect



Krystal Park



During the survey in Hopetoun townsite before the release of the RHD virus, it was observed that activity and density across the townsite and foreshore areas remained light to medium throughout the entire control area. No active warrens were detected during the release. In contrast, at Krystal Park, the survey results indicated a high-density rabbit activity on private properties and council verges.

Apple of Sodom

In the ongoing efforts to manage and control invasive plant species within Ravensthorpe Shire, a total of 929 plants were targeted for treatment during the reporting period. These invasive plants varied in size, ranging from 0.25 meters to 2 meters in height. Notably, this represents a reduction in the size of plants treated compared to previous years, indicating a proactive approach to managing these invasive species at an early stage.

The control measures employed primarily involved the application of chemical herbicides. This approach was selected for its efficiency and effectiveness in eradicating or suppressing the targeted invasive plants. Manual removal was also utilized in specific instances.

Coordinated control and assistance to landholders will be ongoing until the viability of the seed bank is exhausted. Important reasons for eradication this plant from the shire are the berries



are toxic to humans and animals, dense patches crowd out native and pasture species, can restrict stock and vehicle movement and provides a harbor for rabbits and foxes.

Bridal Creeper -



This plant forms a thick mat of underground tubers which impedes the root growth of other plants and often prevents seedling establishment. Rare native plants are threatened with extinction by bridal creeper.

Birds feed on the berries and later excrete the seeds at perch sites, usually within 100 m of source plants. Seed dispersed by birds has helped spread the weed along roadsides and into native vegetation patches further afield. Rabbits and foxes also eat fruit and disperse seeds. Plant control should occur to avoid stems running up, flowering and seed set.

Bridal creeper has a few features which make it difficult to control its underground tuber reserves provide a buffer against adverse seasons. The large tuber area makes it difficult to remove manually successfully.





Contractor activity for the year included the rust disease being released in numerous sites within the shire. It will take many years for the biocontrol agent to reduce the density of bridal creeper due to the huge reserves stored in underground in tubers. Herbicide treatment was also undertaken in areas where rust disease was not released. Other weeds (Polygala and Polygama) were also identified while treating bridal creeper this year. Timely treatment of these weeds was also undertaken.



Before treatment



After herbicide treatment

Cactus - The cacti treatment for SBG (April/May 2023) project, led by M. Cronin, aimed to control cacti infestation in the Oldfield River area (DPR 2022-23 Cactus Control). Despite the challenging terrain, we treated an 80-hectare area within the Oldfield River area, using Cochineal as the preferred method. The Cochineal effectively consumed the cacti, with results showing significant reduction in density. The cacti population has noticeably decreased despite the challenging terrain for surveying. The cacti found were generally smaller in size, while a substantial number of new seedlings were identified. Bridal Creeper found during the project was also addressed.





Photo point taken at 11.51am on the 14th of May 2023. Coordinates -33.7250 120.7045



Nursery photo.

Funding sourced in addition to the Declared Pest Rate

Cactus (Funded by State NRM)– The coordinated cactus control program surpassed the initial project work plan by covering a larger area during the 2022-2023 financial year. This included revisiting previously treated sections and extending efforts downstream. The program successfully identified new cacti plants emerging from beneath debris and soil, including some that had been overlooked in previous assessments.

The primary objective of the project was to prevent regrowth and the emergence of new plants to curb the spread of cacti. These findings hold great value and contribute to the overall success of the project.

It was observed that accessing certain parts of the river required traversing private properties, which became more challenging when paddocks were cropped, leading to longer travel distances. Lessons were learned from this experience, emphasizing the need to secure alternative access routes to the river that do not rely on private land between seeding and harvest periods. Access through private properties remains convenient in certain locations, but it should be coordinated following the harvest period and before seeding.

In addition to our cactus control efforts, we have submitted a large grant application to the state NRM program for a three-year program focused on eradicating Cacti in the Oldfield River system.

State Barrier Fence species movement monitoring – This project was funded by the Sheep and Goat Industry Fund with the aim of establishing a baseline of animal movement prior to construction of the State Barrier Fence. Continued SD card and battery changeover and recording of data continued to be recorded.

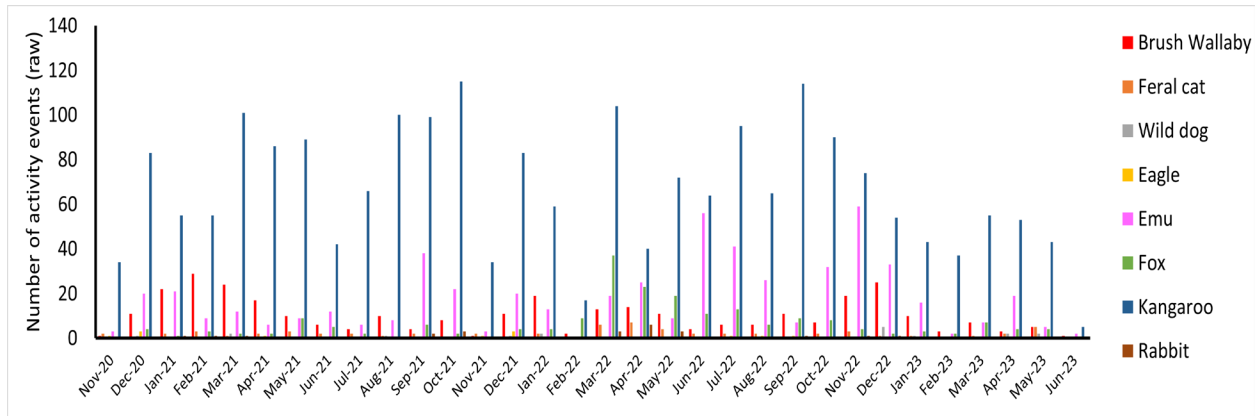
The project underway will be active until 2025 after a positive project extension grant, monitoring three gaps in the Esperance Extension of the State Barrier Fence, specifically the Oldfield, Young, and Lort rivers.

The collected information is being used to compile control charts for key species, including wild dogs, and to monitor any changes in the ecosystem following construction.

Sample of images from remote sensor cameras



Graph of species from commencement of project to June 2023



Australian Wool Innovation

The wild dog and fox control training project aimed to benefit wool and sheep producers in Western Australia has been successfully completed.

As part of the project outcomes, a training trailer was procured to develop essential knowledge and skills related to wild dog and fox control. The trailer, now fitted with two taxidermized dogs captured within the Shire during control efforts, will serve as an ongoing method of raising awareness within the Shire.

Another focus of the project was the development and fostering of networking among Licensed Pest Management Technicians (LPMT). A forum introduced the use of night vision vehicle technology, and a video was created titled ‘A Biosecurity Update’ and distributed to all 14 Recognised Biosecurity Groups (RBGs) for further dissemination among contracted LPMTs.

Additionally, the video is available on the home page of SBG's (southernbiosecuritygroup.org.au) website.

As part of promoting professional networking, the project highlighted the Vertebrate Pest Management Association Australia, a not-for-profit organization facilitating collaboration among commercial operators, commercial wildlife, and licensed professional pest controllers, with a specific emphasis on wild dog control in this project.

Biosecurity Event

The Southern Biosecurity Group proudly showcased their innovative training trailer, generously funded by the Australian Wool Innovation through a grant, at the Ravensthorpe Wildflower Show. Positioned near the entrance, this trailer, featuring two meticulously crafted taxidermized wild dogs, captured the attention of both residents and visiting enthusiasts. The trailer's multifunctional design allowed us to present our media production, "A Biosecurity Update," and deliver an engaging PowerPoint presentation on the topic of invasive weeds.



In addition to these visual aids, we distributed promotional materials and publications on various pests, including wild dogs, foxes, rabbits, and feral cats, along with our annual newsletter. This event provided a wonderful opportunity for us to showcase our ongoing community efforts, engage directly with landholders, and address any concerns or questions they may have had in person.



COMMITTEE MEMBERS, CONTRACTORS, AND STAKEHOLDERS

The SBG Management Committee would like to thank Ravensthorpe Agricultural Initiative Network (RAIN), Executive Officer, Finance Officer (Esperance BAS & Books, RAIN Treasurer) for having been engaged to undertake cashbook management. We extend our appreciation to other stakeholders for their ongoing collaboration with the SBG as we all work together to achieve positive results.

Committee members for the 2022-2023 financial year comprised of volunteer community members:

- Karyn Tuckett
- Jen Chambers
- Gemma Walker
- Reece Laycock

Stakeholders:

- Australian Wool Innovation Limited
- Biosecurity Council of WA
- Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions
- Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
- Industry Funding Scheme (Sheep and Goat) Committee
- Local communities within the Shire of Ravensthorpe
- Main Roads Western Australia
- Other Recognised Biosecurity Groups
- Ravensthorpe Agricultural Initiative Network
- Shire of Ravensthorpe
- South Coast NRM
- State Natural Resource Management
- Water Corporation Western Australia

Contractors

- **Licensed Pest Management Technicians**
Gavern House
- **Licensed Weed Technician**
Mark Cronin
- **Executive Officer**
Michelle Grobler

COMMUNICATION

SBG has maintained regular communication with the community through publications in the local newspaper, providing updates on current projects and sharing informative articles throughout the year. These publications have focused on the projects running during specific time frames, ensuring that the community is well-informed about ongoing initiatives and their progress. By keeping the community informed, SBG fosters transparency and encourages active engagement, allowing residents to stay connected and understand the important work being carried out within the region.

In March 2023, SBG coordinated a highly successful Red Card fox shoot in the Shire of Ravensthorpe. The event attracted seven registered teams, and after a night filled with thrilling action, the participants were still buzzing with excitement at the tally. The SBG Executive Officer expressed gratitude to all the teams, acknowledging their valuable cooperation and the significant role their participation played in managing biosecurity within the Shire of Ravensthorpe during the supplied breakfast supported by SNRM. By actively managing fox populations, the teams made a substantial contribution to preserving the region's biosafety and safeguarding local flora and fauna.

The Annual Newsletter, inclusive of the Annual Survey as well as a handy guide to Feral Cats was mailed to all landholders in the Shire. The survey provides the opportunity for community input into species control to be considered in the upcoming Operational Plan and budget.

Due to the high number of absentee landholders in the Shire communication via the annual mail out is viewed as an important means of communicating to all landholders.

**DECLARED PEST RATE SHIRE OF RAVENSTHORPE
2022-2023 Financial Year**

Statement of Income and Expenditure

Delivery organisation: Southern Biosecurity Group

INCOME	
Declared Pest Rate from Landholders	63,000.00
Declared Pest Rate State Govt matching funds	94,944.00
Total funding	154,944.00
EXPENSES	
Program 1 - Declared animal species	
Wild dogs	15,290.00
Foxes	7,090.00
Feral cats	-
Rabbits	-
Baits, poison, biocontrol control etc	8,540.00
Camera monitoring	-
Signage	-
Program 2 - Declared plant species	
Briar creeper	11,290.00
Apple of sodom	3,000.00
Cactus	28,200.00
Herbicide, biological control	-
Program 3 - Governance	
Accountant (inc audit) - Legal	5,702.50
Committee honorarium-expenses	956.36
Insurance workers compensation (contract sole trader)	1,615.45
Insurance RAIN 1/3rd (share various)	1,113.71
Insurance SBG pub liab(dogging)	917.27
Insurance - License (trailer)	384.54
Teleconference/zoom meeting costs	27.28
Program 4 - Administration	
Contract Executive Officer	78,571.99
Chico,phone internet	70.00
Professional Development	753.37
RPs application fee	379.55
RAIN admin-bookkeeping	5,318.75
Stationary postage (excl annual letter)	31.61
Submemberships	631.71
Travel accommodation	3,050.70
Program 5 - Communication	
Advertising	510.00
Annual newsletter (incl post, print)	2,295.00
Biosecurity event (incl market days)	1,045.45
Promotional material (banners, brochures etc)	1,054.11
Website	-
Program 6 - Operations	
Equipment purchase-replacement	2,894.09
Total expenditure	177,356.74

Funding Reconciliation	
Carried forward unspent of income previous year	14,011.91
Total income 22/23	154,944.00
Total funds available 22/23 yr	168,955.91
Total Expenditure 22/23	177,356.74
Underspend of income over expenditure 22-23 yr	-
Overspend of income over expenditure 22-23yr	8,400.83