



MEDIA RELEASE

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How restaurant demand for feral pigs could save FNQ farms and parks

A North Queensland mill estimated more than \$1m worth of damage to sugar crops last year from an escalating feral pig issue, however local growers and a meat retailer say there could be a simple solution.

Kennedy MP Bob Katter and Hill MP Shane Knuth are backing calls for federal grant funding for cane growers to manage wild pigs on their properties, and for the state government to allow shooters in national parks, where it is understood the boars are breeding at rapid rates.

Third-generation Greenhill and Fishery Falls cane farmer Glen Anderson has suffered years of condemned cane due to pig damage, losing 80 tonnes in 2016, 117 tonnes in 2021 and this year he had 1.6ha not able to be harvested. Mr Anderson's total damages were estimated to be about \$20,000, while the Mulgrave Mill has estimated potential losses of over \$1m every year since 2018.

Mr Anderson said after speaking with Mulgrave MP Curtis Pitt, state bio security officers and Cairns Regional Council, he had been told feral pigs on his property were his problem.

"In September in the mill's area we killed off 100 pigs, but it's all out of our own pockets, plus we're losing money for the damaged cane," Mr Anderson said.

"Now the farmers everywhere, we're hunting, killing, shooting as many pigs as we can, but they keep being replaced by the ones in the national park.

"Guys with thermal scopes at night have been successful, but they want to get paid for their time, so whether there's money around for them... I know one farmer hired a shooter, he got 60,70 pigs and cleaned out his farm, but five months later they were back again from the parks.

"For me the solution is funding and access to allow baiting and shooting in national parks.

"I know they're worried about cassowaries and I don't want to see a dead cassowary, but there's farmers looking at going out of business and selling."

Brisbane-based game meat industry consultant Andrew Varasdi said if the state government commercialised feral pig meat, the private sector could help manage the boars in national parks without the need for public funding.

BOB KATTER

Katter's Australian Party

Federal Member for Kennedy

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“There is a growing and increasing demand for wild boar meat in Australia and globally and there are thousands of harvesters available to help,” Mr Varasdi said.

“All we need is access from the government to national parks and the animals.

“Through trapping, wild boar, can be harvested with almost no impact or risk to public land, native animals, or fauna, and with a very small cost to the government compared with environment and economic benefits that commercial harvesting offers.

“Once the traps are bought the harvesting of the animals, emptying of the traps, is carried out by third party commercial harvesters. There is no more manpower, or any requirement of time for National Park staff, or government staff.”

Mr Katter said he supported Mr Varasdi’s venture for commercialisation of pig harvesting, but said it would take more than traps to protect wildlife in national parks.

“While yes, we can money out of the pigs with trapping - that's a big part of the answer, but that's not the full answer, we need access to national parks,” Mr Katter said.

“Now let me be very specific, I cannot see how the cassowaries, the turtles and a whole lot of other species are going to survive these pig numbers.

“In Australia, you're not allowed to shoot pigs because you're not allowed to have the weapon and you're not allowed go where the pigs are which is in the national parks. Nature has been tipped on its side, the pigs' biggest predator was man, that predator has been removed.”

Mr Knuth said the State Government needed to provide special permits for recreational pig hunters to access national parks which were a huge breeding ground for these animals.

“Providing permits to access national parks, coupled with a bounty program would make a significant dint in the feral pig population,” Mr Knuth said.

“The reality is that feral pigs are one of the most destructive pests in Australia. They are killing cassowaries, digging up turtle eggs, causing millions of dollars of crop damage each year and they destroy our native flora and fauna.

“It is estimated that up to 20,000 tons of sugar cane alone is lost each year.”