

FINAL REPORT

DEVELOPMENT OF MIDLANDS BIOSECURITY GROUP

JULY 2020

PROJECT FUNDING: DEPARTMENT OF PRIMARY INDUSTRIES &
REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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DEVELOPMENT OF MIDLANDS RECOGNISED BIOSECURITY GROUP

The approved purpose of this grant is to contribute to a large-scale multi-tenure biosecurity response and includes (but may not be limited to) biosecurity group support, communications, capacity building, research (including information management), and monitoring and evaluation.

Summary

- Midlands Biosecurity Group is incorporated, recognised and implementing on ground control in 18 months.
- 120 new Restricted Chemical Permit applications completed with farmers.
- 65 farmers committing to co-ordinated wild dog baiting program in hotspot areas.
- 3 wild dogs controlled and ongoing monitoring in hot spot areas.
- Farmer reports that baiting programs have led to large reduction in fox numbers.
- 40% reduction in stock attacks over the course of the project.
- 25 farmers committing to co-ordinated feral pig control.
- Rabbit monitoring and baiting conducted on 15 properties including a K5 virus release site.
- Midlands Biosecurity Group newsletter subscriber list built to 160.
- Monitoring work has begun in numerous parks and reserves throughout the region.

Introduction

The Midlands Biosecurity Group (MBG) was formed to aid in the control of widespread and established invasive species within the Midlands region. The operational goals of the group are to reduce the impact of wild dogs, feral pigs, foxes, rabbits and any other declared pests of concern through proactive and responsive management and control conducted in a co-ordinated fashion.

The decision to form a Recognised Biosecurity Group (RBG) was made in December 2018 by local farmers and industry due to concerns around increasing numbers of wild dogs and feral pigs. A steering committee was formed with farmer representatives from throughout the region and regular steering committee meetings were held to start the RBG process and define the future objectives of the MBG.

The area supported by the MBG is seven local government areas and includes Dandaragan, Moora, Mingenew, Carnamah, Coorow, Three Springs and Irwin. This area covers 24,523 km² of which over 4003km² is managed by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions.

The group is actively monitoring pest activity throughout the Midlands region using the FeralScan application. This monitoring assists the group in making operational decisions around the deployment of resources and the focus of the group in the future.

In the 18 months this project has been running, the MBG has been very successful in improving communications between different stakeholders and land managers which has led to the establishment of a co-ordinated response to pest management. Sixty-five farmers have committed

to a wild dog baiting program in 2019/20, with Watheroo, Eganu, Dandaragan and Arrowsmith being hot spot areas for wild dogs. Twenty-five farmers have also committed to a co-ordinated feral pig control program in feral pig hot spots in Mingenew, Arrowsmith and Badgingarra. Rabbit numbers are high in the region and around fifteen farmers have begun a rabbit baiting program with the support of the MBG. Monitoring of these programs is in its infancy, however anecdotally farmers are reporting a reduction in pest numbers and are feeling more confident about their pest management given there is now a 'go-to' point in the region. Reports of stock attacks have reduced by around 40% in the second half of the project compared to the first. The number of farmers involved in the programs is expected to grow considerably in the coming financial year.

Project Milestones:

Milestone no.	Milestone Description	Date Achieved
1	Signing of Agreement	19/2/2019
2	Progression to Recognition Status of MBG	11/9/2019
3	Inaugural MBG AGM held	6/12/2019
4	Approval of Pest Management Operational Plan & Budget with evidence of agreed consultation.	24/7/2020
5	Completion of project	30/6/2020
6	Provision of an acquittal report	31/10/2020

Incorporation and Governance details

The MBG was incorporated under *the Associations incorporation act (2015)* on the 19th of June, 2019. The MBG has been formed with the administrative support of the West Midlands Group (WMG). Now that the MBG is an independent entity, it has developed a contractual arrangement with the WMG to continue this support which will include communications and administrative functions. The WMG is a well-established grower group with a track record of managing project funding appropriately. This partnership between the two groups will allow for continued effective communications and group administration.

The first Annual General Meeting of the MBG was held in December 2019. A Board of Management was elected with 23 people attending the meeting. Charles Wass was appointed as the inaugural Chairperson of the MBG, and Carl Forward the Vice Chairperson. A total of nine board members were elected. Chris O'Callaghan has been appointed as the Executive Officer of the group and will act as the groups' Secretary/Treasurer on an ex-officio basis. This completed Milestone 3 of the funding agreement.

In 2020, the MBG Board met in February, June and August, and the Annual General Meeting is scheduled for the 19th of October.

The MBG has its own bank account with Bendigo Bank, an Australian Business Number and is registered for GST.

The MBG is insured through Community Underwriting for Association Liability and General Liability. *Association Liability* covers: Office Bearers Liability, Association Reimbursement, Professional Indemnity, Associations Liability, Employment Practices Liability, Fidelity and Third Party Crime, Crisis Consultancy Expenses, Fines and Penalties and Tax Audit. *General Liability* covers Personal Injury, Property Damage, Advertising Liability.

Recognition

On the 11th of September 2019, the MBG sought recognition as a Biosecurity Group from the Honourable Alannah MacTiernan, Minister for Regional Development, Agriculture & Food. This request was granted on the 25th of October 2019. This completed Milestone 2 of the project agreement.

Funding

The WMG initially obtained funding from Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) (this project) to help establish the MBG and begin the effective management of wild dogs. In collaboration, the groups have successfully applied for funding through the Sheep and Goat Industry Funding Scheme (Sheep and Goat IFS) to boost wild dog operations which has been complemented by funding from the WA Wild Dog Action Plan (WDAP) and support from Australian Wool Innovation (AWI).

DPIRD Seed Funding – (\$100,000 Feb 2019 – June 2020)

Funding was obtained through the DPIRD to establish the MBG. The purpose of this funding was to contribute to a large-scale multi-tenure response and includes biosecurity group support, communications, capacity building, research, information management and monitoring and evaluation. This project provided support for a part time co-ordinator with administration and communication support from the WMG. In addition to this, it allowed the MBG to obtain insurance, signage, poison and wild dog traps. It ensured community consultation was conducted to a high level and allowed for workshop and field days to occur. It also covered the costs of over 120 restricted chemical permits for landholders.

IFS Funding (\$56,000 pa July 2019 – June 2022)

The Sheep and Goat IFS is a three year project starting July 1, 2019 and finishing June 30, 2022. This project has been transferred from the WMG name into that of the MBG as of July 1 2020. This project has a focus area of Irwin, Mingenew, Three Springs, Carnamah, Coorow, Moora and Dandaragan. The project contracts a Licenced Pest Management Technicians (LPMT) in these shires to focus on assisting farmers with wild dog monitoring and control.

Commonwealth Drought Funding (\$250,000 July 2019 – October 2021)

The Federal Drought funding started July 1 2019, and will run through to October 31, 2020. This project has a focus area in the shires of Victoria Plains, Gingin, Chittering, Moora, Dandaragan, Coorow and Carnamah. This project contracted two LPMTs to monitor the area and assist farmers with wild dog management. It also has assisted with community consultation. This project was funded through commonwealth drought funding, channelled through the WA WDAP.

Australian Wool Innovation (\$34,700 March 2019 – June 2019)

AWI provided funding to allow some immediate on the ground action to occur in the period March-June 2019, prior to other sources being obtained. This funding allowed the group to purchase important equipment including six chest freezers, the fabrication of six portable aluminium bait racks and 70 canid pest ejectors and accessories. These items are important for current and future baiting programs. This funding also allowed for the purchase of manufactured baits for immediate use in hot spot areas, as well as the purchase of fresh meat for future baiting programs.

WA Wild Dog Action Plan (\$25,000 July 2020 – June 2021)

In June 2020, the MBG received funding through the WA WDAP to support the group's activities into the 2021 financial year. This project will support an LPMT for 40 days in the 2021 financial year.

Appendix 2. MBG Expenditure 2019-2020 through the DPIRD seed funding.

Collaborations and Funding Applications

In March 2019, an aerial surveillance and control shoot for feral pigs was conducted in the Morawa-Mingenew area. This was led by the Central Wheatbelt Biosecurity Association (CWBA) in collaboration with the Mingenev-Irwin Group (MIG), the Northern Biosecurity Group (NBG) and the MBG.

In June 2019, the MBG, CWBA, NBG, WMG and MIG, developed a Midwest feral pig management strategy, to guide future funding applications for feral pig control.

Following the development of the Midwest feral pig management strategy, a joint application was submitted to the state Natural Resource Management (NRM) program to work across boundaries on feral pig management. This was a collaborative application between the MBG, CWBA, NBG, MIG and WMG. This project application was unsuccessful.

A collaborative funding application was submitted to the Federal Drought Fund in February 2020. This application was led by the Shire of Three Springs, partnering with the Shires of Coorow and Mingenev as well as the MBG. The application focussed on feral pig control in these shires. This application was unsuccessful.

In June 2020, a joint application was submitted to the state NRM program for feral pig control through the Midwest. This was again a collaborative effort between MBG, NBG, CWBA and WMG. This application was under assessment at the time of writing this report.

In June 2020, an application was submitted to the state NRM program by the MBG, to conduct research into the use of Canid Pest Ejectors in the Midlands region. This application was submitted with the DPIRD as a collaborative partner. This application was under assessment at the time of writing this report.

Airtable Property Activity Reporting

To reduce the handling of paperwork coming in from the LPMTs, an online database has been created using Airtable. This database allows LPMTs to complete a property activity report online via an app on their smartphone or via PC.

The data then directly enters the database which can be used to sort and/or filter the data to what the group needs for reporting purposes and also allows for quick download and even mapping of LPMT activities. Furthermore, the database keeps track of all the restricted chemical permits that farmers have completed with the group and assists farmers and LPMTs keep track of their poison usage.

The MBG's membership and contacts database is also stored using Airtable and memberships to the MBG can be submitted online via the MBG website or through a shared link.

Restricted Chemical Permits

Over the past 12 months, 120 restricted chemical permit applications have been completed for farmers through the MBG. The group has assisted farmers through running workshops and providing one-on-one assistance with the application process. This includes assistance with completing the form, the mapping requirement and instructions on how to complete the online training.

See Appendix 1 for spread of RCP's completed through the Midlands region.

Operational Plan & Pest Management Plans

To support the future sustainability of the group, an operational plan was developed by the MBG Steering Committee and Board of Management for the 2020/21 financial year. This was endorsed by the MBG members at the Annual General Meeting and submitted to DPIRD in January with the request to raise a Declared Pest Rate (DPR).

The request was made as follows:

The Midlands Biosecurity Group request the Minister of Agriculture to approve an Ad Valorem declared pest rate for 2020/21 of \$167,000, on land in the local government areas of Irwin, Three Springs, Mingenew, Carnamah, Coorow, Moora and Dandaragan that is:

- a) freehold land,*
- b) a minimum 100 hectares,*
- c) with a minimum \$100 per VEN*

With Covid-19 restriction coming in to play in March 2020, DPIRD community consultation was pushed back to June/July. On July 24, 2020, DPIRD issued a direction notice to the MBG, indicating that the group's operational plan had been approved and the DPR had been gazetted. This achieved Milestone 4 of the funding agreement.

The group's activities are guided by pest management plans that have been developed and endorsed by the MBG Board of Management. A wild dog management plan was endorsed in March 2019. A feral pig management plan was endorsed in February 2020.

Membership

Full Membership of the MBG is open to persons who own or occupy at least 100 hectares in the Midlands region. Associate Membership is open to any legal entity that controls, cares or manages land within the Midlands region. The MBG has a current membership of 59 and growing. Membership provides the opportunity to farmers to have a say in the group's governance processes including being eligible to be elected onto the board and to vote on board members.

Stakeholder Engagement

Over the last 12 months, the MBG has developed a relationship with the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA), an important stakeholder for the group. A total of five in person or teleconference meetings have been held over the course of the project. All MBG LPMTs were issued with access permits (Reg 4), for the parks, reserves and UCL in the Midlands region to complete monitoring activities for declared pests. A MOU is currently in negotiation with DBCA to formalise the relationship.

All local governments have been consulted with a number of presentations given to councils in public question time by MBG staff with support from DPIRD staff. Information packages and letters have also been sent to all council staff to assist them with answering any queries they may receive.

Community Resource Centres also received an information package to keep them informed of the process.

Community Engagement and Consultation

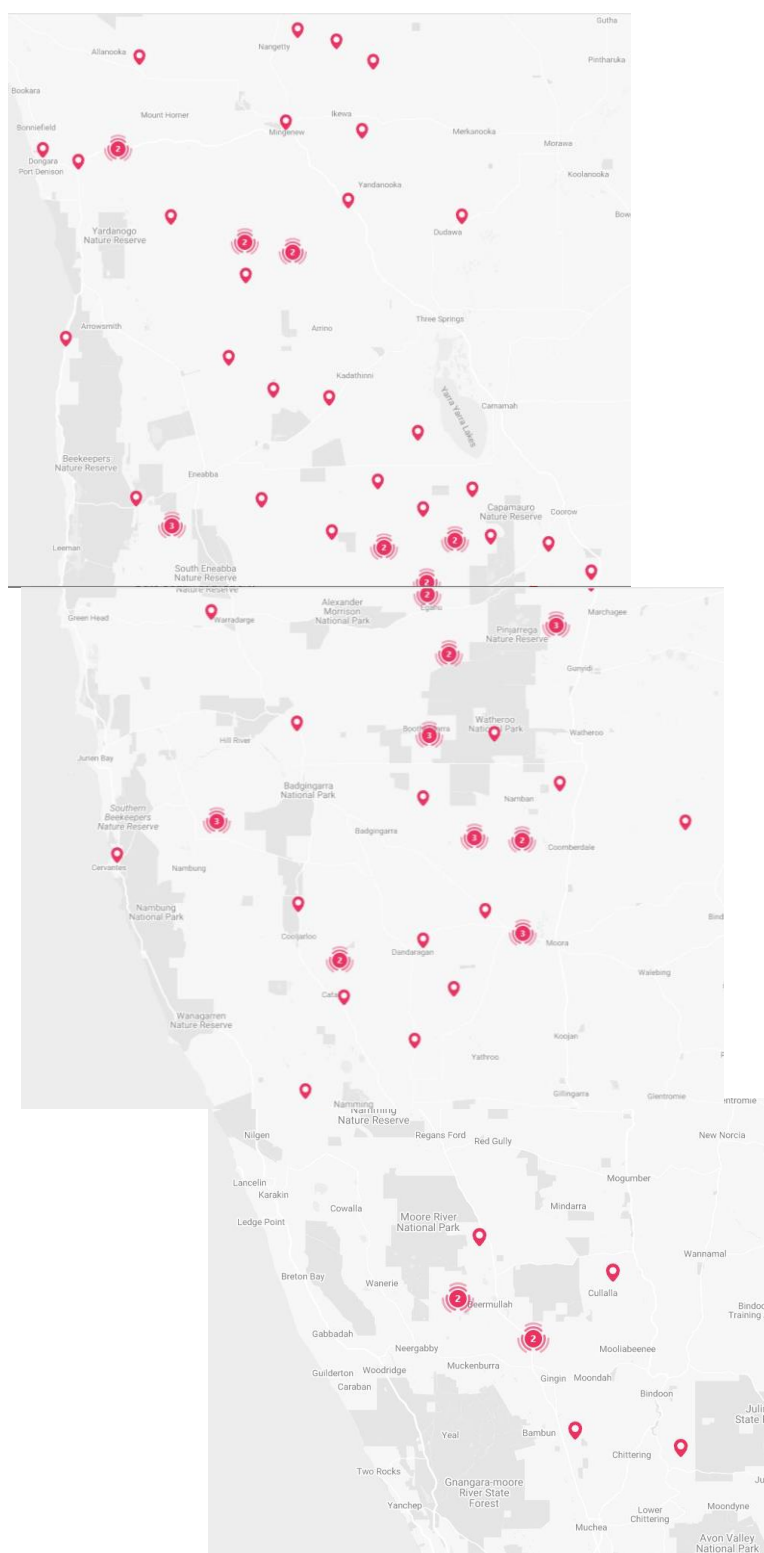
Community engagement activities are ongoing and the MBG updates are being communicated through the local papers, E-Newsletters, social media, community workshops and one-on-one contact at events. A logo has been developed with blue and white branding for the group. The MBG and WMG have also collaborated on a podcast focussed on declared pest management.

See appendix 3 for a list of community engagement activities.

Conclusion

The funding provided through this project, has allowed the MBG to become established and begin on-ground work for controlling declared pests in the region. It has also allowed the group to leverage into other funding programs and ensured the group becomes financially stable through the gazettal of a DPR. Group processes are now well established and include monitoring, governance, administration, and communications. The development of partnerships with key stakeholders involved in the group is ongoing and will continue to strengthen over time.

APPENDIX 1. Map of RCP's completed through the MBG.



APPENDIX 2. MBG Expenditure FY 20 through DPIRD Seed Funding.

Expenditure Item	Amount	Description
Wages	\$55,548	Coordinator and Communications officer wages
Insurance	\$3,933	MBG Insurance for 2020-21
On-Costs	\$18,750	On-costs for Co-ordinator and Communications officer.
Workshop and Event Costs	\$8,284	Administration costs associated with workshops and meetings.
Travel	\$2,031	Travel costs to attend workshops, events, presentations and field days.
Permits/Subscriptions	\$1,139	Costs associated with completing Restricted Chemical Permits with farmers in the region.
Signs	\$2,706	1080 and Strychnine warning signage
Wild Dog Baiting	\$7,690	Baiting product including 1080 and Strychnine poison and wild dog traps for on ground control activities.
Total	\$100,000	

APPENDIX 3. Community engagement & communication activities and media.

Community engagement activities:

- West Midlands Spring Field Day 2017 – Badgingarra - Display on RBGs and Feral pests and presentation on Wild dogs/RBGs
- West Midlands Spring Field Day 2018, Warradarge – 2 x Joint presentation Wild dogs/RBGs/DPR.
- Initial Wild Dog meeting in partnership with AWI, 2018 – Marchagee
- Wild Dog Management Workshop – Warradarge, 2018
- Series of feral animal workshops – Badgingarra (Wild Dogs), Eneabba (Wild Dogs, Feral Pigs, Rabbits), Coorow (Wild Dogs), Moora (Wild Dogs, Rabbits), March 2019.
- Presentations to Local Governments in Midlands region - including Moora (x2), Carnamah, Coorow, Three Springs, Mingenew, Irwin. 2018-2019.
- Ongoing updates to all key stakeholders including Local Government
- Meeting and ongoing discussion with Mingenew-Irwin Group – Mingenew
- Joint aerial surveillance and control program for Feral pigs with Central Wheatbelt Biosecurity Association and Northern Biosecurity Group. March 2019
- Attendance at Feralscan workshop Dalwallinu July 2019
- Inclusion in DPIRD Gene Flow research of Wild Dogs in the Agricultural zone.
- Supported by presentation of DPIRD at Avon Midland Country Zone June 2019.
- Collaborative display, attendance and information WALGA Local Government Week – August 7-9th, 2019.
- Collaborative Display, attendance and information at Mingenew Expo August 14,15, 2019
- Display and attendance at Sheep Easy Conference, Moora, August 2019
- Collaborative display at Dowerin Field Day, August 2019.
- Attendance and display at Liebe Group Spring Field Day, Watheroo, September 2019
- Presentation at West Midlands Group Field Day, Dandaragan, September 2019
- Display at Mingenew-Irwin Group Field Day, Mingenew, September 2019
- Midlands Biosecurity Group Annual General Meeting December 2019
- Letters and Information Packages sent to every Local Government and Community Resources Centre in the Midlands. December 2019.
- Series of Wild Dog Bait Rack Workshops – Eganu, Dandaragan, Watheroo, Mingenew. February -April 2020.
- Feral Pig baiting mix-up event in collaboration with the Mingenew-Irwin Group, with support from the Central Wheatbelt Biosecurity Association. February 2020.

Media

A number of media articles have been published through various formats. These include:

Farm Weekly

- *Pest Management Starts and Home Podcast Article – May 21, 2020*
 - Available at: <https://www.farmweekly.com.au/story/6763924/podcasts-focus-on-west-midlands-issues/>
- *Wild Dog Workshops for Preventing Pests – June 6, 2019*

- *Midlands Biosecurity Group gets Funding – May 9, 2019*
- *Wild Dog Vigilance Needed – August 30, 2018*

Local Newspapers

- *Midlands Biosecurity Group forming to coordinate fight against feral pest – April 2019*
- *Midlands Biosecurity Group receives three years of funding – May 2019*
- *Moora wild dog workshop – May 2019*
- *How to Report Wild Dog Activity – June 2019*
- *Restricted Chemical Permits – June 2019*
- *Doggers on the ground in the Midlands Region – July 2019*
- *Get to know your “doggers” on the ground – August 2019*
- *Dogger Fact Sheet Flyer – November 2020*
- *Annual General Meeting Flyer – November 2020*
- *Midlands Biosecurity Group formally recognised by State – December 2019*
- *Midlands Biosecurity Group Update – February 2020*
- *Dogger Fact Sheet Flyer – February 2020*
- *Free baits available to farmers in Midlands region – April 2020*
- *DPR posted to fight ferals – June 2020*

West Midlands Group E-Newsletter

- *Wild Dog Workshop Advertising – October 2018*
- *Wild Dog Workshop: Need for Action – November 2018*
- *Biosecurity group to rid Midlands region of growing wild dog issue – December 2018*
- *More feral pest workshops in March – February 2019*
- *Midlands Biosecurity Group formed to combat feral pests – March 2019*
- *Passion for paddock to plate discovered post farm sale due to wild dogs – March 2019*
- *Considering Baiting? You need a restricted Chemical Permit – April 2019*
- *Midlands Biosecurity Group Receives 3 years of funding – May 2019*
- *How to Report Wild Dog Activity – June 2019*
- *Feral Pig Management in the Midlands Region – July 2019*
- *Meet your Dogger – August 2019*
- *Meet your Dogger – September 2019*
- *Doggers are active in your area – December 2019*
- *Midlands Biosecurity Group Update – April 2020*
- *DPR posted to fight ferals – July 2020*

Social Media

Available at:

MBG Twitter handle: @midlands_group

MBG Facebook Page handle: @midlandsbiogroup

- *Facebook and Twitter “MBG Wild Dog Workshop” Flyer and FeralScan stats – 19 February 2019*
- *Facebook and Twitter “MBG Wild Dog Workshop” Flyer – 4 March 2019*

- *Twitter "Wild Dog workshop attendees" photo – 6 March 2019*
- *Facebook "MBG Wild Dog Workshop" Flyer – 6 March 2019*
- *Facebook "Electric fence works to deter wild dogs" Farm Weekly article – 11 March 2019*
- *Facebook and Twitter "Wild dog sightings update" – 21 March 2019*
- *Twitter "MBG on Country Hour" link – 4 April 2019*
- *Facebook "EOI's sought for doggers" Farm Weekly article – 8 May 2019*
- *Twitter "EOI's sought for doggers" Farm Weekly article – 12 May 2019*
- *Facebook "MBG Wild Dog Workshop" Flyer – 6 June 2019*
- *Facebook "MBG Wild Dog Workshop" Flyer – 15 June 2019*
- *Twitter "MBG Wild Dog Workshop" Flyer – 14 June 2019*
- *Twitter "MBG Wild Dog Workshop" Retweet @AnnabelleGarra1 – 19 June 2019*
- *Facebook "How to use RabbitScan" Youtube video – 5 August 2019*
- *Twitter and Facebook "Have you seen feral pest activity on your property" – 19 August 2019*
- *Twitter "Thanks to Mingenew Expo for hosting the MBG team last week!" – 20 August 2019*
- *Twitter and Facebook "Are you at SheepEasy2019? Come say hello!" - 21 August 2019*
- *Twitter "Great innovation featured at SheepEasy2019 – the slades ferals fencer" – 21 August 2019*
- *Twitter and Facebook "Did you know wild dogs are present in 85% of the country" – 26 August 2019*
- *Twitter and Facebook "Are you heading to Dowerin Field Day? Come say hello!" – 27 August 2019*
- *Twitter and Facebook "Become an MBG member for free!" – 3 September 2019*
- *Twitter "Come and see the MBG at the WMG Spring Field Day!" – 6 September 2019*
- *Twitter and Facebook "MBG AGM Save the date!" 10 September 2019*
- *Twitter and Facebook "Come see us at the WMG Spring Field Day next week!" – 16 September 2019*
- *Twitter "Become an MBG member for free!" – 20 September 2019*
- *Twitter "Thanks to those who visited us at the Spring Field Day yesterday!" – 25 September 2020*
- *Twitter and Facebook "The MBG AGM is this October!" – 2 October 2019*
- *Twitter and Facebook "Wild dog and feral pig workshop" – 9 October 2019*
- *Twitter and Facebook "Poison baiting for rabbit control youtube video" – 21 October 2019*
- *Twitter and Facebook "Wild dogs are active in your area. Report pests!" – 23 October 2019*
- *Twitter and Facebook "Sheep and goat producers in the Morawa area are ropeable after fence removed" – 30 October 2019*
- *Twitter and Facebook "Get to know your dogger!" – 31 October 2019*
- *Twitter and Facebook "Farmers call for massive feral pig cull" – 5 November 2020*
- *Twitter and Facebook "MBG AGM coming up!" 21 November 2019*
- *Twitter and Facebook "MBG AGM this Friday!" 4 December 2019*
- *Twitter and Facebook "Congratulations to the MBG's inaugural Board of Management" 6 December 2020*
- *Twitter share "NBG feral pig project" – 13 December 2019*

- Facebook “Report any suspicious plants using the MyPestGuide Reporter app” – 16 December 2019
- Twitter and Facebook “Become a member today!” – 19 Feb 2020
- Twitter and Facebook “The MBG has a website!” – 17 March 2020
- Twitter and Facebook “Using muzzles for working dog safety youtube video” – 2 April 2020
- Twitter and Facebook “Latest edition of MBG newsletter is out now” – 29 April 2020
- Twitter and Facebook “Listen to Paddock Chat episode featuring MBG” – 13 May 2020
- Twitter “Latest edition of MBG newsletter is out now” – 22 May 2020

Midlands Biosecurity Group E-News

The MBG E-news has been developed to provide locally relevant information about pest management in the Midlands Region for MBG members and subscribers. Content includes a Co-ordinators report, a report on recent feral pest activity, information on local pest management events, latest research as well as any topical fact sheets, videos, or recordings, usually sourced from Pestsmart.org.au. The E-News has a subscription of 157 and growing.

Available at: <https://www.mbg.org.au/newsletters>

- Edition 1 – February 2020
- Edition 2 – March 2020
- Edition 3 – April 2020
- Edition 4 – May 2020
- Edition 5 – July 2020

Podcast

With Covid-19 restrictions taking place in March 2020, many local events and workshops were cancelled. In this time, the West Midlands Group launched its Podcast channel ‘Paddock Chat’, with the very first episode featuring the topic of Wild Dog management. The podcast was titled ‘Pest Management Starts at Home’ and was hosted by WMG’s communications officer Kirra Holley with MBG Co-ordinator Chris O’Callaghan and DPIRD Biosecurity Officer Jim Miller.

Available at: <https://www.mbg.org.au/pod-pest-management-starts-at-home>

Farmer Mail Drop

- MBG brochure and contact details – August 2019
- MBG letter to landholders – DPR consultation – March 2020
- MBG letter to farmers in Gingin, Vic Plains, Chittering Shires – April 2020

Other Media

- ABC Country hour interview with Charles Wass – 4 April 2019
- Web site developed - www.mbg.org.au
- Letters and Information packages delivered to every local government authority and CRC in the Midlands region. December 2019.

