

# FERAL CAT CONTROL UPDATE

## FELIXER DEPLOYMENT

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From late April to the end of May 2023 the Office of the Threatened Species Commissioner, with support from NRM South, will be deploying three Felixer traps within the Neck Game Reserve. This deployment is part of a wider Australian Government funded project being led by NRM South that is working to control feral cat populations on Bruny Island. These traps will be deployed and regularly serviced by licensed professionals, warning signs will be displayed at entrances to the reserve and within 50m of each trap.

### WHAT IS A FELIXER GROOMING TRAP AND HOW DOES IT WORK?



The Felixer cat grooming trap is a new and innovative method for controlling feral cat populations. The device contains a camera, data processing unit and cartridges of 1080 poison.

When the device identifies the animal passing in front of its camera as a cat, it squirts a dose of gel containing 8mg of 1080 poison (sodium fluoroacetate) onto the animal's fur. The poison is then ingested when the animal grooms its fur. This takes advantage of the fact that feral cats are often reluctant to enter traps, but they do instinctively and fastidiously groom themselves, unlike native animals.

### HOW DO FELIXERS KNOW IT'S A CAT?

Felixers were developed specifically as an automated and humane tool to help reduce the number of feral cats, thereby improving the welfare and survival of native animals. Previously the devices used laser sensors to analyse the size, shape and gait of animals, allowing them to specifically target cats. The new V3.2 Felixer™ with Artificial Intelligence, has been developed to further minimise the possibility of targeting native species.

### WHY DO WE NEED FELIXERS?

To date, the primary methods of cat control on Bruny Island have been domestic cat management and trapping of strays and feral cats. Although these methods are still very important, effective feral cat control on Bruny Island needs multiple approaches.

Now that the number of cats has been reduced around heavily controlled areas such as the Neck seabird colony, the remaining cats are too wary of cage traps to be caught in this way. Felixer cat grooming traps do not resemble traditional traps and are more effective at targeting these animals. This provides a promising new method for protecting native species and ecosystems from the negative impacts of feral cats.

## WHAT ARE THE RISKS TO NATIVE AND DOMESTIC ANIMALS ON BRUNY?



The Felixer deployment on Bruny Island comes after a non-lethal trial of five devices on Bruny Island for four months which was used to assess the risks posed to non-target species and their efficiency in targeting feral cats. Throughout this trial, over 1700 non-target animals were detected and none were targeted (including quolls, potaroos, wallabies and birds). These results indicate that the potential risks to non-target, native species is negligible. During the same period 11 cats were detected and correctly identified by the device.

In the current deployment, a 2-week trial of these devices in non-lethal mode will be conducted immediately before they are switched to lethal mode. Each device keeps a photographic record of all animals detected by the sensors as well as all animals targeted. These photos will be regularly reviewed and if a non-target animal is identified as a target, the device will be immediately deactivated.

Like other pest control techniques such as baiting, there is a small risk that domestic animals may be targeted. However, the current domestic dog laws and cat by-law minimise the risk of contact between domestic pets and these devices by excluding domestic animals from the reserve and requiring domestic cats to be contained to the owner's property. Additionally, this deployment will be conducted in the Neck Game Reserve, within land managed by Parks and Wildlife Service where domestic animals are not allowed and is well away from residential areas. Signage will also be installed either side of the devices.

## WHAT ABOUT SECONDARY POISONING?

Secondary poisoning refers to a situation where an animal consumes another animal that has died as a result of poisoning. After ingesting the bait, 1080 is distributed throughout the cells of the cat, so a scavenger would need to eat the whole cat (~5 kg) very soon after death to receive the full dose of poison. Any 1080 gel remaining on the coat of a sprayed cat rapidly degrades due to microorganism activity and UV radiation, and is therefore not deemed a likely source of secondary poisoning. Studies from other parts of Australia have also confirmed this.



## WILL IT WORK?

**Yes!** Felixer devices have been used since 2015 across Australia and on off-shore islands in cat eradication and cat suppression, in order to protect threatened species and ecosystems from the impacts of feral cats. The data from local non-lethal trials demonstrate that they could also be a very effective tool for cat control on Bruny Island as well.

More information about Felixer traps can be found at: [www.thylation.com/felixer-faqs/](http://www.thylation.com/felixer-faqs/) and on the Bruny Island cat management project at [www.nrmsouth.org.au/eastern-quoll-bruny-island/](http://www.nrmsouth.org.au/eastern-quoll-bruny-island/)