

Call for more dingoes to restore native species

Reintroducing more dingoes to Australia would help control the population of nuisance pests and restore some of the country's dwindling native species populations, according to research by Professor Chris Johnson from the School of Marine & Tropical Biology at James Cook University.

Introduced predators, including humans, account for the significant 50 per cent extinction rate of native fauna in Australia. The major culprits are feral cats and foxes, which are efficient and diverse hunters.

'We cannot bring back what we've already lost, but we must now urgently deal with the threat from cats and foxes, which prevents recovery of rare species and could cause more extinctions in the future,' Professor Johnson urges.

Although fencing and poison baiting can be used for dealing with the unwanted pests, they are not always successful and require significant resources to set up and maintain.

Dingoes, on the other hand, could be the answer farmers are looking for. They compete for the same food supply as feral cats and foxes, and even prey upon them (as well as other species, such as feral pigs and kangaroos, which can be a nuisance for farmers).

Professor Johnson's research has shown



Australian ecosystems have adapted to the presence of dingoes over thousands of years, but not to voracious introduced foxes and feral cats. Robert Cumming

that more dingoes would help control the population of these pests, releasing pressure on the country's diminishing biodiversity. He has recently published his findings in the book *Australia's Mammal Extinctions – a 50,000-year history*.

Having studied the decline of Australian

mammals for nearly 30 years, Professor Johnson has seen first-hand how native populations, such as rufous bettongs, can thrive when dingoes are present.

'I found that for ground-dwelling species the presence of dingoes makes a big impact on probability of decline. In places where dingoes are rare or absent, and foxes and cats are abundant, 50 per cent or more of ground-living mammals have vanished; where dingoes remain abundant the rate of local disappearance is 10 per cent or less,' Professor Johnson says.

Once dingoes are reintroduced, fox numbers could be suppressed within a few years. This is good news for threatened species, which are sometimes wiped out from the mainland but survive in small numbers on predator-free islands.

But Professor Johnson also highlighted that there are complex processes required to restore stable native animal populations and their habitats.

'Getting these species back to the mainland depends not just on establishing the right ecological conditions on mainland sites (which mainly means having foxes and cats under control), but going through the expensive and lengthy process of translocation from their refuges and building up populations in the reintroduction sites. This whole process will take decades.'

● Tracey Millen

South Australia's grid payback makes solar easier

South Australia will be the first Australian state to introduce a Feed-In Tariff policy for electricity, providing renewed incentive and support for the take-up of solar energy technology by households.

Under the progressive new policy, residents are rewarded for feeding surplus electricity back into the city grid, receiving a premium rate on their electricity bills. It is a positive move that will likely spark the system's uptake in other states not already providing grid paybacks.

The high upfront cost of solar photovoltaic technology often hinders individuals from investing in it for their homes. The Feed-In Tariff is one incentive the

government is offering to make such an investment more feasible for the general population.

BP Solar, the largest manufacturer of solar photovoltaic products in Australia, commended the South Australian Government for its initiative, seeing it as a breakthrough in acknowledging that solar energy is valued as an emission-free peak power source.

BP Solar Australasia Regional Director, Mark Twidell, is enthusiastic about the possibilities the new policy will create.

'This policy is one that has been adopted in over 30 countries worldwide and has proven to be instrumental in



Domestic solar power has just become an easier option under South Australia's Feed-In Tariff. Dirk

transforming markets, creating jobs and delivering greenhouse savings,' he explains.

Germany introduced similar legislation in 2000 and is now the largest market for solar photovoltaic technology.