

Setting the scene

The feral pig is considered by the community to be many things: agricultural pest, endemic and exotic disease host, environmental liability, export commodity, [cultural resource] and recreational resource. These attitudes vary with time and location. The feral pig management debate has become complex because of changing values in the community. No longer simply regarded as a threat to agriculture and the environment, the feral pig now also represents a source of significant income to rural communities through recreational hunting and commercial harvesting.

Source: Choquenot, D., McIlroy, J. and Korn, T. *Managing Vertebrate Pests: Feral Pigs*, Bureau of Rural Sciences, Canberra, 1996



What to do

Debate the following question

- ▶ are feral pigs a destructive pest or a valuable resource?

Include the following points in your destructive pest argument.

- ▶ feral pigs are a pest
- ▶ have the ability to kill and eat newborn lambs
- ▶ crops are eaten and destroyed resulting in lower yields and lower income for farmers
- ▶ damages property fences
- ▶ contaminates water sources by trampling and rooting up vegetation and soil in and around rivers, lakes and dams
- ▶ competes with livestock for feed by eating or damaging pasture
- ▶ are a potential carrier of exotic disease, such as foot and mouth disease and swine fever, should such diseases enter Australia
- ▶ diverts money and valuable resources from a farming property
- ▶ seriously impacts the environment by modifying unique and sensitive habitats
- ▶ predated on a range of native animals
- ▶ competes with native animals for food by eating native plants, fruits, seeds, invertebrates, reptiles, small mammals and carrion

Include the following points in your valuable resource argument.

- ▶ feral pigs are a resource
- ▶ commercial harvesting provides an additional income to cash strapped farmers
- ▶ Australian feral pigs are free of foot and mouth disease which makes them suitable for exporting to countries who consume wild boar meat
- ▶ Australia supplies 20-30 per cent of the total international trade in wild boar meat
- ▶ are regarded as one of the most important game animals in Australia
- ▶ economic resource for game meat, an industry worth approximately \$20 million a year
- ▶ the wild boar meat industry was created to ensure strict protocols are followed in the processing of meat for consumers
- ▶ hunting of feral pigs is a lucrative tourist attraction, with hunters from around the world regularly visiting Australia to hunt wild boar
- ▶ the local community benefits from dollars spent by amateur pig hunters
- ▶ assists farmers in the clean up of damaged / discarded fruit crops
- ▶ are an essential source of high quality protein to many indigenous communities

 **Feral fact****The legend of Hogzilla — Alapaha, Georgia, USA**

In June 2004, an enthusiastic game hunter claimed to have shot and killed a wild boar measuring 3.6 metres (12 feet) in length and weighing over 450kg (1000 pounds). Due to the difficulty in moving such a large animal it was promptly buried on the property. Only one grainy photo of the triumphant hunter standing along side his prize exists.

Mystery and suspicion quickly grew around the aptly named 'Hogzilla'. Many people thought the pig was released from a nearby farm or that supplementary feed was left out on the hunting reserve to help fatten it up.

Today the small town of Alapaha revels in the celebrity of Hogzilla. Tourist numbers and the local economy have increased and to celebrate, locals held a festival focusing on the legend by organising a parade complete with a replica Hogzilla float, children in pink pig costumes and the winner of the Hogzilla princess competition.