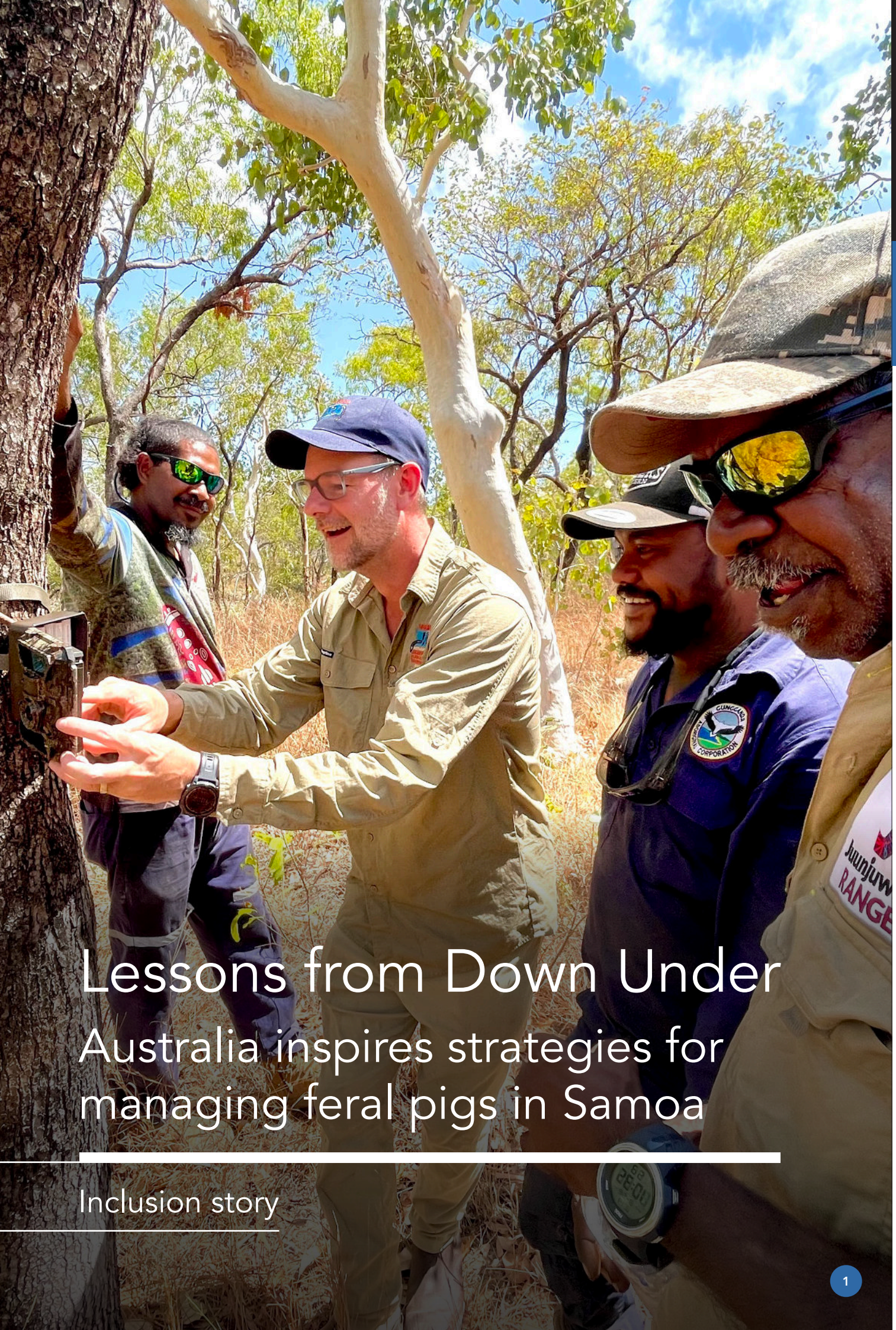

Lessons from Down Under

Australia inspires strategies for managing feral pigs in Samoa

Inclusion story

Feral pigs are a major threat to food security, farmer livelihoods and the environment in Samoa.

Seeking solutions, in 2024 a Samoan delegation embarked on a four-day study tour to Queensland, Australia, to learn about Australia's feral pig management strategies. The delegation included representatives from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF), the Scientific Research Organisation of Samoa (SROS), District Councils, a farmers' association, and a taro export cooperative. The tour was facilitated by Australian Pork Limited (APL)/Feral Pigs Australia in collaboration with MDF. The study was also an opportunity for the Samoan delegation to share stories, challenges and solutions with the Junjuwarra community, who also live with the threat of feral pigs affecting their agricultural and cultural landscape.

Data-driven policies

Feral pigs are an established pest in Australia, occupying a staggering 45 per cent of the landmass across all states and territories. The study tour began with discussions with Australian Government officials and wildlife management experts. Australia has long battled feral pigs, developing comprehensive policies and strategies to manage them. Chief Environmental and Biosecurity Officer from Australia's Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Dr Bertie Hennecke, stressed the importance of collecting data on feral pig activity to inform policy decisions. Data collection and implementation rely on collaboration between states and territories, and partnerships with Indigenous ranger programs and organisations like the North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA). Samoa and Australia face similar feral pig challenges, including land and crop damage, water contamination, infrastructure destruction, and biodiversity threats. Australia's national strategies offer valuable insights for Samoa as it seeks to manage its growing feral pig population.

The impact of feral pigs on traditional knowledge and cultural sites

In Cooktown, Northern Queensland, the delegation met with NAILSMA Research Manager Dr Justin Perry and the Junjuwarra Indigenous rangers, traditional owners of the Starcke locality. The delegation observed feral pig tracking and trapping demonstrations led by the rangers and NAILSMA.

The rangers explained that they begin by setting up pig traps on feral pig "highways" or "pig paths". These are usually close to wetlands or water sources frequented by feral animals. This is followed by three to four weeks of free feeding in the deactivated traps to ensure that the feral pigs become familiar and comfortable with the traps in their habitat. Cameras are set up to monitor the number of pigs feeding at the traps. Once the rangers are satisfied with the number of pigs feeding, the traps are activated to maximise the number of feral pigs caught. While the traps differed, the methods were similar to those successfully trialled in Samoa by MAF and SROS using the MDF-supported Pig Brigg Traps.

Dr Perry highlighted how feral pigs also contribute to the loss of traditional knowledge in Indigenous communities:

"When a plant or food source is destroyed by feral pigs, the transmission of practical knowledge about the uses of these plants and locations of food sources, such as freshwater turtles, is lost to the younger generations within the Indigenous communities," he said.

The rangers shared how feral pigs tend to be low on protein during the cooler months of the year and so begin the search for high-protein food, causing damage to sacred cultural sites, story places, and wetlands.

QUICK FACT

Why do feral pigs love wetlands?

Feral pigs are drawn to wetlands for food, water and shelter. They dig up roots, destroy native plants and contaminate water sources. This damages sacred Indigenous sites in Australia and threatens the delicate balance of these ecosystems. Samoa's wetlands and freshwater sources face similar risks, making targeted feral pig control essential for protecting both the environment and cultural heritage.

"The feral pigs are damaging our sacred cultural sites, story places and wetlands. These are very special places that have been used by our ancestors for medicine and healing, which have been turned into swamps as pigs look for freshwater turtles, fish and crabs," said Chairman of the Junjuwarra Aboriginal Corporation and Ranger Coordinator, Mr Neil Jacko.

The Samoan delegation strongly related to these concerns, seeing the same risks to their own traditional knowledge and cultural heritage if feral pigs are not controlled.

Ravaged crops and lost income

The final stop of the study tour took the delegation to Cairns, where they met with the Innisfail Canegrowers Association to discuss the impact of feral pigs on commercial crops. Third-generation cane farmer Joe Marano described how the feral pig population surged after Cyclones Larry and Yasi in 2006, as they moved onto commercial farms in search of food and water, causing millions in damage.

> *In the last ten years, we have lost over a million dollars in income, averaging about 100,000 dollars per year in lost profits. We can really relate to the stories from Samoa on the impacts of feral pigs on taro farming.*
>
> **Joe Marano**, a cane farmer.

The delegation drew comparisons with Samoa, where feral pigs frequently destroy hundreds of matured taro plants overnight, leading to significant financial losses for farmers. The rising feral pig populations has become one of the biggest challenges for farmers in Samoa in recent years.

"We have been noticing an increasing number of feral pigs in farmlands in Apia and Savai'i. Sometimes, taro shortages occur in both local markets and exports. Farmers also fear that native varieties of taro may become extinct due to feral pigs. Some farmers have even abandoned taro farming due to repeated crop losses. To control feral pig populations, they have started using pig fencing and traps. Some have also shifted to planting other crops", explained Siusiuosalafai Papalii, Senior Crops Advisory Officer at MAF Samoa.

QUICK FACT

The 100-million-dollar problem

In Australia, feral pigs cause over **AUD100 million** in damages annually, destroying crops, fences and water sources. Left unmanaged, their populations can increase by **up to 86 per cent** in a year.

Samoa's farmers already experience significant losses, with **78 per cent** of surveyed farmers reporting crop damage. Over **50 per cent** noted an increase in damage over recent years, with 51 per cent incurring replanting costs. Without intervention, the financial impact could become devastating.

Michael Nash, Natural Assets Manager, Hinchinbrook Shire Council, presents on feral pig trapping in Cairns, Australia.

Looking ahead: Samoa's mission to tackle feral pigs

The study tour equipped the Samoan delegation with practical insights and potential solutions to tackle the feral pig problem in Samoa. Dr Fiame Leo, Chief Executive Officer of SROS, acknowledged that while Samoa cannot directly replicate Australia's approach, the core principles of data collection, community engagement and proactive management will be critical.

> *We aim to develop something* ***similar to Australia's National Feral Pig Action Plan, tailored to Samoa's unique context.***
>
> **Dr Fiame Leo**,
> Chief Executive Officer of SROS

Study tour facilitator Darren Marshall expressed optimism that Samoa can manage the issue with proper planning.

"There is an opportunity in Samoa to get ahead of the feral pig problem and to suppress it before it gets to unmanageable levels.

I hope that we have presented some useful information to the delegation, the problems that we have with feral pigs and potentially some solutions, and the importance of working with people and understanding the vulnerabilities of the feral pigs in their landscape," he said.

By adapting Australia's best practices and collaborating with experts and Indigenous groups, Samoa can develop a strong regulatory framework and community-driven strategies. These efforts will help mitigate the damage before feral pigs become an irreversible crisis—safeguarding agriculture, livelihoods, and cultural heritage.

The Samoan delegation with the Junjuwarra Aboriginal Corporation indigenous rangers and representatives from NAILSMA.