

# Top invasive species named and shamed

By JAMIESON MURPHY

INVASIVE species have cost the Australian economy almost \$400 billion and farmers will continue to suffer the consequences unless more money is invested into stopping their spread.

Led by Flinders University, South Australia, researchers analysed data from a range of international studies and combined it with Australian datasets.

They found over the past 60 years, the total economic cost was \$390b.

Feral cats were the single-most costly species, at around \$18.5b, mostly due to the ecological damage they do to native birds and wildlife.

However, the combined costs of managing invasive plants was the worst of all at \$200b, with ryegrass, parthenium and ragwort the costliest culprits.

Invasive mammals and insects were the next biggest burdens, costing the country US\$48.63b and US\$11.95b respectively, with cats, rabbits and red imported fire ants the three costliest species.

Flinders University professor Corey Bradshaw said the costs had been

growing exponentially, with the nation spending about \$19b a year combating them.

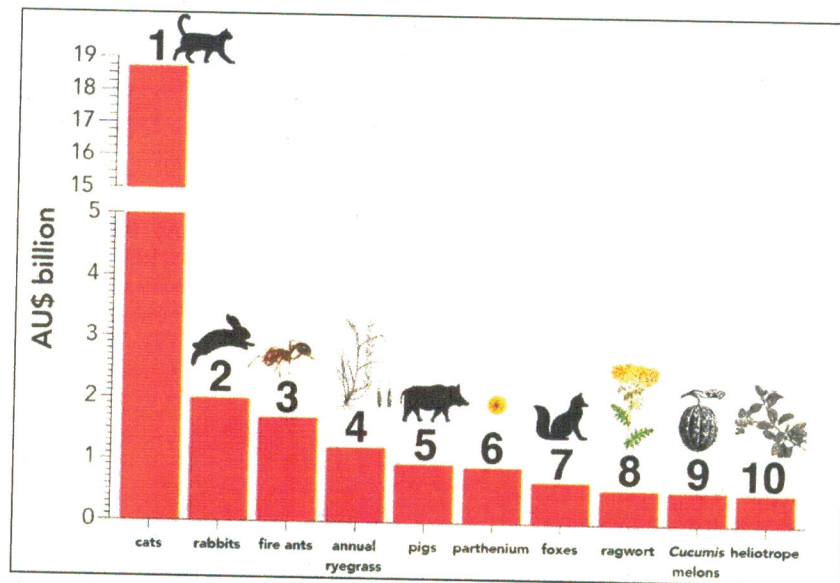
"Prevention is better than a cure at least in terms of the costs," Mr Bradshaw said.

"So if we get on top of our biosecurity, our surveillance and our eradication approaches,

we'll save billions of dollars over the next few decades."

The total cost of an invasive species was determined by looking at things like crop or livestock damage, the combined cost of management including eradication and even human salaries.

Centre for Invasive Species Solutions chief executive Andreas Glanzning said research put the study spotlight on the need for strategic and co-ordinated action on invasive species.



□ Top 10 most costly invasive species in Australia.

"In a way, tackling invasive species is the low hanging fruit in terms of agriculture reaching its \$100b goal by 2030," Mr Glanzning said.

Recent studies have found biosecurity spending has a 30:1 return on investment.

Invasive Species Centre chief executive Andrew Cox said the nation's biosecurity controls had a tangible impact on farmers, who spend an average of \$11,000 on pest control every year.

"If we can improve pest

control across the ag sector, we can lower those on-farm costs," Mr Cox said.

The analysis also considered the estimated costs of five native species groups, as they are often deemed pest species due to their overabundance and tendency to damage crops, livestock, or farmland.

Together kangaroos, koalas and wombats only accounted for between 2.4 to 3pc of the costs – with kangaroos alone almost completely responsible for those costs.