

# Midnight pork patrol

By Duncan Paterson

REMOTE infra-red cameras with motion detectors are the latest weapons in the continuing battle against feral pigs.

The program, which began in Tully in 2007, is estimated to cost Innisfail and Tully banana growers more than \$12,000 each year, and cane farmers more than \$45,000.

Leading the charge is Terrain NRM, a not-for-profit community organisation which aims to build partnerships to secure the health of natural resources in the Wet Tropics.

The group is managing the Cassowary Coast integrated feral pig program, which combines trapping and baiting with the only bait-registered poison, 1080.

But the trapping part of the program was suspended following the death of a cassowary in a trap at Garners Beach last December.

CEO Carole Sweetman said the trapping guidelines were being reviewed, and trapping in cassowary habitats would not be resumed until all guidelines were approved.

She said one baiting site near Henderson Drive had killed about 80 pigs from one property in the past six months.

"The last baiting was on December 14 last year, near Rifle Range



**CAUGHT IN THE ACT:** An automatic night vision camera captures a herd of feral pigs eating baited bananas.

Photo: Supplied

Road, and we will not bait again until April this year," she said.

"This is the first program using both traps and baiting, and concentrating on a smaller scale area, including nearly all of the Cassowary Coast, and some of Hinchinbrook Shire."

Team leader Bart Dryden said the program would continue while it still provided value.

"We are trying to achieve sustained control of feral pigs, and for

us, the best results are seeing declining damage in sugar cane and other crops.

"We believe we need to remove 70 per cent of the feral pig population a year to get sustained control so we can maintain numbers at a lower level."

Mr Dryden said funding came from the Australian Government, Cassowary Coast Regional Council, Department of Environment and Resource Management, Inn-

isfail and Tully sugar cane industries, Elders Forestry, the Australian Banana Growers Council and Powerlink Queensland.

But the program has to run at minimum cost.

"We are encouraging greater participation in the communities, because we can't do it on our own," he said.

"We do use two contractors, who take over the role of landholders - they collect the baits from Council

and distribute them to selected sites.

"That's better from our point of view, because they are trained, know Workplace Health and Safety and animal welfare regulations, and operate under our guidance."

Baiting sites are selected by pre-feeding pigs with unbaited bananas and corn mixed with molasses.

Cracked corn, soaked in water with 1080 concentrate added, is later spread like a blanket on the site awaiting their return.

Mr Dryden said there was little risk to other wildlife.

"The poison has only weak secondary toxicity, cameras are activated late in the evenings so as not to attract off-target species, adjacent landholders are advised, and parks are locked up so people and pets don't go in when the site has been baited," he said.

"The protocol is pretty rigorous and we have to abide by that: We advertise in the media to advise all residents and produce an information brochure, and Council provides lists of people who we can contact. There are private landholders in Ella Bay baiting themselves, but they have to go through the same hoops and can only get baits from Council."