

Australia's fight against feral cats could turn to gene drive technology

Feral cats kill thousands of native animals every minute — now a controversial plan to use gene drive technology as a weapon against them is being considered by the Federal Government.

Conservation groups want cats that only produce male offspring to be released into the wild as a way to save native mammals, such as bilbies and bettongs, that are under attack.

The CSIRO is investigating the technology, which the Federal Government said could be a “powerful tool” subject to careful study.

But scientists acknowledge there are risks, particularly if genetically modified cats made it to other countries and wiped out native cats there.

Unlike other feral predators, cats live in every habitat in Australia, from the rainforest to the desert, the east coast to the west.

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“The primary focus globally at the moment is whether or not it would be an acceptable technology to manage mosquitos to try and rid the world of diseases like malaria,” [Research Director Andy] Sheppard said.

He said the technology would remove the need for baiting or trapping because the population would die out naturally — but he acknowledged there were risks.

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If the decision was made to push forward, Dr Sheppard said the technology had huge potential for managing even the most elusive pests.

Read full, original post: [Gene drive technology considered in the fight to save native animals from feral cats](#)