

Wolgan Valley Resort & Spa

Feral Animal Control

Wolgan Valley Resort & Spa, Emirates Hotels & Resorts' first hospitality development outside Dubai, is being built on the same principles as Emirates' acclaimed Al Maha Desert Resort & Spa, fully integrated into its environment and supporting wide-ranging conservation practices focusing on endangered species protection.

With approximately 4,000 acres of land dedicated as a wildlife reserve and bordered by two of Australia's most prominent National Parks, Wolgan Valley Resort & Spa is the only Australian resort in recent history to receive permission to be built adjacent to a World Heritage Area.

The Wolgan conservancy project re-establishes and secures a future for many of the region's 1,500 indigenous and endangered species, which were under critical pressure from introduced flora and feral predators.

Australia has the highest rate of mammal extinctions in the world and introduced feral predators such as cats, foxes and rabbits are the greatest threat to surviving species. Ten feral species are found within Wolgan Valley alone, including cats and red foxes which have almost eradicated all the small and medium-sized local native mammals.

Over the years, many conservation organisations in Australia have implemented successful methods to create 'feral-free zones' and ensure that local native species, especially those that are most threatened, are protected.

In January 2009, Wolgan Valley Resort & Spa completed a trial feral-free zone covering a 50-hectare area. Wolgan Valley's natural escarpments, provided by the surrounding Donkey and Wolgan Mountains, prevent animal movement and make the property a perfect fit for the development of this pilot project.

This initiative was developed in partnership with the University of Western Sydney, who's been supervising a two-year biodiversity research project to study the effects of creating a feral-free environment. Now already half completed, the study includes site investigations, habitat assessment, vegetation surveys, wildlife movements and ongoing monitoring of onsite water quality.

Designed specifically to keep out feral animals, the feral-proof fence features 'flappy tops', which prevent them from climbing over fences as well as from entering the enclosed area. and. In the event of a bushfire, three sets of very large fence gates can be opened to enable animals to escape the enclosed reserve through open areas. They also allow Rangers and Field Guides to drive in and out of the feral-free area.

Wolgan Valley Resort & Spa is also working on the future development of a 'greater' feral-free zone, which will protect wildlife over the entire property. This stretch of land, delineated by the valley's natural escarpments and a larger feral-free fence, would connect currently separate sections of protected National Park land, creating 'wildlife corridors' to support native wildlife movements around the property and into adjoining World Heritage Areas.

This 'greater' feral-proof zone would run along the Wolgan Road, well inside the existing farm fences that are incapable of preventing invasions by feral species.

The development of this 'greater' feral-free zone would enable the resort to:

- ✓ Eradicate existing pest species within the feral-proof area. Management plans will be implemented by trained and experienced staff to maintain the feral-free zone and will prescribe specific controls for those feral species which pose the biggest threat to native wildlife populations.
- ✓ Work with National Park authorities to establish wildlife protection priorities and examine the long-term conservation needs of native species within the Valley.
- ✓ Work with established conservation organisations in the local area to develop a programme for reintroduction of local native species that have already become extremely rare or extinct.

The Wolgan Valley feral-free wildlife sanctuary will benefit the surrounding National Park land, providing a buffer between surrounding agricultural land. It is fully aligned with Emirates' stated aims of supporting wildlife and biodiversity protection in the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

The development of the Wolgan Valley 'greater' feral-free zone is pending approval by the Australian Government. Under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation (EPBC) Act – the Government's central piece of environmental legislation – the resort is required to perform two years of scientific studies and submit the results to relevant government agencies before they can officially approve the project.

Emirates has worked closely with state and federal conservation organisations every step of the way to ensure full compliance with requirements.

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