

Introduction

Why were foreign dung beetles brought to Australia?

In the cattle producing areas of Australia, unburied cattle dung fouls pastures, locks up nutrients and serves as a breeding ground for important fly pests, such as the bush fly and, in the north, the buffalo fly. Native dung beetles, adapted to feeding on the dry fibrous pellets of marsupials, have had little impact on the dispersal of cattle dung, either in the semi-natural pastures of tropical and subtropical northern Australia or in the more intensive systems of temperate southern parts. This problem was recognised by CSIRO entomologist Dr George Bornemissza,

who proposed that foreign dung beetles be imported into Australia to bury cattle dung and hence minimise the twin problems of pasture fouling and fly breeding.

In 1966 a pilot project began to import foreign dung beetles into northern Australia to assess prospects for the biological control of dung in tropical pastures. Once the new beetles became abundant, the associated high degree of dung burial attracted much interest among cattlemen and led to the establishment of the CSIRO Dung Beetle Project, the aim of which was to import beetles for all different climatic areas of Australia.

Between 1968 and 1992 CSIRO imported and released 43 species from Africa, Europe and Asia, of which 23 have