



17 February 2016

Research Director
Agriculture and Environment Committee
Parliament House
Cnr of George and Alice Streets
Brisbane Qld 4000

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: Submission to Inquiry into barrier fences in Queensland

Condamine Alliance has reviewed the inquiry submission areas of interest and makes the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1

Consider the historical purpose of the barrier fences (keep dingoes and rabbits out) and if the current and future agricultural needs for a barrier fence are still relevant to maintain for these areas.

Recommendation 2

Further consideration of allowing some of the key functions of administration to be delivered by other local organisations capable of providing transactions at a lower cost to allow more funds to be spent on fence management.

Recommendation 3

That the department undertake a role of management of the wild dog barrier fence and consideration be given to combining all QLD barrier fence management functions with one organisation/department.

Condamine Alliance considers a number of questions related to historical events that led up to why the barrier fences were established and how that relates to modern farming practices and systems needs review.

Condamine Alliance works closely with our Local Governments, Toowoomba Regional Council (TRC), Southern Downs Regional Council (SDRC), Western Downs Regional Council (WDRC), and the Darling Downs Moreton Bay Rabbit Board to deal with pest strategies and initiatives leading to on ground action.

Currently we have a number of joint projects that are jointly funded to these organisations to expand their effort and reach in pest management.

In response to the questions posed by the review we make the following comments:

In considering the inquiries questions we have asked the following point on what is considered "management" in order to provide a response.

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If management is considered to be:

- More than just maintenance
- Oversight of all things to do with a barrier fence
- Engaging with landholders along the barrier fence
- Engaging landholders who have some indirect linkage to the barrier fence
- Local government and industry organisation in aspects of the barrier fence management
- Managing public concerns and issues regarding the barrier fence
- Interaction with pest animal networks
- Linkages to strategic control mechanisms that include the barrier fence
- Collection of data to prove impact of the barrier fence
- Collection of levies to maintain the barrier fence infrastructure
- Providing future solutions to all issue raised

Then our responses are provided in this context.

Response 1: The management of the Wild Dog Barrier Fence by the department

In considering this it is our opinion that the department is best placed to encompass all the roles identified as management as listed above. The department is best placed to undertake the role to ensure all stakeholders are engaged in the debate surrounding any issues associated with the barrier fences. It is unrealistic for landholders to undertake this role and local government have local interests which could prevent a strategic view to be taken. The department is best placed to bring consistency of all interests together to allow informed debate to be had.

Response 2: The management of the Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Fence by the Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Board (DDMRB)

In responding to this there is a slightly different interpretation to management by the DDMRB than for the department. In this case management is considered in this context:

- Role of management is more than just maintenance
- Oversight of all things to do with the fence
- Engaging with landholders along the fence
- Engaging the general public in rabbit awareness
- Liaising with Local Government and industry organisations
- Managing public concerns and issues
- Interaction with pest animal networks
- Linkage to strategic control mechanisms
- Collection of data to prove the impact of the fence
- Use of levies to maintain infrastructure

The DDMRB in the current context undertakes an important role. The one significant issue is the rising costs of administration without a rise in received levies. Thus a future role for the organisation could be to have its operational fence activities run by the DDMRB and the administrative duties assumed by another organisation providing those functions to the board which would allow them to concentrate efforts into fence effectiveness. Additional cost savings could be made by partnering with other entities to bring in additional resources and even to the point of gaining additional resources from non-traditional areas but the central role of the organisation would remain.

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The action of the DDMRB in management of the fence is limited to what can be done with allocated resources. This review could consider other delivery mechanisms that look at a number of ways of improving funds received and the administration of the organisation while allowing the work of fence management to continue.

Could there be a single entity for both fences?

A single entity would bring all issues associated with protecting farming interests to one point and could be possible if all stakeholders are engaged in the debate. We can't expect landholders to be able to undertake this and Local Government encompasses more than one area with particular interests. The department can bring individuals together to get consistency across all interests.

In contrast the DDMRB and department are doing much of the same roles but don't interact with each other to operate one fence and bring united collaborative outcomes. Duplication could be reduced if one entity did the combined fences operational role, separate out the administrative role and coordinate together on the engagement role.

Response 3: The effectiveness of barrier fences at protecting stock and crops from wild dogs, rabbits and other introduced species

In responding to this the original question should be asked why the fences were put were they are historically and how that fits to modern farming needs. If the rabbit fence has its "dirty " side on the same side as a clean side of the wild dog barrier fence there must be some consideration whether the fence is in the right place for modern agriculture and if the purpose of activity is meeting current and future needs.

Unfortunately not all landholders undertake all of their responsibilities in conjunction with an overarching plan of cooperation which makes overall coordination hit and miss for pest management.

Evidence does exist to show that the barrier fence reduces the mixing of rabbit populations and the density of movement. The fence makes it possible to reduce numbers but reduced pest numbers allows landholders not to go to the next step to eradicate because the costs increase and the last few don't matter that much. One historical example is on the Darling Downs when there used to be lots of sheep and dog fences around every property which had a role in restricting movement but those vectors have now disappeared.

It is acknowledged that densities of these farm animals has changed over the decades. In asking the question why was the fence located in that particular place in the first instance: was it to protect the food production areas and if so has this changed, was it in an area where the fence could go in without going through prickly pear at the time or was it to prevent dingoes moving in from up north and out west. It is important to recognise the historical context in relation to the modern context and future needs. How do small croppers survive on the dirty side of the fence, is the economic imperative real or not to keep rabbits on one side? History could say that the wild dog fence was to reduce dingo movement into sheep areas of New South Wales (NSW) and Queensland (QLD) but that issue has now moved to all dogs that roam free.

A fence to control cats, foxes, pigs and deer is questionable as the barrier fence is single species targeted rather than multiple species. This makes the need for barrier fences to be built for other pest species now questionable.

Response 4: The unintended impacts of barrier fences on native species

The following points are a number of areas for consideration by the review panel.

The new public attention to cluster fencing is now creating have and have not landscape for overall pest control. There is an increasing higher public cost to undertake management of the fence now and into the future.

Native species numbers change but the interaction between species for food and habitat reducing the known impact of effects. Climate adjustments will create the conditions for the movement of species to preferred sides of the fence including wild dogs and rabbits.

There is now more opportunity for movement of native species with the removal of old sheep fencing segments from early days of sheep production which provided a more intense arrangement of fence barriers.

Communities are reacting more and more to cost of publicly funded maintenance when there is more important issues at hand such as roads and water. With only a limited select few who benefit from the fence it will be questioned in the future why all rate payers have to contribute to the cost if the benefits are for one side only.

Response 5: Recent upgrades to sections of the Wild Dog Barrier Fence by the department

The main question that has been asked is which side is the dirty side of the wild dog fence and which is the dirty side of the rabbit fence. When this is known which agricultural pursuits are then affected?

Response 6: Whether barrier fences should be expanded to other areas of the State to protect stock.

It is considered there could be value in opening the debate across QLD in relation to the fence expansion and even closing the loop of the fence to enclose the barrier similar to what is undertaken for cluster fencing.

If the evidence is that fences do restrict movement if there is enough of them, then increased fencing could be of benefit. A consideration of non-expansion of the fence should be considered in the light of the original purpose of the fence: was it to stop dingoes moving south but the reason for having it has changed. Wild dogs is the new modern term and is interpreted differently by many people.

If a fence is to be effective how does the government and the community stop dogs being released into the wild for whatever reason. With a reduction in farm ownership numbers and a significant shift in types of enterprises do we need a fence at all. The loss of a single stock in small flocks had greater impact than larger flocks losing a single number by a small landholder. Thus, should landholders take more responsibility to protect their stock?



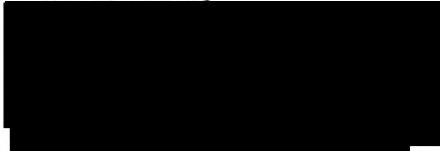
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A positive for the increase in fence distribution is that it would boost employment and local expenditure in areas of the state with little economic activity. The cost of maintenance should come from people who benefit as it is harder to explain to a household rate payer that a dog fence should be funded by them if they have no direct benefit.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute our thoughts into the Inquiry for barrier fences in Queensland.

Yours sincerely



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