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Yaraka, 4702

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Submission to QLD Parliaments Agriculture and Environment Committee

To whom it may concern

This submission is on behalf of a Western Queensland landholder group that has been meeting since July, soon after funding was announced for cluster fencing. All participants were keen to be a part of a cluster - namely Yaraka East and Yaraka West situated on either side of the lower Barcoo River. Following numerous meetings which discussed all measures relating to being part of a cluster and, as the drought bit harder, reality set in regarding costs which meant numerous landholders dropped out and modifications to the original planned cluster were made. As of December 2015 more than half of the landholders had backed out of being part of the cluster but before the group disbanded, all land holders agreed that the Multi Shire fence model (albeit as a modified version - possibly enclosing shires), which had undergone extensive investigation over 2 years, including full central western community consultation, was the preferred option over the cluster fence model. Below is a report from the Yaraka group's original meeting which was compiled by the facilitator of the meeting.

On Saturday July 25, 2015, sixteen (16) sheep producers from the Yaraka district met to discuss the impact of wild dogs on their capacity to continue grazing sheep. Together they represented 14 families, 12 sheep enterprises and 750,000 acres of the central west of Queensland.

Conversation 1 was around – The problems caused for your business by the dog and roo populations in your district...

The summary: Yaraka country is suited to sheep especially in low rain years when cattle have to be shifted off. Losses from dogs are measurable in the tens of thousands of dollars per property annually since 2011/12 (e.g. \$57,760 in 2015). Losses also come from dollars previously spent on the animals that are killed or bitten. Currently, landholders have to spend large amounts of time on dog control activities. For younger people they can't see a future in grazing the way things are at present. People are aware that fencing has worked in the past for dogs. Roos are present in large numbers and estimates put numbers at up to 800roos/1000ha. Roos prevent spelling of country as they devour stock feed and supplements. The

impact extends to causing the community numbers to drop through decreased employment options. All of this is happening at a time when many graziers are older and so are left with fewer options for their future.

Conversation 2 was around – The personal problems that these can create for yourself and others...

The summary: The time being spent on management actions for the dog and roo problems are great and it is producing no gains for the grazing families. The lack of success keeps people awake at night and plays on their minds at all times. People are weary. Communication can be difficult, which together with a lack of time with family, causes strain on relationships. Concern about staying viable is high and that means the future looks uncertain. The two problems of dogs and roos are, at present, unable to be controlled by graziers. Anxiety and stress levels are high and there is concern for a further loss of community.

Conversation 3 had a focus of – the benefits you believe your business will get from being in a cluster fenced area and working with other landholders to control dogs and roos.

The summary: Optimism for the future is expected to rise. The expected benefits of control methods that work are in increases in capital value of assets, income, property sale-ability, business profitability and financial survival. That will come from increased production of wool and sheep for which estimates vary from 33%-50% and it will largely be in production per head. Profitability will increase, costs will be less and droughts will be fewer. There will be benefit to the environment from spelling paddocks and decreased grazing pressure that will produce a regeneration of pasture. It means there can be a future for families and young people in the industry rather than only larger companies. There will be employment and community benefits too. The community knows it will require commitment by those in the cluster to make it work for control and those outside the clusters may have problems that require consideration.

Conversation 4 focused on – the personal relief to be gained if you have fencing to control dogs and assist in managing total grazing pressure.

The summary: Peace of mind, a viable business and one that can encourage the future generation to stay in grazing are expected benefits. Personal feelings of relief about the present and confidence and choices for the future are also expected. What will follow from those are an improved community outlook as well as improved health and wellbeing of grazing families and the community. Optimism, certainty and less stress are all expected benefits as is financial survival. An eventual phasing out of extensive 1080 use will alleviate anxiety associated with domestic dog fatalities.

In conclusion

The Yaraka community is well placed to make positive use of support funds to cluster fence properties for wild dog control and to manage total grazing pressure on their land. They can explain clearly the problems they have currently in relation to both and can quantify the animal and dollar costs. They are well aware of the impact on their community and on the up-and-coming generation who follow in succession from them if they had access to enterprises that are financially viable.

Importantly the members of the Yaraka community can envisage what a cluster fence would do for their enterprise profitability, for their personal peace of mind and wellbeing and for their community's ability to maintain itself.

Yaraka is a connected community where people are aware of the benefits of working together. It is something that a high proportion of them have already demonstrated in their commitment to working as one on dog control measures such as annual baiting's over 60 year to date. That is a strength they can carry forward into managing a cluster fence so the expected benefits are realized. They are well aware of those benefits and are prepared to work for them. As this country is marginal for cattle grazing and geographical isolation deems it necessary for people to relocate for alternative employment, the economic and social survival of this region depends on the sheep industry.

End of Group discussion report

As of February 16th, despite several preliminary announcements of applications opening for cluster fence funding and promises that “ posts will be in the ground by the end of December and then February”, there has been no further word regarding applications and approval of cluster funding. Drought is still raging in some areas of the central west and the Yaraka district received relief falls of 30 to 70 mls on February 2nd but response has been slow. Wild dogs are on the increase and figures from our particular enterprise are as follows: 2700 breeder ewes have been fed for almost a year, costing approximately \$50 a head. 400 lambs (20%) were marked 2 weeks ago and the grown sheep numbers were down by 400. It is estimated that wild dogs are responsible for 40% of the lambing and half of the grown sheep deaths. The other half was a result of the drought and poison weed. Wild dogs are on the move and killing regularly despite baiting campaigns and extensive trapping by landholders. At this stage our only option is to spend several hundred thousand dollars to erect a pest fence around a portion of our property to run lambing ewes OR sell our breeding ewes that we have fed through the worst drought encountered in our 35 years of operation. If our enterprise exits the sheep industry then extra employees on our particular property will drop from 4 part time staff to 1 part time. We are preparing to make a submission for pest fencing funds however success will be like winning the lottery. For those who aren't successful in this application process or don't have the capacity to borrow funds to fence they face an onslaught of wild dogs once the cluster fencing comes to fruition and there is a maze of highly vulnerable grazing areas. Continued support for these landholders who are out on their own on the edge of cluster fencing will be paramount if the sheep industry is to survive and time is of the essence. Despondency is high following such a prolonged drought coupled with very little rain at this late stage of the wet season. Human resources are stretched to the limit due to financial pressures and the added burden of chasing and tracking wild dogs is nearly the last straw. It also adds to the work place health and safety issue for stressed graziers. Whole communities need continued support in the form of a listening ear from Government authorities and promises that come to fruition. Government help to date has been appreciated as has help from groups such as Rotary, Buyabale, Aussie helpers, Drought Angels, Churches and many more thoughtful

charities and individuals. Government help could go further in the form of a rental moratorium which would assist all those who aren't producing from their land and who are running thousands of the country's kangaroos.

Recovery from this drought will be a long haul for many graziers even in areas where rain has fallen. If there is one thing that this task force could take on board, it is to come and listen to the communities and to tackle the situation quickly before people lose heart and whole communities disintegrate.

Thankyou for the opportunity to make this submission to the QLD Agriculture and Environment Committee.

Yours sincerely

Susan Glasson