

Paul McClymont


Longreach QLD

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Agriculture & Environment Committee

Dear Committee members,

I am writing to you as a western Qld. sheep & cattle producer, concerned at both the impact of wild dogs in my area, & the suitability, relevance & accessibility of the various wild dog fencing programs.

My family is in our 96th year as sheep, wool & beef producers on this land. As some of the western most sheep producers in the Longreach Regional Council area, our business has for decades been at the forefront of controlling wild dogs in this area. Together with our neighbouring businesses we have, since 1968, been part of a well organized syndicate maintaining a solid line against wild dogs through well organized aerial & ground baiting programs over an area far exceeding our own boundaries, & on ground trapping & shooting. Our use of council resources over time has been far outweighed by our own contributions to providing a secure line of defense for the broader pastoral industry around Longreach.

The build-up in dog numbers in the last 10 to 15 years & -most noticeably- an increased reluctance by dogs to take baits, has seen us fighting a losing battle at great expense. In an area that is poorly suited to most of the beef production enterprises, the likelihood that most businesses are no longer viable as sheep operations is a death knell for many producers.

In light of the fact that rigorous & expensive baiting, trapping & shooting campaigns have failed to halt the population increase & expansion of wild dogs across western Queensland, it is clear that the only course of action to maintain a strong pastoral industry, & associated communities, lies with the construction of wild dog fencing. However it is with dismay that we have watched the debate on fencing strategies focus on a "one solution for all" approach that ignores regional issues of economies & production, current economic & environmental situations, & strategic outcomes. It is an even greater disappointment that we are now left with a single plan that has never been presented for public consultation or comment.

Whilst I am a staunch supporter of cluster/regional fencing to save our industry, there are numerous issues that – if not addressed – may only hasten the demise of not only sheep enterprises but also many cattle businesses as well.

Funding- I sit as head of a group of 20 landholders in this area willing to cluster fence an area in excess of 1 000 000acres. Unfortunately this area has suffered extreme drought conditions for 13 of the last 16 years. Many businesses are totally without livestock & none can foresee any significant cash flow until 2018 at best.

In October last year we voted that under the current funding model offered by RAPAD there was absolutely no way that we could afford to take advantage of the available funding. The federal government has touted its \$10 000 000 contribution as drought aid. How effective is a drought aid policy that cannot be accessed by those most affected by drought, & who face the toughest battle to recover from it? The greatest danger to a business in drought is debt, & for those of us who have had next to no income in the last 4 years & remain without income sources now, the current funding model will see us without any protection from wild dogs for many years. With stock and income losses as they are we simply do not have years left to us, we need control over wild dogs now.

Overall strategy- Another glaring fault with the RAPAD plan is a lack of overall strategy. It seem commonsense that if an area was to be the recipient of millions of dollars of funding that a plan would need to be in place to ensure that money was spent in the right place to ensure the maximum area & number of businesses were protected, & that money was not spent in an area that would ultimately receive protection from other clusters.

The most commonsense approach would be to prioritize areas of heavy dog activity on the boundaries of sheep producing areas as a first stage, making realistic funding measures available to reflect the financial strain many of these areas are under. Further stages of infrastructure spending both internal & external to these areas would then be possible & in most cases the need & urgency would be greatly reduced.

These are all issues that were raised repeatedly however due to an avoidance of public consultation we are still battling to be heard, we cannot avail ourselves of the funding, & our businesses are under more stress than ever.

I am left in no doubt as to the absolute need for strategic cluster fencing, either between neighbouring properties or along shire boundaries. The environmental, economic & social benefits are beyond doubt & the sheep & goat industries cannot survive without it. However it needs to be an equitable solution, one that does not result in some producers having to exit the industry. The infrastructure must be strategically planned so that all sheep areas are protected as stage one, & that the funding guidelines reflect our current financial & environmental situations. Further infrastructure development must come under a strategic plan aimed at giving the most effective protection, to the greatest possible area within or external to the sheep production areas, following full consultation with all stakeholders.

Regards, Paul McClymont

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