



City of Gold Coast

Submission No. 18

Office of the Mayor

19 February 2016
Our ref: MS#53779596

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Rob Hansen
The Research Director
Agriculture and Environment Committee
Parliament House
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Hansen

INQUIRY INTO BARRIER FENCES IN QUEENSLAND

We are writing to provide you with Council of the City of Gold Coasts (Council) position in relation to the inquiry into management of barrier fences in Queensland by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Darling Downs Moreton Rabbit Board (the Board). Council considered this issue at its meeting on 29 January 2016 and would like to raise the following points with the Committee.

Council considers the function, operation and activities of the Board to be outside its obligation. Council would like to request that its involvement and funding contribution to the Darling Downs Moreton Rabbit Board is discontinued. Council believes the commencement of the *Biosecurity Act 2014* on the 1 July 2016 provides a unique opportunity to remove the City of Gold Coast (City) from the Board's operational area.

Council has been involved in the repeated reviews of the Board's governance and operations that were initiated in 2009. It is disconcerting that after many reviews, submissions and recommendations a satisfactory resolution has not been achieved.

The following points are made in regard to the terms of reference offered by the Committee:

Costs to maintain existing barrier fences

Council believes the current costs to maintain existing barrier fences can be reduced through the abolishment of the Board. Responsibility for future maintenance of the existing fences should become an obligation for local governments or property owners that currently adjoin the fence and receive a direct benefit. Council levies could then be used to eradicate the isolated infestations of rabbits within our city.

This view is consistent with the recommendations provided to and agreed to by previous State governments from the four previous reviews of the administration and operational function of the Board;

1. March 2009 Part B report of the Weller Review (*Brokering Balance: A Public Interest Map for Queensland Government Bodies - An Independent Review of Queensland Government Boards, Committees and Statutory Authorities*). Recommended that the Board be abolished and its infrastructure functions (primarily the upkeep of the fence) should be transferred to the eight local governments within the Board's operational area.

2. June 2009 former Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation (DEEDI) *Review of the Management of the Pest Animal Barrier Fences in Queensland* (Hyder report) recommended that while the fences served a benefit and should be kept, *the Board should be abolished and responsibility for management of the rabbit fence be combined with management of the wild dog barrier fence and individual local government check fences*. Rabbit compliance would revert to local government. In conclusion the report identified the separate management of pest animal barrier fences leads to less efficient and effective use of funds and resources.
3. September 2009 PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) recommended that *Local government should be given primary power for holistic administration of the rabbit fence*.
4. DEEDI engaged two independent consultants to prepare a report on the governance arrangements for the Queensland pest animal barrier fence. *"that a new single entity should be established to manage the rabbit barrier fence and the wild dog barrier fence"*.

Council incurs additional operational costs undertaking functions of the Board (inspections of private and state land for rabbit infestations, seizure and destruction of pet rabbits). Reports received from the Board show there is significant forward planning for activities related to fence maintenance, whereas compliance activities are purely reactionary. **The perception is that fence maintenance is viewed as a higher priority than the management of rabbit infestations within the Board's operational area.**

The effectiveness of barrier fences at protecting stock and crops from attacks by wild dogs, rabbits and other introduced species.

While it is clear that properly maintained barrier fences will prevent the movement of animals from one side of the fence to the other, the issue of damage from rabbits that have bypassed the fences must be considered.

The Board's function as defined under section 217 of the *Land Protection Act* "is to take reasonable steps to ensure the board's operational area is kept free from declared pests managed by the Board". To achieve this, the Board endeavours to maintain a rabbit barrier fence (the Fence) to prevent the establishment of significant rabbit populations by preventing the northward spread of rabbits from south of the rabbit fence. Unfortunately, rabbits are now found in high numbers within and to the north of the Board's operational area, and the fence fails to prevent incursion from these populations.

Council has no comments on the unintended impacts of barrier fences on native animals, recent upgrades to sections of the wild dog fence by the department or whether barrier fences should be expanded to other areas of the state to protect stock.

To assist the Committee in its deliberations the following information is provided:

- Council's area is not protected by the fence – the fence commences near Mt Gibbs on the western boundary of Lamington National Park which is within Scenic Rim Regional Council area.
- Local governments that are not Darling Downs Moreton Rabbit Board members and State and Commonwealth Government managed assets within the Board's area receive protection without contributing funding.



- Annual work program and yearly budget for the Darling Downs Moreton Rabbit Board is approved by the Minister for Agriculture without consulting with local government, despite local government wholly funding the Board's operations.

Should you wish to discuss this issue please contact my Chief of Staff, Wayne Moran on (07) 5581 5282 or via email mayor@goldcoast.qld.gov.au to make an appointment.

Yours faithfully



TOM TATE
MAYOR



GLENN TOZER
COUNCILLOR DIVISION 9

cc: All Councillors City of Gold Coast
All Gold Coast State MP's

