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26 February 2016

Research Director
Agriculture and Environment Committee
Parliament House
BRISBANE QLD 4000

To Whom It May Concern,

RE: Agriculture and Environment Committee - Inquiry into barrier fences in Queensland

AgForce Queensland (AgForce) is the peak lobby group representing the majority of beef, sheep and wool, and grain producers in Queensland. AgForce represents around 5,000 members and exists to ensure the long term growth, viability, competitiveness and profitability of these industries. Our members provide high quality food and fibre products to Australian and international consumers, manage a significant proportion of Queensland's natural resources and contribute to the social fabric of rural and remote communities.

AgForce thanks the Agriculture and Environment Committee (the Committee) for the opportunity to provide comment to the "Inquiry into barrier fences in Queensland" (the Inquiry).

The purpose of the Inquiry is to allow the Committee to investigate and report on the Queensland Government's barrier fences, namely:

1. The Wild Dog Barrier Fence (WDBF) managed by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF); and
2. The Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Fence managed by Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Board (DDMRB)

The Terms of Reference lists six (6) key areas that the Committee will report to Parliament on, including:

1. The management of the Wild Dog Barrier Fence by DAF;
2. The management of the Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Fence by DDMRB;
3. The effectiveness of the barrier fences at protecting stock and crops from wild dogs, rabbits and other introduced species;
4. The unintended impacts of barrier fences on native species;
5. Recent upgrades to sections of the Wild Dog Barrier Fence by DAF; and
6. Whether barrier fences should be expanded to other areas of the State to protect stock.

AgForce has made comment to the six (6) key areas plus provided additional comments (refer following matrix).

In summary, AgForce considers that the management and day-to-day operations of the existing barrier fences within Queensland is of a high standard. In addition, AgForce is of the belief that management of the Wild Dog Barrier Fence and Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Fence should remain with the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Fence Board, respectively.

Should the Committee require further clarification, please don't hesitate to contact myself on (07) 4654 0231 or Livestock Policy Officer Michael Allpass on (07) 3236 3100.

Regards,



for Peter Lucas
Chair, AgForce Wild Dog Committee

1	<p data-bbox="175 291 207 2058">The management of the Wild Dog Barrier Fence (WDBF) by DAF</p> <p data-bbox="207 291 239 2058">AgForce Wild Dog Committee is of the belief that:</p> <ul data-bbox="239 291 638 2058" style="list-style-type: none"> - the condition of the WDBF is considered Good to Excellent. - the fence still does the job it was put there to do, i.e. curb the flow of wild dog movement from the North to the South and provide protection for the majority of Queensland's sheep industry in the southern part of the State. - the WDBF is regularly inspected by the Maintenance Team(s). - WDBF maintenance is funded by a matching contribution from the State Government of \$1.1 million per year; with a fence Precept contribution from Local Governments of a similar amount. - Local Governments inside the WDBF pay a fence Precept towards the maintenance of the fence of differing amounts, e.g. Murweh ~\$171.8k, Maranoa ~\$287k, Quilpie ~\$87k, Paroo ~\$138.4k; Barcoo ~\$18k; Bulloo ~\$49k; Western Downs ~\$91.6k and Balonne ~\$198k; with Blackall/ Tambo Regional Council (partly inside the WDBF) contributing ~\$52.6k. <p data-bbox="638 291 670 2058">AgForce Wild Dog Committee recognises that the WDBF Panel (the Panel) is represented by the following members/ organisations with a four (4) year term:</p> <ul data-bbox="670 291 1037 2058" style="list-style-type: none"> - three (3) Local Government representatives <ul data-bbox="670 291 1037 2058" style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Cr. Stewart Sargent representing Barcoo, Quilpie, Bulloo, Blackall/ Tambo & Murweh 2) Cr. Rod Avery representing Balonne and Paroo 3) Cr. George Moore representing Western Downs and Maranoa (Panel Chair) - one (1) AgForce Representative, currently Lloyd Harth - two (2) Biosecurity Queensland Invasive Pests and Animals (IP&A) representatives <ul data-bbox="670 291 1037 2058" style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Operations - Kevin Strong 2) Policy - Tim Farry <p data-bbox="1037 291 1069 2058">AgForce Wild Dog Committee recognises that the Panel:</p> <ul data-bbox="1069 291 1356 2058" style="list-style-type: none"> - considers all aspects of the management of the fence. - considers the yearly budget and recommends an allocation between repairs and new fencing (currently approximately 2/3 to repairs and 1/3 to new fencing). - considers the progress to achieving planned results throughout the year; taking seasonal conditions into consideration. - determines resource allocation by need, owing to weather conditions and damage. - considers staffing, including suitability and capacity to complete the job.
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - is able to question the WDBF Operational Manager on all operational matters. - continues to manage WDBF operations on a tight budget; whilst ensuring sound accountability via inspections of the WDBF. - would like to see Maintenance staff trained to handle toxins for baiting. - has instructed the Operational Management Team to look at the most cost effective materials and method to construct new fencing to maintain a high standard for the WDBF. - aims to renew sections of the WDBF within an eighty year turnover, which is currently being achieved under the present budget. 	<p>The AgForce Wild Dog Committee is comfortable that the Panel is implementing good management strategies for the WDBF, including sound budgeting and reporting.</p> <p>AgForce recommendation(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the WDBF Maintenance Team should be able and permitted to provide wild dog control tools along the WDBF i.e. baiting and shooting while repairing and/or upgrading the WDBF line. Additional skills training for WDBF maintenance staff should be part of DAF's budgeting process to allow actual wild dog control tools to be implemented. • that Local Governments spend considerable money on the WDBF toward a total budget, with little consultation on its maintenance for particular sections of the WDBF. If the Local Government Precept was allocated into a model that allowed that money to stay in the Local Government area, which backs on to a particular section of the WDBF, Local Government law could and should be implemented that permits access to baiting and trapping along the WDBF, subject to landholders being given notice of intent to bait and trap and after consultation with each landholder to determine which control measure is to be implemented. • trialling new technology and/ or innovative fence design should be encouraged subject to adequate consultation with industry and local landholders. For example, new fence and grid design across main roads; and gateways that are frequently used in areas that include resource (mining/ CSG) interests.
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<p>2</p>	<p>The management of the Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Fence (DDMRF) by DDMRB</p>	<p>AgForce Wild Dog Committee is of the belief that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the DDMRF is maintained by a Maintenance Team of between 10 and 12 people. - the Maintenance Team check the DDMRF at least once per week, sometimes more often dependent upon environmental conditions. - the DDMRF's annual budget is approximately \$1.6 million, which is considered adequate. - some parts of the DDMRF is to a wild dog exclusion standard (~186km) with extra top-netting height to these parts; with some parts electrified for more rabbit exclusion purposes. - parts of the DDMRF are a "check fence", which provides an additional and critical line of protection to other wild dog barrier fences. - Parts of the DDMRF are managed by a number of individual local councils, with the majority of the DDMRF managed by the DDMRFB. <p>AgForce recommendation(s):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the DDMRF Maintenance Team should be able and permitted to provide wild dog control tools i.e. baiting and shooting while repairing and/ or upgrading the DDMRF line. Additional skills training for DDMRF maintenance staff should be part of DDMRB's budgeting process to allow actual wild dog control tools to be implemented. • consideration should be given to allow the DDMRFB to manage and administer the entire DDMRF line. This will ensure consistency of management by the DDMRFB therefore achieving a holistic approach; and allow local councils, that are already under-resourced, to manage core local council business needs.
<p>3</p>	<p>The effectiveness of the barrier fences at protecting stock and crops from wild dogs, rabbits and other introduced species</p>	<p>AgForce Wild Dog Committee is of the belief that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - exclusion fences are an effective and critical piece of infrastructure to prevent incursions of any feral animal species; implemented to protect all species of livestock, agricultural crops, and grazing and cropping lands from erosion and degradation.

<p>4</p>	<p>The unintended impacts of barrier fences on native species</p>	<p>AgForce Wild Dog Committee is of the belief that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - small, native animal species are impacted minimally by the WDBF. - the WDBF design allows small species to move from one side of the WDBF to the other, given mesh size, without cause for concern. - the DDMRF can unintentionally impact native animal species; however, much of these unintended impacts would have occurred when the DDMRF was first erected. Native animals have historically adapted well to the DDMRF. To take away barrier fences today may allow the number of native species to increase, however it would provide greater opportunity for feral animals to target these smaller, native species.
<p>5</p>	<p>Recent upgrades to sections of the Wild Dog Barrier Fence by DAF</p>	<p>AgForce Wild Dog Committee is of the belief that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the WDBF Panel should consider new technology and new fence design following the discussions that have taken place due to the number of exclusion fences that are being built as a result of the Federal Government's "feral animal management" funding program. - all proposed and future upgrades to the existing WDBF should be completed to a similar standard as new exclusion fence design and standards.

6	<p>Whether barrier fences should be expanded to other areas of the State to protect stock</p>	<p>AgForce Wild Dog Committee is of the belief that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - barrier/ exclusion fences should be expanded to other areas of the State to protect all livestock. - whilst initiatives are already underway to allow for the expansion of barrier fences via recent Federal and State Government funding programs, further financial assistance is paramount to ensure a higher standard of health and welfare outcomes are achieved for Queensland's livestock across all livestock grazing areas of the State. - barrier/ exclusion fencing should be prioritised for Queensland's sheep producers; however all livestock industries should be supported to fight the battle against wild dogs. Most cattle operations can limit wild dog impact through baiting and trapping, therefore government(s) should provide continued and improved support for these on-ground measures. - cluster fence funding initiatives by the Federal and State Governments, where the public financial contribution equates to approximately \$2,300 per kilometre for fencing materials, has received wide support from landholders. - National Parks should be forced to exclusion fence their rural property assets. This could be achieved by State Government supplying the adjoining private landholder with material and/ or funding and request that an exclusion fence is erected. - DAF should maintain management of the existing WDBF. - DDMRFB should maintain management of the existing DDMBF.
	<p>Other comments</p>	<p>AgForce Wild Dog Committee is of the belief that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - exclusion fencing greatly assists in controlling wild dogs, and should be a high priority for sheep country. - it is paramount that on-ground control tools such as baiting, trapping and shooting are used in conjunction with barrier/ exclusion fencing. - barrier/ exclusion fences also assist management of biosecurity issues. A barrier fence could form an integral operation in assisting government(s) and industry to stop and prevent the spread of unwanted biosecurity disease risks that may affect Queensland's livestock industries. - further government provided financial assistance is required to extend existing and proposed exclusion fence lines. - other funding models for further exclusion fencing should be evaluated and considered that could assist landholders either on an individual or group basis.