



29 February 2016

Mr Rob Hansen
Research Director
Agriculture and Environment Committee
Parliament House
Brisbane Qld 4000

By email: aec@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Mr Hansen

Barrier Fences in Queensland

On behalf of the Council of Mayors (SEQ), I am pleased to provide this submission to the Agriculture and Environment Committee's inquiry into the management of barrier fences by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Board.

The Council of Mayors (SEQ) is Australia's largest regional Local Government advocacy organisation, representing the South East Queensland (SEQ) region which is home to one in seven Australians, generates one fifth of the nation's economic growth and is a powerhouse of Australia's economic future.

The membership of the Council of Mayors (SEQ) includes eleven Councils of South East Queensland: Brisbane, Gold Coast, Ipswich, Logan, Redland, Lockyer Valley, Moreton Bay, Scenic Rim, Somerset, Sunshine Coast and Toowoomba Councils. Five of Australia's six largest Councils are located in SEQ.

SEQ is Queensland's most urbanised region. Nonetheless, it contains very significant and productive rural and regional areas within the Lockyer Valley, Scenic Rim, Somerset and Toowoomba local government areas. Beyond this, more urban Councils such as Gold Coast, Ipswich, Logan, Moreton Bay, Redland and Sunshine Coast retain important agricultural areas. Programs to protect agricultural and other communities from pest species are vital to many of these areas.

Building future capacity for growth is the key to ensuring sustainable economic growth. The Council of Mayors (SEQ) believes this can be achieved through investment in productive infrastructure, whether it be road, transport, water, energy or agricultural security.

With this in mind, the Council of Mayors (SEQ) speaks with one united voice, aiming to:

- **Advocate** for a better resourced SEQ Region with world standard infrastructure to support economic development.
- **Influence** the other levels of government to ensure that their policy and legislative positions support SEQ Regional growth.
- **Collaborate** in effective and innovative cooperative programs across the SEQ Region.

The Council of Mayors (SEQ) acknowledges the Committee's Terms of Reference for this inquiry:

- *the costs to maintain existing barrier fences*
- *the effectiveness of barrier fences at protecting stock and crops from attacks by wild dogs, rabbits and other introduced species*
- *their unintended impacts on native species*
- *recent upgrades to sections of the wild dog fence by the department, and*
- *whether barrier fences should be expanded to other areas of the State to protect stock.*

With regard to the second of these terms, ***the effectiveness of barrier fences at protecting stock and crops from attacks by wild dogs, rabbits and other introduced species***, Council of Mayors (SEQ) submits that it is important that the barrier fences are not seen as the primary tool for wild dog control in Queensland.

Wild dog fences are one (often effective) approach, but it is important that a range of tools remain available across the state for wild dog management, including baiting, trapping and shooting, and such programs must be funded by the state.

Wild dogs are endemic across Queensland and have significant impact on not just the agricultural industry but also the environment. The role of wild dogs as an apex predator needs greater research to improve the responses to this problem.

With regard to rabbit fences, the Council of Mayors (SEQ) believes that they remain the most effective rabbit management tool. We must note however that there has been a significant increase in rabbit numbers in some of SEQ's rural areas, particularly since the 2011 and 2013 floods. It has been described by experienced farmers as the most significant outbreak they have ever had.

There is some evidence that these new rabbit populations have largely entered from the north, and that natural barriers like mountain ranges, ridges, valley and rivers are no longer adequate preventative measures in the control of rabbits. Further research into this outbreak, and appropriate responses to it, is needed.

In the meantime, rabbit numbers in areas such as the Lockyer Valley are now having a detrimental impact on the agricultural industry. Whilst not yet in plague numbers, the risk is real and urgent. Addressing this risk requires an increase in on-ground activities including monitoring, eradication and education. The last is especially important, given that responsibility for rabbit eradication on private land falls to the property owner.

The Council of Mayors (SEQ) commends the good work done by the Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Board (DDMRB) in its pest management activities, but believes a medium-term funding boost for increased on-ground activities is required.

With regard to the final term of reference, ***whether barrier fences should be expanded to other areas of the State to protect stock***, it is the position of Council of Mayors (SEQ) that any expansion of barrier fences should focus on reinforcing the current fences as a first priority, with gaps between current fences an obvious starting point.

We note the Committee's Terms of Reference focus on operational matters rather than **funding models for barrier fences**. However, it is vital to recognise that the funding models (both for capital costs and ongoing operations) have been at the core of debate

since the first Australian barrier fences were erected a century ago. Public debate and inquiries regarding the funding models have occurred in every state with fences over the last decade, with no discernible improvement in funding certainty.

The Council of Mayors (SEQ) believes that the appropriate and reliable funding of all infrastructure, at the appropriate level/s of government for the footprint of that infrastructure, is the only reasonable approach.

Queensland (and Australia's) various barrier fences:

- service areas greater than any single local government area or region: their value is statewide, and indeed national;
- do not service a single industry: they work for many industries and communities;
- are a permanent infrastructure feature, having been in place for a century in some cases; and
- work best when planned, maintained and managed in a "linked up" strategic manner, at state and national level.

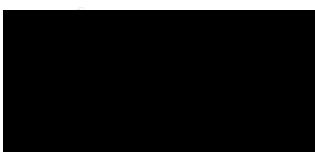
In these features, the barrier fences have significant commonality with state and national roads, major passenger and freight rail networks, the national energy grid, and major water catchments. Unlike most of these, they are managed and funded in a haphazard and ad-hoc manner, relying on local contributions to fund a state (and national) good. The history of the fences shows that these contributions can be beyond the local community's capacity to pay.

The funding inconsistency between types of fences adds further complexity and uncertainty. The rabbit fence, which is generally seen to provide a greater economic benefit measured as Gross State Product than the wild dog fence, is more reliant on local funding. A state commitment to funding all fences at the higher level is a minimum reasonable outcome of any proper review. However, it is the position of the Council of Mayors (SEQ) that even a more equitable distribution between state funding and local levies going forward is inadequate.

Barrier fences are permanent infrastructure of state and national significance, and should be funded as such. A national funding approach, with matched funds from Federal and State Governments, is a logical goal. In the realm of trunk infrastructure funding, the amounts required to build and maintain the national barrier fence network are a pittance given the obvious benefits, and Queensland should take the lead in opening this urgent national discussion.

Should you have any questions or wish to discuss any aspect of our submission in this important policy area, please contact me at peter.olah@seqmayors.qld.gov.au or (07) 3040-3460.

Yours sincerely



Peter Olah
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