

“Loongana Stn”,

Longreach. Q4730

██████████

██

29/02/2016

## **Submission to QLD Parliaments Agriculture and Environment Committee**

**The Situation now.** We produce sheep & cattle in CW Qld. In recent times, Elders Longreach Branch was the biggest single receiver of wool in the Eastern States up until the last two years. This is despite the wild dog incursion into this region and the progressive loss of sheep enterprises. Drought has now, severely reduced all livestock numbers to extremely low levels. Most producers are planning for the eventual break in this drought, and are considering what they will restock with, sheep or cattle? With the wild dog problem unresolved, and getting worse, it will be hard to invest in sheep knowing that there will be a considerable risk of loss through wild dog attacks.

It is widely acknowledged that the best stocking regime is to have a mix of both sheep, cattle and goats in the central western qld rangelands, both for land conservation, for production value, diversification and for local economy. What has already decimated our local towns is the retraction in our sheep industry. This can be reversed, but only if we can successfully address the wild dog problem.

We have several coinciding factors that have impacted on our towns and communities, wild dogs, drought and collapse of the macropod industry. Drought will disappear with a change in seasons, the roo industry is going to take years to rebuild, but we do have the opportunity to solve the wild dog issue.

In the 1990's there were 40 to 50 shearing teams in CW Qld, each with around 13 workers, many of those had families living in CW local towns. There were many jobs that supported the shearing industry and their workers and families, nurses, doctors, teachers, police, butchers, government agencies, railway, etc, etc. We now have about 4 teams left in the whole of the CW, and most of those are away looking for work. This is a disaster for our towns, but we can turn it around.

If we choose not to address the wild dog problem, we will turn our good towns into ghost towns.

### **Solutions.**

We are already putting many millions into traditional control measures, baiting, trapping, shooting etc, we have lost the first battle with dogs using these measures.

1080 baiting was once very effective and was all we needed to keep dog populations under control. For various reasons, this has now failed, and at the moment we have no option but to move to exclusion fencing. Exclusion fencing is hugely expensive and beyond the scope of many individual producers to build.

Unfortunately, exclusion fencing is the only proven method we have, of controlling wild dogs to a level where it again becomes possible to produce sheep. Exclusion fencing also has a side benefit, in that it makes it possible to keep macropod numbers under control, enabling a much higher level of landcare.

I was part of a committee that worked for three years to develop and promote the idea of a regional fence, enclosing a number of shires. We looked at this as a community infrastructure project, jointly funded by Federal, State governments and livestock producers through a levy. This proposal has extremely good local support, but unwillingness by State government and Local government to take an active role. This type of community infrastructure approach would be my preferred approach, because it has economy of scale, and it helps whole communities and not just select groups. I think this approach should be revisited, on a scaled down version, ie shire boundaries rather than multi shire boundaries. The aim of a large scale exclusion fence projects is to enclose large areas, which would then be split by individuals and group into smaller areas. It would give some assistance to the whole community, rather than a select few.

Cluster fencing is government's preferred model, because they can throw a bit of funding in, be seen to be doing something, but leave all responsibility to landholders. If it was possible to apply cluster fences to all the areas that need exclusion fencing, it would be a very good option. However, it is going to be impossible to cluster fence a big enough area quickly, to save the sheep industry. It will not be equitable, because many will not be able to access the funding for various reasons. There will be a lucky few who will get some help, many others won't. However, although it will not be able to be widely used, the cluster model should remain for those who can qualify. That leaves a lot out in the cold, and will foster resentment.

I propose a third funding model that could be accessed by groups and individuals and local governments. My idea is to subsidise interest on loans for exclusion fencing, initially for the most vulnerable small livestock industries, sheep & goats. There is subsidised finance available through QRAA that can be used for exclusion fencing, but the rates & terms are only slightly better than can be accessed at commercial banks. We need much more favourable finance terms than this to get the job done. IE Interest free for the first five years (interest only), with a heavily subsidized interest rate for the following 15 years, (principal & interest) This finance scheme would be available to all, so would be fair and equitable, would allow many producers to get fences up while the drought is on, and allow them to be ready to restock with sheep when the season breaks.

## **Conclusion.**

We should all hang our heads in shame at allowing wild dogs to decimate our sheep industries and damage beef breeding operations. It seems state & federal governments have listened but not done much. Most local governments have wimped out on taking the strong action needed to save their towns and communities. Sections of the livestock industry have been apathetic and by their negligence have helped the wild dog population explode. Now we are here, at this point in time, with the sheep industry facing total wipe-out, other livestock facing damage, we need to muscle up and do what needs to be done to win the war.

John Milne.