



Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Board

Submission to the Agriculture, Resources and Environment Committee

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Submission in reference to the Biosecurity Bill 2013 Section 48 (2)

10th December 2013



Introduction

The Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Board ('DDMRB' or 'the board') appreciates the opportunity to provide comment in response to the *Biosecurity Bill 2013*, as presented to Parliament on 19 November 2013, by Hon John McVeigh, MP, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

As the agency responsible for the management of the Queensland rabbit-proof fence, the DDMRB maintains a strong interest in contributing towards the outcomes of this stage of the legislation review process.

The Issue

At the Community Cabinet meeting held in Toowoomba on 24 November 2013, a delegation from the DDMRB met with Minister McVeigh to highlight our views on section 183 (2) of the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002*. The corresponding section of the new Biosecurity Bill 2013 is section 48 (2).

One of the key issues discussed with Minister McVeigh is the efficiency gains that could be achieved if the local governments that contribute towards the operational costs of the DDMRB were to take a more co-operative stance regarding managing rabbit infestations and pet rabbit confiscations within their areas.

The current view of the majority of the eight local governments who contribute towards DDMRB funding, is that managing rabbit infestations or pet rabbit confiscations is the sole responsibility of the Board.

It is our view that a shared responsibility for rabbit management within the board operational area would achieve greater efficiency, both in terms of financial outcomes and rabbit management outcomes. The DDMRB currently expends more than \$200,000 per annum on rabbit eradication efforts, but this investment could be more focused on public awareness programs and landholder education in eradication techniques, if the legislation was amended to clearly state that this was a shared responsibility between local government and the Board.

For example, at present if there is a pet rabbit report in the Gold Coast area or the Logan City area, the DDMRB sends an officer from the Ipswich area to investigate the report, and to try to confiscate the animal. This is not the most efficient use of resources when a Gold Coast City Council or Logan City Council pest management officer may be in close proximity to the location, and could more efficiently investigate the report.

Data collected from January 2013 to October 2013 shows that the DDMRB has responded to 48 pet rabbit reports. In the twelve months from January 2012 to December 2012 we responded to 18 pet rabbit reports in total. This clearly demonstrates an increasing problem and responding to each report is a resource intensive process.

Also, all local government pest officers regularly conduct property pest inspections and if a pest control notice is being issued, rabbits could be included in the recommended actions for the landholder to undertake. At present the local governments within our operational area interpret section 183 (2) of the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002* as precluding them from including rabbits on a pest control notice.

Recommendation

That section 48 (2) of the Biosecurity Bill 2013 be deleted.

That section 65 (3) be amended so that the local governments of Queensland and within the board's operational area share the responsibility for managing the animal, so that a more collaborative working relationship is formed.

Conclusion

The DDMRB has well-established partnerships with Natural Resource Management groups, industry and the state, and has successfully fostered co-operative working relationships with landholders and local government on-ground pest management officers. These partnerships need to be supported by the local government elected representatives, and executive management, of the eight precepted local governments to enhance the efficiency of the DDMRB and to achieve better rabbit management outcomes.

It is also the view of the Board of Directors that the entire State of Queensland derives a benefit from the existence of the rabbit-proof fence. This issue should be considered, with a view to establishing a broader contribution arrangement to assist with the maintenance of the rabbit-proof fence in the long term.

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