




Speech By  
**Dale Last**

**MEMBER FOR BURDEKIN**

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**AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE: REPORT, MOTION TO TAKE NOTE**

 **Mr LAST** (Burdekin—LNP) (12.20 pm): I rise to speak to report No. 35 of the Agriculture and Environment Committee entitled *Barrier fences in Queensland*. There is no question that across rural and regional Queensland we have a significant problem with wild dogs. Wild dogs are decimating sheep and goat herds and encroaching on fringe suburban areas of some of our major regional centres.

I have witnessed firsthand the devastation that wild dogs can cause on two separate occasions on my property south of Townsville. We have lost a significant number of pets to wild dog attacks. I have inspected sheep and cattle that have been attacked by wild dogs. There is no question that this is a significant problem for our western sheep and cattle producers.

I have spoken to graziers who have invested in barrier fences and those who remain outside the fence. There is overwhelming evidence to support the benefits of barrier fencing, or cluster fencing as it is called, in building and maintaining herds. The re-emergence of sheep and goats in Western Queensland has been well documented. It is certainly my plan to expand this across rural Queensland. Put simply, more sheep and goats means more jobs, more economic prosperity for our rural towns and, importantly, more people living in rural Queensland.

I am not denying that cluster fencing is prohibitively expensive. I take the point from my colleague the member for Gregory regarding the wide disparity in construction costs between government and private landholders. However, I firmly believe the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages for without barrier fences graziers would not be able to run sheep or goats in the numbers required and cattle herds would be severely impacted.

Let us not underestimate the extent of the wild dog problem in Queensland. I have visited and spoken to the western mayors at Winton, Longreach and Barcaldine. The number of wild dog scalps being brought into council offices is simply astounding. We are not talking about a few hundred; we are talking thousands. When we multiply this across the state, we begin to understand the extent of the problem.

My focus today is on barrier fences to exclude wild dogs. However, I am also mindful of the role these fences play in keeping out rabbits. If we look back through history, we should not underestimate the impact that rabbits have had on our rural areas and native flora and fauna.

The adoption of the Wild Dog Management Strategy and subsequent integration of maintenance of the wild dog fence into the control plans of local wild dog committees has been a giant leap forward in terms of maintenance and planning. As members would appreciate, barrier fences are only as good as the maintenance program involved in ensuring these fences are appropriately managed.

There is no question that dog fences are an effective barrier to pest animal movement. Local governments have a key role to play in the planning, delivery and maintenance of barrier fences. As we move forward, there will need to be an ongoing commitment by the state and federal governments to

barrier fence funding. The delivery and maintenance of these fences is beyond the capacity of individual landholders and local government authorities. However, as I have previously stated, the benefits are clear to see.

When we look at a map of Queensland and the location of barrier or cluster fencing we begin to appreciate the work that has been done to date on this initiative. When we start to see the jigsaw filled in we see the benefits that this fencing is providing to large areas in Western Queensland. We certainly appreciate the benefits of this fencing.

The challenge moving forward is to extend that fencing into country that is deemed productive and to fill in those gaps. Certainly those graziers who have not taken up the option to fence their properties are already experiencing an increase in displaced wild dogs, kangaroos and other feral pests. We certainly need a long-term plan in Queensland going forward that will give our western communities that certainty and give our landholders certainty and confidence going forward to be able to plan the expansion of their herds.

I fully support the recommendations contained within the report and commend the committee for their work in preparing this document. The benefits of barrier fencing are clear to see. If we are to grow our agriculture sector we need to embrace this initiative and expand it across our western shires.