




Speech By
Patrick Weir

MEMBER FOR CONDAMINE

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AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE: REPORT, MOTION TO TAKE NOTE

 **Mr WEIR** (Condamine—LNP) (11.56 am): At the outset of my address, I would like to thank the committee secretariat. As a member of the Agriculture and Environment Committee, I rise to make a brief contribution to the debate on the committee's report No. 35, titled *Barrier fences in Queensland*. The inquiry was initiated by the committee on 28 October 2015 to examine the effectiveness and cost of maintaining both the rabbit and dingo barrier fences.

The construction of the rabbit barrier fence began in 1886 and was completed in 1906. The rabbit barrier fence has operated under the oversight of the Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Board since 1964 and is funded by eight councils: the Western Downs Regional Council, the Gold Coast City Council, the Ipswich City Council, the Lockyer Valley Regional Council, the Scenic Rim Regional Council, the Southern Downs Regional Council and the Toowoomba Regional Council. Although there have been—and continue to be—some outbreaks of rabbits from the clean side of the fence from time to time, the overwhelming view of the councils involved in the operation of the rabbit fence is that it serves an invaluable service. Estimates put the ratio of rabbits between the clean and dirty side to be about 15 to one.

Over the years, the role of the Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Board has been the subject of much debate and was again during this inquiry. This discussion revolves mainly around the funding model. Although some of the councils regard the funds via precepts as money well spent, other councils would like to be removed from the funding model, stating that they are paying to protect areas that are not contributing financially.

The committee recommended that the Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Board be reviewed, with particular emphasis on the funding model. It must be emphasised that these precepts are paying for the protection of the rest of the state. The Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Board is struggling with a lack of funds. I think the state should consider how they can contribute to that protection.

The construction of the dingo barrier fence commenced in 1948 by landholders using materials supplied by the government under the supervision of government inspectors. The landholders were then responsible for the maintenance of the fence. Over time, that led to some sections of the barrier fence falling into disrepair. In 1974, it was estimated that it would cost \$915,000 to return the fence to a dog-proof condition. In 1982, the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries reduced and realigned the fence to a distance of 2,500 kilometres and has maintained it through precepts from the nine councils that are receiving the benefit of this fence: Balonne, Barcoo, Roma, Blackall, Bulloo, Dalby, Murweh, Paroo and Quilpie. Some groups such as the Condamine Alliance questioned the effectiveness of the fence as wild dogs now exist on both sides of the barrier fence.

There are a number of reasons for this, such as the decline in the sheep industry, properties employing fewer staff, fewer landowners and staff having ready access to firearms and a reluctance of some landowners to use 10/80 baits. Despite the existence of wild dogs on both sides of the fence, there is overwhelming evidence that there are far more dogs on the dirty side than on the clean side and strong support for continued funding of the dingo barrier fence.

The reconstruction costs of the dingo barrier fence is an area that should be the subject of some scrutiny. According to figures supplied by the department, the cost is in the vicinity of \$23,500 per kilometre. That is an astounding figure. When one considers that the average cost to construct a cluster fence is about \$8,000 per kilometre this would seem to be a massive price difference. Whilst there are differences in the structure of cluster fences compared to barrier fences, that price difference does require some explanation.

I would like to thank other members of the committee and research staff for their input in presenting this report and I commend the report to the House.