

AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

REPORT NO. 35

BARRIER FENCES IN QUEENSLAND

QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

INTRODUCTION

On 28 October 2015 the Agriculture and Environment Committee ('the Committee') resolved to hold an inquiry into barrier fences in Queensland, in accordance with its public works power under section 94 of the *Parliament of Queensland Act 2001*.

The Committee examined:

- 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;
- the unintended impacts of barrier fences on native species;
- recent upgrades to sections of the wild dog fence by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries; and
- whether barrier fences should be expanded to other areas of the State to protect stock.

On 21 June 2017 the Committee tabled Report No. 35, Barrier Fences in Queensland (the Report). The Committee made six recommendations in relation to barrier fences in Queensland. The recommendations are not especially controversial and are supported or supported in principle by Government.

The Queensland Government response to the Report's recommendations is provided below.

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that the Wild Dog Barrier Fence and the Rabbit Fence continue to be actively maintained as major components of Queensland's control strategies for wild dogs and rabbits.

Queensland Government Response

The Queensland Government supports Recommendation 1 and notes that work continues on the Wild Dog Barrier Fence and the Rabbit Fence on an ongoing basis. The Wild Dog Barrier Fence is maintained in good condition and a large amount of work has been undertaken recently to ensure the high standards continue.

Recommendation 2

That the organisation responsible for the Rabbit Fence develop a strategy for state-wide control of rabbit populations, with an approach similar to the Wild Dog Management Strategy 2011-16.

Queensland Government Response

The Queensland Government supports Recommendation 2. The Rabbit Fence is an important component of a strategy for the state-wide control of rabbit populations in some areas of Queensland but has little impact on isolated rabbit populations further north. An integrated and complementary pest management approach is fundamental to success and it is important for landholders to implement effective population control on their own properties before rabbit numbers become unmanageable.

Development of a strategy for the state-wide control of rabbit populations is timely given the recent release of Rabbit Haemorrhagic Disease Virus, RHDV1 K5, commonly known as calicivirus.

Any strategy for rabbit control should be developed in consultation with relevant stakeholders and should seek to operate in conjunction with the Queensland Biosecurity Strategy 2017 – 2022 and the Queensland Weed and Pest Animal Strategy (both under development).

Recommendation 3

That the Government review the management structure of the Darling Downs Moreton Rabbit Board and its capacity to meet the objectives of the organisation.

Queensland Government Response

The Queensland Government provides in principle support for Recommendation 3. It is proposed that, in light of the various reviews conducted in 2009, a desktop audit of the *Review of the Management of the Pest Animal Barrier Fences in Queensland* ('the Hyder Review') be undertaken by the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries before any commitment is made to conduct another review in the same vein.

Notwithstanding changes to the prevailing legislation with the introduction of the *Biosecurity Act 2014*, the Hyder Review represents the culmination of an extensive examination and consultation process undertaken in 2009 by Hyder Consulting in response to identical questions regarding the management structure of the Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Board.

The Queensland Government proposes that the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries undertake a desktop review of the Hyder Review, to ascertain the relevance and appropriateness of the recommendations made by the Review in light of the legislative and other changes that have occurred since the Review report was published and, further, to determine whether a new review is required.

Recommendation 4

That the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries consider the merits and a cost-benefit analysis of the proposal to extend the wild dog barrier fence northwards from the Windorah area to within the area of the Longreach Regional Council.

Queensland Government Response

The Queensland Government provides in principle support for Recommendation 4 and notes that a Wild Dog Check Fence Feasibility Study was published in October 2013 by LPM Creative Rural Solutions ('LPM Report'), which is relevant to the proposal to extend the Wild Dog Barrier Fence northwards.

The LPM Report included a cost-benefit analysis and significant consultation in relation to the benefits of establishing Wild Dog Check Fences north of the current Wild Dog Barrier Fence, including in the area of the Longreach Regional Council (LRC).

Notably, the submission made by the Longreach Regional Council to the AEC was made in 2015. Since that time, in 2016, the LRC has received a loan of \$18 million to allow significant exclusion fencing infrastructure of 2 500 kilometres to be erected by landholders in the area. Prior to funding of this and other cluster fencing projects, consideration was given to the possibility of later joining the cluster fences to create an extension to the Wild Dog Barrier Fence.

The Queensland Government proposes that the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries will undertake an internal cost-benefit analysis, including a review of the LPM Report. As part of the internal cost-benefit analysis, the Department will consider what investment may be necessary, if any, in light of the substantial exclusion fencing infrastructure that has recently been erected and continues to be built.

Recommendation 5

That the Queensland Government maintain the Feral Pest Initiative Committee, including its capacity to consider how cluster fencing fits into the broader dog management scheme, and whether there is any merit in repositioning or extending barrier fencing.

Queensland Government Response

The Queensland Government provides in principle support for Recommendation 5 but believes that the Queensland Dog Offensive Group (QDOG) is the appropriate body to consider issues pertaining to cluster fencing and the broader dog management scheme in Queensland.

The Queensland Feral Pest Initiative Oversight Group has provided important oversight for the development and implementation of the initiative itself, including providing advice on funding issues. However, it is not within the scope of the Oversight Group to consider cluster fencing or the merits of repositioning or extending barrier fencing.

QDOG is a committee that provides advice to the Government on the best strategic direction to take in wild dog management. QDOG is best placed to provide strategic advice regarding cluster fencing, how it fits into the broader dog management scheme in Queensland and whether there is merit in repositioning or extending barrier fencing.

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries is currently in the process of organising an external audit as part of a review of the Queensland Wild Dog Management Strategy. The Department will consider the appropriateness of including additional items in the Terms of Reference for the external audit to allow consideration of cluster fencing and repositioning or extending barrier fencing as part of the audit.

Recommendation 6

That the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries include the New South Wales Border Fence Maintenance Board in any future consultation regarding wild dog control strategy and barrier fence construction.

Queensland Government Response

The Queensland Government supports Recommendation 6.

The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries will invite the New South Wales Border Fence Maintenance Board to participate in consultation when the review of the Queensland Wild Dog Management Strategy is underway and will extend an invitation to a representative of the board to attend future Queensland Dog Offensive Group meetings.