



AGRICULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr GJ Butcher MP (Chair)
Mr AJ Perrett MP
Mrs J Gilbert MP
Mr R Katter MP
Mr JE Madden MP
Mr EJ Sorensen MP

Staff present:

Mr R Hansen (Research Director)
Mr P Douglas (Principal Research Officer)

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO BARRIER FENCES IN QUEENSLAND

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

WEDNESDAY, 11 MAY 2016

Brisbane

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Committee met at 9.46 am

CHAIR: Welcome, ladies and gentlemen. I declare this meeting of the Agriculture and Environment Committee open. I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which this meeting is taking place today. I am Glenn Butcher, the member for Gladstone and the chair of this committee. Other members with me today are Mr Tony Perrett, the new member on the committee, member for Gympie and our deputy chair; Mrs Julianne Gilbert, the member for Mackay; Mr Jim Madden, the member for Ipswich West; Mr Rob Katter, the member for Mount Isa, who will be joining us today; and Mr Ted Sorensen, the member for Hervey Bay.

We are meeting today to hold hearings for our investigation into barrier fences in Queensland. The committee is conducting this inquiry in accordance with our public works responsibilities as specified in section 94 of the Parliament of Queensland Act 2001. The hearing will finish today at 12.45 pm. These hearings are a formal proceeding of our parliament and subject to the parliament's standing rules and orders. The committee will not require evidence to be given under oath, but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a very serious offence. The meeting today is being transcribed by our parliamentary reporters and broadcast live on the parliament of Queensland website. We welcome all those watching on TV. I now welcome our first witnesses.

GOW, Councillor Cameron, Rural, Environment and Sustainability Portfolio Manager, Southern Downs Regional Council

O'BRIEN, Mr Tim, Manager, Environmental Services, Southern Downs Regional Council

CHAIR: Would either of you like to make a brief opening statement for the committee?

Mr O'Brien: I can do that for you if you like, Glenn. When the call came from the state for submissions to the inquiry, I did a report to council. I went to the council's briefing session where we discussed what the outlook of the council was. Then I did a report to council's meeting on 27 January, and it was decided that we would do the submission that we have sent to the committee.

CHAIR: Thank you for that. In your submission you note that there are numerous spur fences maintained by local governments, branching off the main wild dog and rabbit fences.

Mr O'Brien: Yes.

CHAIR: You also take the position that barrier fences and cluster fences should be expanded where beneficial to graziers and agriculturalists in other parts of the state.

Mr O'Brien: Yes.

CHAIR: Presumably the spur fences have been erected and are maintained because they are of benefit to graziers and agriculturists. Is the council's position that the spur fences should be merged into the main barrier fences and extended?

Mr O'Brien: The council did not discuss that. It is government legislation that council has to control and maintain the spur fence.

Mrs GILBERT: Did you build the spur fences?

Mr O'Brien: No, the state government built the spur fences and then passed it over to the council many years ago.

Mr PERRETT: Tim, your submission is quite dismissive of the possibility of merging the boards responsible for management of the barrier fences because of the scale and locations involved. Could you tell us a bit more about why you think a merger would be a bad idea? Are there other factors that should be considered?

Mr O'Brien: I might ask Cameron to comment on that one.

Councillor Gow: Politically speaking, and having spoken to some of the neighbouring councils, there is a concern that other councils may not hold the requirement to maintain those fences in the same regard that more rural based councils do. We have had informal feedback that the more Brisbane

coastal councils in particular are not as diligent and have had discussions amongst themselves about whether or not the maintenance of those fences is necessary from their perspective. From our perspective it certainly is. We believe that, if the state government were to maintain control, there would be a more uniform approach to its overall maintenance.

Mr PERRETT: Cameron, with your involvement in local government and your interaction with other local authorities, do you do that through the LGAQ or do you do it through a regional organisation of councils to come together to form views with respect to these matters and how you progress it, particularly when there are various boards that provide advice and responsibility for the management?

Councillor Gow: No, it is not as formal as that, and perhaps it should be. There is sufficient communication between councils. This letter that was sent out in that regard encouraging other councils to make a submission is indicative of the fact that perhaps those links are not as formal and there is more an individual approach to the thought processes around the barrier fences in total, not just rabbit fences but also dog fences. They have been kept separate in the past, but to my knowledge there is no formal structure from a council basis or through LGAQ to form a single opinion. I guess that is what this inquiry is all about.

Mr PERRETT: That is why I am keen to hear that opinion. I have had 12 years in local government, most of those as deputy mayor, and I know in a regional sense sometimes these issues are best discussed collectively rather than individually to get a better understanding. I raise that with you. Perhaps that might be something that can come out of this inquiry.

Councillor Gow: Yes, that is very true.

Mrs GILBERT: You have the barrier fences up at the moment. We have had some reports from other states that they do not have fences to the same extent as we do in Queensland. Do you believe that the fences should be maintained and that this is the best way to go with the dog fences and the rabbit fences?

Councillor Gow: There are two components to that. Firstly, there is the political component of where you are representing grower, community and industry interests. Those barrier fences, whether they are rabbit or wild dog fences, in a total length of fence or cluster fencing where they are surrounding particularly valuable agricultural areas, are an absolute requirement. Wild dogs and rabbits as pests have an enormous impact across our community. From an operational point of view—and Tim may be able to expand on this—they are an asset that requires maintenance. That is certainly in our corporate and operational plan as something that the community has had input into and in a sense directed us to maintain as something that is extremely important to the community.

Mr O'Brien: In the Southern Downs council the rabbit fence virtually cuts us in half. The southern area of the region is outside the rabbit fence and the northern area is protected by the rabbit fence. The rabbit infestations in Wallangarra and parts of the south are quite large. The fence does provide protection for the northern cropping areas. We do have a spur fence which cuts across from the rabbit fence and goes through the ranges just west of Stanthorpe, and it does an amazing job protecting some of the sheep-grazing country in the south of the region as well.

Mrs GILBERT: You were saying that the fence cuts you in half. Have you come up with an alternative of where you think the fences should go? Are they in the most appropriate places?

Mr O'Brien: I think they are in the appropriate place at the moment. I do not know that it would be of any benefit to try to shift them. I think they were historically put in place where it could be accessed reasonably well.

Mr MADDEN: With regard to biological control, I am curious as to how calicivirus and myxomatosis are distributed in your area and if you are satisfied with how they have been distributed?

Councillor Gow: We are a bit unfortunate. We had a representative down here engaged through QMDC and Granite Borders Landcare: Harley West. He unfortunately passed away due to cancer, but he had an enormous amount of knowledge in relation to exactly that. It is a little bit hit and miss—almost prescriptive—where you contact the people who have stocks of either of those particular control methods. It is more or less a responsive and reactive method of distribution.

There are different kinds of control methods that are currently being reviewed by other states. One of them is a haemorrhagic flu specific to rabbit control that was nearing the trial stage. We are certainly looking forward to that rolling out and demonstrating its effectiveness. There are organised methods as far as contacting the relevant people and obtaining those particular control methods and having them distributed. At this stage, I would suggest that industry and the community would be reasonably happy with how it is being used to date and are looking forward to the opportunities to use it in the future.

Mr O'Brien: The state government distributes that sort of thing through people who work in rabbit research in the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. They have been distributing it down towards Wallangarra as a trial site.

Mr MADDEN: Is it distributed by releasing infected rabbits? Is that the mechanism of release?

Mr O'Brien: Yes.

Mr MADDEN: It is a state government responsibility? Your council contacts the state government and then they work out a program for the release of infected rabbits?

Mr O'Brien: Yes. The state works on the release of them, yes.

Mr MADDEN: Good. Thanks very much for that, Cameron and Tim.

Mr O'Brien: That is okay.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for assisting us today.

PARKER, Mr Michael, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Balonne Shire Council, via teleconference

CHAIR: Would you like to make a brief opening statement for the committee?

Mr Parker: Yes. Thank you for the opportunity. Council provided a submission to the committee's inquiry into barrier fences in Queensland. We held a special meeting and worked out a response, because it followed on from a report that we had asked for compilation from Grant Consultants into the economic feasibility analysis on the implementation of cluster exclusion fences in the Balonne region, which showed economic benefits that may be derived from the control of wild dogs in the Balonne region. It was very timely that the committee opened its inquiry at that time and we welcome the opportunity to provide that response.

CHAIR: Wonderful. Thanks for that. On the subject of rabbit fences, you mentioned in your submission that recent changes to the management have improved outcomes. That is always good to hear. It is a bit light on detail in your submission.

Mr Parker: Balonne council is not directly involved in the rabbit fencing; it is more to the East and West Moreton area of council. There was the comment from the mayor at the time that they believed that there had been some management changes. They did not elaborate on that. The mayor and the councillors discussed various matters and they thought that the feedback that they had received was that the management of the rabbit fence had improved. I cannot elaborate further on that, unfortunately.

CHAIR: Right. Do you know what changes have been made and how they have improved things?

Mr Parker: I can take on that task to follow up with that particular council and ask for some more information.

CHAIR: Can you take that as a question on notice for us today, please, Michael?

Mr Parker: Can do. Yes.

Mr PERRETT: Welcome, Michael. I want to talk about stock. You have noted in your submission that the combination of barrier fencing and cluster fencing has allowed farmers to diversify their stock—changing from cattle grazing to sheep. You have noted that, in the right areas, sheep are less vulnerable to drought and that the sheep industry generates more employment. If we can take Balonne as an example, how much of an effect has the move back to sheep had on your local economy?

Mr Parker: It is in its very early stages within the region. We have check fences and cluster fencings and wild dog groups, because we still have a major prevalence of wild dogs. There are a lot of people who are just looking on to see if it is going to be successful. Given the extent of the drought in this area, there are no direct economic benefits as yet, because it will take drought-breaking rainfall to allow people to start restocking. Any restocking process takes a couple of years. The confidence in the wild dog working groups is that, yes, the cluster fencing models will prove of benefit in the long term.

Mr PERRETT: Michael, within your region and your shire, is the percentage of land that has cattle compared to sheep fifty-fifty? From your knowledge, what is the break-up with respect to the areas that have cattle compared to sheep?

Mr Parker: It might have been in the Grant report—some of the detail there. The original sheep production area was mainly to the west in the Bollon area. The broadacre farming is to the south and irrigation is around St George and cattle grazing is to the north. It is probably about 20 per cent to 25 per cent that is the prime sheep country in that Bollon area to the west, the red soil country.

Mrs GILBERT: Michael, given the fact that you are looking at expanding your industry and getting back into sheep, do you think the fences are in the most appropriate places? Are you looking at expanding the fences?

Mr Parker: South West Natural Resource Management has recently advertised for expressions of interest for the cluster fencing expansion on a group basis. That has recently closed and the applications are to be assessed. I spoke to the South West NRM chair. As of Monday of this week, they had received several very good submissions. They have a \$5 million grant from the state government that will allow that cluster fencing model to be expanded and I think there is a further \$5 million from the federal government that they will follow up with.

These applications will be assessed at the end of May. They range from individual landowners up to eight properties getting together in a significant area—something like 140,000 to 160,000 hectares—that will be fenced. That is the request for the funding.

Mrs GILBERT: Great. Thank you.

Mr Parker: It has been quite a successful expression of interest process. They are very impressed with the results. They got some very good submissions, they tell me.

Mrs GILBERT: Very good.

Mr MADDEN: Are you satisfied with the other methods of control of wild dogs and rabbits in your area other than the fence? I am thinking here of biological control and other methods of control such as baiting.

Mr Parker: Yes, we have a very active baiting campaign. It is coordinated by council and the wild dog committees. That is just about to kick off again. This time of the year is the prime time. They are very willing participants. There high numbers of participants in that. It is accepted as an annual process. They see it as a need to continue to keep as much control of the wild dog population as possible—and also pigs and that sort of thing which cause a lot of damage.

Mr MADDEN: Are you satisfied with the support that you are receiving from the state government?

Mr Parker: Yes. I have probably been involved in these over many years, not just in Balonne but in western Queensland areas. The state has always been a willing partner, especially National Parks. Of late, they have been very willing to support their neighbouring landowners in baiting campaigns. That has changed the whole outlook of the landowners, because probably seven to eight years ago they were not willing to provide any access there. Their involvement has been most welcomed.

Mr MADDEN: That is fantastic news. Thanks, Michael.

Mr KATTER: I am certainly sold on the virtues of pushing back to sheep and increasing the number of people in town and everything with the fencing. I know from the tour that we did, people have adjusted their operations to cattle because there is less maintenance and less hassle. Are you still battling a bit of local sentiment that people have now switched to cattle and are resistant to change? My understanding is that, especially with the clustering, you have to get people together wanting to go back into sheep farming and be a part of it. Are you still working against a bit of resistance from people?

Mr Parker: Yes, I agree that there will always be die-hard cattle producers who will not consider a return, just because of the management style that it affords them. I have spoken to a few of the landowners, because they needed the support of the council for their expressions of interest. They got together. It is the diversity that it allows. It still allows cattle, but it allows them to broaden their economic exposure. They can have sheep and cattle and strike a balance. We live in an arid country and we will always have drought. It enables that balance to lessen the impact of a prolonged drought. That is their thinking. The landowners I spoke to have been in that Bollon area for 30, 40, or 50 years, some of them, and their families before them. They just see it as the lifeblood to economic diversification.

Mr KATTER: Yes.

CHAIR: Thank you for assisting us today, Michael.

McCARTNEY, Mr Andrew, General Manager, Program Delivery, Condamine Alliance Group, via teleconference

THORPE, Ms Jayne, General Manager, Business Growth, Condamine Alliance Group, via teleconference

CHAIR: Would either of you like to make a brief opening statement for the benefit of the committee today?

Ms Thorpe: Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the inquiry as we have done in the written form and thanks for the opportunity to offer more comment. I guess we are curious about what aspects of our submission anyone would like clarity or further comment on.

CHAIR: Your submission proposes a management model where one organisation, basically the department, provides organisational and admin support while more local scale organisations, like the DDMRB, handle the day-to-day operational side.

Ms Thorpe: Yes.

CHAIR: You also seem to be in favour of a single management organisation for the barrier fences. In particular, in your submission you said that a single entity could bring all issues to one point and could be possible if all stakeholders are engaged in the debate. Duplication could be reduced if one entity did the combined fences operational role and separate out the administrative role and coordinate together on the engagement role. Could you explain to the committee and elaborate a little bit on what you actually meant by that statement?

Ms Thorpe: We have some involvement with the operation of the fences and the entities responsible for them and also with the councils that contribute towards the cost of management of those. In our dealings with those things we can see where there might be efficiencies gained by consistent and collective management of that asset. There seems to be, particularly where the rabbit fence and the dog fence are running as the same fence just with different purposes in the same locations, still apparently a bit of a divide in the management of the asset and potential purchasing power for materials for maintenance and those sorts of things.

CHAIR: Is that an issue with your group at the moment, that you are having trouble with the fence being repaired and trying to coordinate who is actually doing what?

Ms Thorpe: I would not say it is an issue for us except in that we are all aiming to get the most pest management benefit out of the investment that is available.

CHAIR: As a result of some of the issues that you may have had, are you seeing many of the rabbits and dogs actually getting in past the fence itself? Is there an issue in your area?

Ms Thorpe: My understanding of the way the fences work is it is about density management on each of the side. It is not intended or likely to be a completely impermeable barrier, but that it reduces the access to a point where you have got much lower densities on the side of the fence that is considered the clean side. We did have some particular confusion on the dog issue as to whether there is still a clean or a dirty side of the dog fence. There may be others who can offer more information about that, but it is not clear from our operations whether there is a respective change in density either side of the dog fence in particular. That is clearer for the rabbit fence.

Mr PERRETT: Welcome, Jayne. I have a question around the subject of funding for fences. You have made the comment that with only a limited select few who benefit from the fence it will be questioned why all ratepayers had to contribute to the cost if the benefits are for one side only. Who do you see as the appropriate source of funding for the fences?

Mr McCartney: Good morning, I am acting in the CEO position for today. We are not suggesting that there is a definite individual group that is responsible. I guess it is just in principle that those are the issues that need to be addressed in terms of who is receiving a benefit and where the costs are being borne and whether that is equitable. It is an issue that people have raised with us and we are aware of, but I do not think, in and of ourselves, we have a definitive solution to that issue.

Mr PERRETT: There is always a bit of conjecture around who benefits and who does not and who should pay and that is why I thought I would put that to you because obviously if the integrity of the fence is to be maintained obviously someone does need to pay and it is always good to get opinion around who should contribute.

Mr McCartney: We appreciate that. The other thing is that, even though some individuals are benefiting directly, you can always make the case in many instances that there was a broader community benefit from that happening. There is often a lack of data or information to demonstrate those impacts and communicate to the broader community about which benefits are accruing to which particular stakeholder group.

Mrs GILBERT: We are interested in making sure that the fences are effective. You mentioned earlier that you were unsure whether there is anymore a clean side on each side of the dog fences. What is your view around the location of the fences and should we be looking at expanding them or maybe changing the location of where the dog and the rabbit fences are?

Ms Thorpe: There was discussion in formulating our response that the current location of the fences was based on the historic agricultural businesses that were operating at the time and what needs they may have had or benefits they may have perceived they would have by the location of the fence and fences where they are now. We also have understanding from some of the research that has come to our attention that over the years, with the change in the footprint of the sheep industry, dog-proof fencing in general has declined as we know of in our area and that that has expanded the range and movement of dogs regardless of which side of the fence they might be on and that has led us to think that there needs to be a discussion about the future needs of the agricultural industries that are operating in that space and which industries are benefiting and where they want to be locating themselves in relation to the existing fence or where new fences might be. I suppose some of these questions are coming up with the new cost of fencing work that is going on out west, not only the who-benefits and who-pays equation but also the density of the fencing that is dog proof and what impact that has biologically on the way they move through the landscape.

CHAIR: Do you have programs in place on what you traditionally call the clean side other than biological controls? Are there programs that try to eliminate these wild dogs and rabbits on the clean side?

Mr McCartney: Certainly we have programs that are targeting control and they are quite active and for the most part they are quite effective. Particularly with the wild dog issue, the source is not just the original wild dog when the fences were put in being dingoes. There are new sources coming in for the wild dog issues that are complicating the perception of which is the clean and which is the dirty side. It does not matter whether it is a barrier fence itself or some of these other internal fencing arrangements, whether they are private or the new cluster arrangements, the source of problems particularly from wild dogs is extremely varied from region to region. I guess while the control mechanisms are very successful they are usually at the end of the chain and not necessarily addressing the source of the wild dogs or about the control of when they become a problem.

CHAIR: As part of this committee hearing what we need to do at the end of it is come up with some answers for this whole process, particularly in the cost that it takes to run these fences. If this program of maintaining the fences was finished, would that be detrimental to your area and what your group sets out to achieve?

Ms Thorpe: I would say yes. In particular for the rabbits it is definitely a clear demarcation between the densities of rabbits either side of the rabbit fence. In terms of the dog fencing, I think we have a perception that the more dog-proof fencing there is in the landscape the less they are able to move and that then limits their rate of expansion or their access to be able to have new breeding grounds and the success of the next generations and that sort of thing. I would say if the fences were just discontinued altogether, yes, it would have a detrimental impact on pest control in our region.

Mr MADDEN: I was recently at Barcaldine travelling along the Matilda Highway and I noticed around Tambo and Augathella quite a lot of construction of wild dog fencing. I am curious as to whether either of you are aware of any wild dog fencing being done on the dirty side of the dog fence taking advantage of the dog fences like one part of the fencing for the property?

Mr McCartney: I am not aware of any.

Ms Thorpe: I do not know about that, sorry.

Mr MADDEN: I was just curious. Thanks very much.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Andrew and Jayne, for joining us today.

TURNER, Mr Ken, Member, New South Wales Wild Dog Destruction Board, via teleconference

CHAIR: Good morning, Ken. Would you like to make a brief opening statement?

Mr Turner: My name is Ken Turner. I am a member of the Wild Dog Destruction Board. I live on a property north-east of Broken Hill. You have the submission from our chairman, Andrew Bell.

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr Turner: That gives a bit of an overview of what we do and that type of thing. Traditionally, Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia have exchanged ideas through a national wild dog administrators conference. Traditionally that has been a good forum where there is an exchange of the more practical ideas. It was attended by our staff, our manager from New South Wales and different people attended, even from Western Australia. We are looking to maybe have more of a management type meeting. Our chairman is happy to go and a couple of landholders who are members, myself and one other landholder, would like to attend to discuss the future of the national wild dog fence. What I mean by the 'national fence' is the Queensland section of the barrier fence, the New South Wales section and the South Australian section.

We are looking to see if all the states are on the same page—that we do continue to have a national fence to protect the south-east corner of Australia, if you know what I mean. We are happy to exchange ideas for mutual benefit and that type of thing about different strategies that individual states take. We are more interested in the big picture, probably with the view that New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia all have dog problems. There seems to be a few more maybe ad hoc measures being adopted. We thought it might be a good time to get together and exchange some ideas. Maybe there might be a better idea, rather than having a national fence. We have to talk about it before we go off on our individual paths. Does that give you a bit of an overview of what we are talking about?

CHAIR: Yes, that is great, thanks. To clarify, you say you do have some meetings currently with Queensland?

Mr Turner: Traditionally we have. We have not had a meeting with Queensland—I think it would be going back four or five years since we have had what used to be called the national wild dog administrators conference. I think it would be at least four or five years since one of those happened. It is quite some time since we have met with Queensland.

CHAIR: You have raised concerns in your submission about whether the dog fence is maintained in Queensland to the same standard that you guys have in New South Wales. In your submission, you said that casual inspections of a small section of the fence north of where it intersects with the border have shown that it is not always well maintained or actually dog proof. Can you give us a bit of information on where the section is that your people have inspected and what you have seen that is not up to standard or what you would consider to be up to standard in New South Wales?

Mr Turner: That is probably not part of what this meeting is about. Traditionally, we have an annual inspection. The board members and the manager of the fence board in New South Wales inspect the fence that we call 'our fence'—basically, it is the New South Wales-Queensland border and the New South Wales-South Australian border—on an annual basis. From time to time, with landholder support or probably pressure from landholders in New South Wales in the areas where the South Australian fence heads off into South Australia or the Queensland fence heads off into Queensland—the local landholder might say, 'Come and have a look at this and see what you think'—we go and have a look. It is some time since we went up to Queensland. I think in my time on the board I have been up there twice. The last time was a fair while ago.

Landholders, both in Queensland and New South Wales, are questioning whether it is the right thing to do to continue running the fence. We went up to that section of the Queensland fence, and we are talking about the section that heads off from Hamilton Gate due north. Landholders have said, 'Maybe this fence is not up to standard; what do you think?' We did find on those couple of occasions—and it is not our job and we are not here to criticise you guys; we are just here to find out where your feelings lie and what you are putting emphasis on: is it on the barrier fence or maybe it is some other method of control?

CHAIR: Thanks for that. Who runs your fence? Is it a government department or something else? Two different bodies run our fences together. As part of our committee, we are trying to work out whether it is beneficial to move to one overseeing body or maintain a couple of different bodies to maintain the fence. How does the New South Wales system work for maintaining the fence?

Mr Turner: Basically, in the western division of New South Wales, which is the western 42 per cent of the state, all the landholders with more than 1,000 hectares pay 4.7 cents per hectare. That is the rate. The board is made up of five landholders and the chair, who is a bureaucrat, Andrew Bell, from the department of lands. Part of his job is as Western Lands Commissioner, because it is all Crown leases out here. He is probably the ex officio who owns it all, if you know what I mean. It is part of his job to be chair of the board. Basically, we meet four or five times a year and inspect the fence at least once a year. The five landholders come from organisations. In New South Wales, there are two farming organisations: one is the New South Wales Farmers, which is principally in the eastern part of the state, and the Pastoralists' Association, which is in the western part of the state. Both those organisations put up one member. I am the one from the western part of the state. There used to be pastoralist protection boards, but now they are Local Land Services. There are three members from the western Local Land Services. The landholders come from that western area.

Basically, there is an act of parliament that allows us to collect rates from landholders. Being a statutory body, we have to abide by all the rules and regulations of the state. They are becoming more and more, as time goes by, onerous on the board or more costly to the board. Basically, the landholders' rate is 4.7 cents per hectare. That makes up about \$1.4 million per year. There is a small grant from the state government or a statutory amount of \$100,000 that they put in. There is another statutory amount of \$100,000 they put in towards the housing for the staff on the fence. Other than that, it is landholder contributions. The board has employed and basically made all the decisions towards the running of the fence.

CHAIR: Sorry, we lost you for a minute. Do you want to continue where you left off?

Mr Turner: Basically, we are a landholder organisation. Because we are using public moneys, we have to abide by the state laws. We administer it as a single body. As a member, I believe we have good support from the landholders. The reason I say that is that the rates go out at Christmas time and usually, by February, we have 90 per cent of the rates paid. I find that a good indication of support from the landholder base. Recently, with the incursion of dogs in the western division, our membership of the board—we all come from different areas of the far west—go out and talk to different farmer groups in different areas. We ask, 'Which way would you like to go? Are you happy with what we are doing or do you want this or that?' We ask the usual questions. We have very good support. There has been a little bit of support from the far south-eastern section of the western division where there is a bit of horticulture along the Murray River. Dogs do not pose an issue to horticulture, vineyards and that type of thing. They do still continue to pay the rate without too much question. Now and again we will get a question from somebody with a couple of thousand hectares of vineyards or something, asking, 'Why should we pay rates? What is all this about?' Really, once we explain what it is about they come on board pretty quickly.

We believe what we are doing is working, but that is where I think it is a good practice to have an exchange of ideas with, say, you guys in Queensland and our South Australian counterparts, because there is always a better way of doing something. You guys might have come across something that we might be able to learn from. That is more of the reason, rather than nitpicking about whether our fence is better than their fence or their fence is better than our fence, if you know what I mean.

CHAIR: I do. Thanks very much for that, Ken. That was a great answer.

Mr PERRETT: Ken, I want to touch on cluster fencing. Your submission takes a pretty dim view of Queensland's support for cluster fencing. In fact, you have said—

The Board is of the view that such fencing funnels dogs to those areas where cluster fencing does not exist and creates a bigger problem for those landholders who do not, for whatever reason, have the protection of cluster fencing.

You pointed out that there are already wild dogs inside the dog fence and that they are able to freely wander across the border. We note that the Brewarrina Shire has requested that the border fence be extended 300 kilometres for this reason. Can you give us an idea of the kind of impact that wild dogs are having on farmers in north-western New South Wales?

Mr Turner: The impact in the far north-west where it is protected by the fence, in the Cameron Corner-Tipoobera area, is reasonably low. There are not many problems in the far north-west, but it is in the Brewarrina-Bourke-Walgett area where we have had the submissions. That is what prompted the board over the past two or three years to start asking questions and being proactive about what is happening there. The last submission we had is where they are suggesting we extend the fence east from Hungerford to Mungindi. We have talked to people out there. That is all east of where we operate now. It still adjoins the western division of New South Wales, because the western division comes onto the Queensland border at Mungindi. We have talked to those guys. It is an area where

traditionally—and I go back 20 or 30 years—very, very few dogs were seen in that Bourke-Brewarrina-Walgett area, down as far as Cobar. Traditionally, dogs just were not an issue to those guys, but in recent times, I would suggest in the last five years, they are not uncommon. There is a dog sighting from time to time. Landholders are trapping the occasional dog and there are some killings happening in the area.

We are trying to be proactive. The discussion has been held: is cluster fencing the best idea, do we maintain the existing fence, which includes your barrier fence in Queensland, or do we come down to the New South Wales border? There are people in the Walgett area suggesting that we bring it down to the border fence or rebuild a fence along the border fence to exclude the dogs from the Queensland side. We are more about talking about it, just to decide. With cluster fencing, there is an area in the Cobar area which suggests it is the way to go. In New South Wales, around Cobar, they are thinking we can multipurpose this fence; we can build clusters around groups of properties and manage kangaroos, pigs and dogs. It would be a multipurpose fence. Then when the discussion goes a bit further into how much it costs, they then say, 'Gee, this is going to cost a lot of money. How effective on the big scale is it?'

This is another reason we want to come and talk to you guys, because we understand in Queensland quite a number of these clusters have been built and are being built. We are interested to get the feedback on whether they are a good option.

Mr PERRETT: Thanks, Ken. Certainly there appears to be a lot more discussion and collaborative networking that needs to take place with regard to these matters. Thank you.

Mr Turner: If you guys are happy, we are happy to travel to Queensland—and the suggestion was Roma—to meet with you guys. Do you think it will be mutually beneficial for us all to have this sort of discussion?

CHAIR: Ken, as part of this inquiry we are looking at all these type of issues. If the committee recommends any improvements to the system, that may be one. The department and the inquiry will certainly pass on those recommendations. At this stage, we are just finding out the best scenario for our barrier fence in Queensland. Anything that comes from what we are doing, through listening to your story, may help with getting you guys together in the future.

Mr Turner: We would like to be a part of that big picture and help you progress, if we could.

CHAIR: That sounds good, mate.

Mr MADDEN: Ken, I just did a trip out to Barcaldine and noticed there is almost a little industry with the construction of wild dog fencing on private properties. I am just wondering how extensive it is in your area.

Mr Turner: Wild dog fencing out here has not been that big actually. People have been more concentrating on managing the existing barrier fence we have with South Australia and Queensland. They have been investing their money in that and the wire manufacturers and those people are pushing their products in this area and it is pretty early days. I would suggest that, given my knowledge of what is happening in Queensland, we are a long way behind as far as the cluster fencing and that type of thing. Most people out here have not had the dogs. Yes, they have the kangaroos and, yes, there are the pigs. People are talking about it rather than actually doing it, whereas I understand you guys are actually doing it. I have seen photos, reports and things on the internet of what you are doing. A lot of people here are saying that it costs a lot of money to fence, even if you put four or five properties together and made these clusters like a cross. The bulk amount of money you need to do that is going to be a lot more money than maybe upgrade the barrier or maintain the barrier fence to a good condition and maybe we have to look harder at how we get rid of the dogs that are inside the fences.

Mr SORENSEN: Ken, what does it cost to build a kilometre of that fence and what does the most damage to those fences?

Mr Turner: Are you referring to our fence where we join Queensland and South Australia—the main New South Wales belt fence?

Mr SORENSEN: Yes.

Mr Turner: Are you referring to what we refer to as our dog fence or the various sorts of cluster fencing?

Mr SORENSEN: No, the dog fence itself in New South Wales.

Mr Turner: In round figures it is about \$20,000 a kilometre, but it depends on the terrain. The terrain varies a lot on our dog fence from rivers to lakes to sandhill country on the South Australian side. On the South Australian side we do have a fair bit more cost because all the sandhills are clay

based and the fence built over the clay, so the earthworks there cost more. Depending on how far between sandhills et cetera, as an average we budget about \$20,000 a kilometre to supply the materials and erect it and that gives us a bit for earthworks, but in some areas there are more earthworks than others, if you take my point.

Mr SORENSEN: What does the most damage to that fence?

Mr Turner: On the South Australian side as far as damage to the fence goes there are probably three things. We are having an influx of camels coming in from the South Australian side. I think they are pretty much under control now, but there have been mobs of 15 and 20 camels come up against a fence, and a camel is a pretty mean animal to stop at a fence. There are also the prevailing westerly winds on the South Australian fence, because we maintain our fences about six feet high. In season, when the roly-poly buckbush comes up against the fence when you have had a north-westerly and it swings around the west and it blows like billyo for three or four days, it builds on the fence and then just because of the sheer weight of the pressure on the fence sometimes it will come over.

Probably the third major one on that side would be the kangaroos that are built up on the inside of the fence trying to get outside. They flog up and down the fence and create a fair bit of damage there. We are relieving that kangaroo pressure on the top in that we have upgraded the bottom part of the fence. Most of the fence now is chain wire on the bottom. We are using 300 mil of chain wire in the ground and 600 mil above the ground which is overlapping the fabricated type fencing which goes another 1,500 mil above, so there is six feet above and a foot in the ground that is working quite well. But on the Queensland side in the Paroo channels and the Bullagree area there is quite a number of pigs and pigs are pretty tough animals. If they want to go through there they scratch around and dig and sometimes just apply an enormous amount of pressure and, especially in older parts of the fence, they will get through there. They are the major impacts we have.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for assisting us today, Ken, in our inquiry. We thank you for answering the questions.

Mr Turner: I hope I have helped you. I would like to be able to sit down with you around a table with another offsider off our board and maybe we could help each other down the track a bit.

CHAIR: Great idea. Thanks very much.

LECKIE, Ms Kirsty, Conservation Principal, National Parks Association of Queensland

CHAIR: I invite you to make an opening statement.

Ms Leckie: The National Parks Association of Queensland is a not-for-profit organisation that represents over 3,000 members and supporters, so not only other not-for-profits but also individual members and community groups. We welcome this inquiry. This is an issue that we have been keeping an eye on and looking at in consultation with not only government departments but also other conservation groups. In fact, we have a feature on wild dogs in our magazine *Protected* next month.

We were particularly pleased to see a couple of issues that were addressed as part of the inquiry, and other speakers this morning have also mentioned those. One of those is consideration of unintended impacts on native species because of the sheer extent of the fence and also the effectiveness of the barrier fence in isolation. Our submission made the point that we saw the fence as one tool in the tool kit and that for pastoralists and land managers it was a matter of having an integrated approach to pest management. We feel that the fence in isolation will not be effective in controlling the incursion of wild dogs. There are a few points that we made and if there are any questions I am happy to go further.

One of those issues is just the complexity of the fence itself and having—I think someone mentioned it earlier—one fence for multiple purposes. In preventing the incursion of wild dogs, all of a sudden there is a barrier to kangaroos, which then cause consequences to the fence and destruction of the fence. Pigs will then push at the fence. You are trying to manage the incursion of multiple different species, from cats all the way through to dogs, while at the same time you are trying to allow the ingress or the movement of native species. The example that we included was at Currawinya National Park. A fence was put up to keep cats away from bilbies and in essence what it did was kind of corralled all the bilbies, which are pretty defenceless little things, into one area and then it was a bit of a massacre of bilbies. That is one that we just wanted to flag from a conservation perspective because we are coming at it from a slightly different angle.

I mentioned the integrated approach. We were keen to see that other methods of controlling wild dogs would continue to be looked at, so whether that is baiting, shooting or trapping. We are a pretty pragmatic organisation in that we understand you cannot just put in a fence and expect that that will be the silver bullet or the solution, and we acknowledge that.

The regular inspection and maintenance is another one. It is already an extensive network. If you get entanglement, entrapment or, as someone mentioned earlier, kangaroos, pigs or whatever it is pushing against the fence and pulling down part of it, because of the sheer extent of the network it is very expensive to continue to maintain and upgrade it. The other issue we have seen is flooding. We get flooding, albeit we love the rain. Part of the problem is that then has an impact on the fence and the integrity of the fence, which just compounds the issue.

Probably the final one, which again is important to us as a not-for-profit and a community based group, is when there is research done on the effectiveness of the fence or any changes to the fence it would be great if that could be made publicly available, which is another reason we like this inquiry. It kind of opens it up. It invited comment and for us that is a great opportunity. We can then go back to our members and say, 'This is something the government's being proactive about in Queensland. They are looking at hearing from all parties.' If that monitoring and research takes place to look at unintended consequences and how effective it is, it would be great if that could be published, whether it be through universities or through the government, and we can then make it available throughout Queensland to our members.

CHAIR: Thank you. That was a good submission. I am interested to hear your thoughts on the way that the fences are currently managed. There are two different sources that run it—DAF and obviously the board. Do you think that is a good model or do you think that needs to be looked at?

Ms Leckie: We are probably not the right organisation to comment on it other than to say, like I said, the sheer extent of the fence—so the size and scale of the fence network—and also the isolated areas that the fence has been built in means that having two organisations may possibly compound that, but that is purely our opinion from looking outside and from a national parks perspective. It does seem to add complexity when maybe that would be one way to improve the way it is managed.

CHAIR: Just also touching on the migration of our natural species, do you see much of that causing a real problem?

Ms Leckie: All kinds of animals can get entrapped or entangled. We put a couple of references in our submission which the committee is welcome to have a look at. Depending on how the particular species moves, kangaroos are probably an easy one that everyone understands. Kangaroos are

pretty tough, they can get pretty big and if they want to go through a fence they will go through it. Sometimes what will happen is they just become entangled and either die on the fence or in the fence or they will take out the fence or a component of it—a section of it—and then will die down the track. That is kangaroos. They are pretty big. Smaller animals are likely to just become entangled or entrapped, particularly if you look at the spacing of the wire in those lower sections. If that is in their way and they want to get from point A to point B, it causes mortality which we do not like to see of a native species. Again, it just compounds the management and maintenance of the fence because you then have a section of the fence that is being destroyed or damaged and if it does not get picked up you then have more wild dogs and pest species moving through that section.

CHAIR: Can you tell us for my information—I have no idea about this—if, say, a kangaroo or a small animal got tangled up, how often would someone go past to inspect that section of fence? Do you know how often it is done?

Ms Leckie: There are probably others who will present evidence or who are even on the committee, to be honest. It depends on which area of the fence we are talking about. These are pretty isolated parts of the state. We think landholders and national parks departmental staff are a really key part of that because they are kind of your eyes and ears on the ground. It just depends on the time and availability of people to go out and have a look, but the landholders nearby are really good at keeping an eye on the fence and the state of the fence. I am sure there have been many occasions where the landholders have actually repaired and fixed the fence and humanely destroyed animals that have become entangled in the fence because they see it as part of their responsibility as landholders.

Mr PERRETT: Thank you, Kirsty, for coming in today. I am a rural landholder and fully understand what you are saying with respect to that. It is not just barrier fencing; that happens with general fencing on properties, no matter whether they are small acreages or large acreages. In all sorts of fencing you do find animals that do get entangled from time to time and you do your best to either release them or deal with the problem, depending on what it is.

Just in and around that pragmatic approach that you mentioned before to an integrated response to wild dog management, what is your view around the government? While there is talk about the barrier fencing and who is responsible for this and that and whether there should be some further funding or extension of the fences, in terms of that integrated approach to being able to deal with wild dogs on a broader scale, depending on which side of the fence it is or where they are just generally, what role do you see the government having in that in controlling wild dogs across not only these areas where the barrier fence is but more generally? I do not think it can be handled in isolation, given some of the data and the information that I have been privy to with respect to the movement of wild dogs. They just do not stop in one area; they are quite transient. What are your thoughts around that, Kirsty?

Ms Leckie: I would agree that the range of wild dogs is incredibly large. Again, that compounds the issue of what do you do. We always view it as a collaborative approach or a partnership approach between landholders and the various government departments, whether they be state or federal, and the community groups, whether they be not-for-profits, landholder groups or agriculture groups. It is an issue where you need all parties around the table in order to get the best outcome. If you pursue one outcome and you take one perspective, I do not think the outcome will be as good.

The reason we think it needs to be an integrated approach is that the evidence points to that. We are a group that looks at the science and the good management practices to expand and protect national parks. A big part of that is good land management. To just say that fencing is the answer and one government body has all of the answers and the ways and means to do that is just not sustainable. We believe it has to be a real partnership with the people on the ground in those areas and all the other stakeholders, some of whom I have seen are presenting evidence in the inquiry.

Mr PERRETT: As a committee we are going to make some possible recommendations with respect to these matters. With respect to the resources that the government should apply to this, do you have any suggestion as to whether they are adequate, inadequate or there is more that can be done given the knowledge that you have of the extent of the problem?

Ms Leckie: This is purely our perspective based on what we see and the research that we have looked at. We think it is inadequate. The cost of expanding the network let alone maintaining and having those regular inspections that were mentioned earlier is incredible. I come from the country. We have a cattle and wheat property, and the cost of our fencing is incredible for several hundred hectares. We are talking about a huge state and a huge area. I think it is important as part of this to look into those costs and to make it clear to the community—to the public—just how much it costs not only to establish fencing but also to maintain it properly.

Mrs GILBERT: You were saying there are not enough resources. Who do you believe should be paying for it? How do you think the funding of the fences should be rolled out, whether it is the state or local government, landholders or state forests?

Ms Leckie: Again, I believe it is similar and should reflect the management. It is a matter of getting all parties involved who are bearing the brunt of the economic impact and who have a vested interest in what is happening. I think that includes the general community, which is where government funding comes into it, but we should also look outside of Queensland at other funding models that are currently in place and successfully implemented like New South Wales. There is an element of user pays but there is also government support of all the parties involved. I think that is the only way to get a good outcome for everyone involved.

Mrs GILBERT: Once the shared resources have put up the fences, who do you believe should maintain the fences? Is it the individual landholders whose land it borders, or do you see that comes back to government as well?

Ms Leckie: It probably sounds like a cop-out, but I think it comes down to the underlying tenure. If you have Crown land where you have a protected area, you would need the involvement of QPWS. If you have private landholders or leasehold land, I think they should play a part as well. They are your eyes and ears on the ground if you are looking at private land. I think it has to be based on the underlying tenure where the fence is located.

Mr MADDEN: I have a lot of questions that I would like to ask you, but I will limit it to two. I was interested in your comment about barrier fencing as it exists now protecting vulnerable native species that may be under threat. Do you have any examples of that that you are aware of? I am thinking of bilbies.

Ms Leckie: I have a tendency to talk science so I will be really brief. Australia now has a real absence of apex predators—predators that will take out smaller mammals. For mammals like the bilby, if cats, foxes or dogs get in they can decimate a population. If you already have a population that is under threat and those animals can freely come into those refuges, you can wipe out a population, which is what happened at Currawinya. Part of our vested interest in barrier fences is that there can be huge advantages for conservation if those fences are maintained, built and modified as research comes to hand to manage for conservation as well. You are getting more bang for your buck.

Mr MADDEN: There was an interesting comment made by the CEO of Balonne on the wild dog baiting program run by the councils. He commented that in the last few years there has been much more cooperation with national park staff. Are you aware of any changes in the policies of the national parks service with regard to participating in wild dog baiting programs?

Ms Leckie: I cannot speak for the service, although we enjoy a good relationship with QPWS. I suspect it may be worthwhile asking the question if having an integrated approach to test management is the best way to go. You cannot build fences and expect that it is the silver bullet. You have to contemplate baiting, shooting and trapping in order to control wild dogs. The same would be said for any pest species that you are dealing with. You cannot just build a fence and expect that to be the end of it. You really have to contemplate all of the tools in your toolbox to do that. The park service is very pragmatic. Again, they are landholders. They are out there on the ground working in the same environment that primary producers are.

Mr SORENSEN: I have seen wild pigs destroy swampland. If you get enough pigs they can go through and plough up acres and acres of land. In national parks they must be a real problem to the rest of the fauna in some of those places, because what I have seen pigs do in a very short time is amazing. They must be a real threat to national parks.

Ms Leckie: Absolutely. The same applies to wild pigs. You cannot expect that one method will control wild pigs in an area. Again, coming back to the barrier fences, a huge boar can take out whole sections of a fence. That is left to the landholder or the park service, wherever that is located, to fix up. You are right: they can do a lot of damage in a short amount of time.

Mr SORENSEN: They sure can.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for assisting us in our inquiry today.

Ms Leckie: My pleasure.

PATERSON, Dr Mandy, Principal Scientist, RSPCA Queensland

CHAIR: Dr Paterson, would you like to make a brief opening statement?

Dr Paterson: Thank you. The RSPCA is the major non-government animal welfare organisation. As an animal welfare organisation, we are not against farming or farmers doing their thing. I have listened to all the speakers up to Kirsty talk about the benefits of cluster fencing. The RSPCA is quite aware of the damage that wild dogs can do to lambs, sheep, calves and other animals, and cluster fencing or fencing a property off can prevent wild dogs from doing that. Our concern is that it is seen as an easy solution—maybe an expensive solution—and if we do this then we protect the farmers. I am not against farmers making their money and employing people. All that is good, but we are concerned that it is seen as a simple solution and that only one perspective is being considered—the benefit to the farmers.

We agree completely with Kirsty that we need an integrated approach. We need to look at it from more than one perspective. As an animal welfare organisation, we look at it from an animal welfare perspective. If these dogs are not killing and maiming sheep, lambs and calves, they are still killing and maiming other animals because they still have to eat. It is just changing the animal that is suffering. Although it is good for farmers, the animal welfare impact is still happening. It has just changed to another animal. Therefore, we need to not just stop the dogs going in there; we need to get rid of them all together.

There are other welfare considerations—and this has come up again and again, and I talk about it in our submission—with regard to cluster fences. When a cluster fence is put up, macropods are trapped within the cluster fence. If there is good grass, they can then multiply. They are then a pest, and I understand that. Then the farmer has another problem: they have to get rid of these macropods, which they may do humanely by shooting to the head, which is a humane death, and they may follow the code of practice, but they may not do that. They may shoot them themselves or they may get other people who are not following the code of practice to shoot them.

I have been told by farmers that once the cluster fence goes in they fence off water sources. They move their cattle out of that paddock and they fence off the water source so the kangaroos are left within that area. They cannot get out to find another water source but they cannot drink because that water source has been fenced off, and so they die an unpleasant death. I have been told that this does happen in Queensland. If farmers do that, they are breaching the Animal Care and Protection Act because they know they have animals there and they know they are fencing off the water source. That concerns us. If a fence is put up and macropods are caught inside, how humanely are they being controlled? We are all about welfare.

Kirsty mentioned, and I think other people mentioned, how dog movements have changed as a result of cluster fencing. I think Kirsty also mentioned that putting up cluster fencing is changing the movement of other animals and that has a welfare impact as well. I listed some of the welfare impacts that we are concerned about in the submission.

The bottom line is that we feel that fencing might have a place, but it has to be seen as not the answer and all the money goes into that and no money is put into understanding a whole lot of things that we do not understand—Kirsty would know more about this than I do—such as the mesopredator, the apex predator, the effects of controlling some predators on other species and the flow-on effects. I think that money has to go into research and what other approaches can be used rather than just putting up more fences. I am willing to take questions.

CHAIR: What are some things that you would like to see done other than money spent on fences? In your submission you mentioned sterilisation of cats and dogs.

Dr Paterson: That is one of our mainstay, go-to policies. Dogs and cats are already out there breeding, but we are still allowing more animals to add to that population because people are still not desexing their animals. It is only one part of it. We believe that people through mandatory desexing should not be able to add any more animals to a population that already exists. Obviously that is not going to help with the animals that are already feral in the population. I think research is important. Let's understand, because there is some research that suggests that dingoes play a part in controlling foxes and cats. If you remove the dingoes then you can get an increase in foxes and cats which might have a negative impact. You are solving one problem but creating others. We support an integrated approach that Kirsty was talking about—the introduction of new baiting methods rather than just relying on 1080, for example. Money has to go into that.

CHAIR: For research and development.

Mr PERRETT: Thank you, Dr Paterson, for coming in. Obviously it is a challenging area to try to deal with, particularly with the size of a state like Queensland and with the infestation of all sorts of feral animals across the state. Just getting back to wild dogs, you talk about the fence not being the silver bullet or a one-size-fits-all response. With wild dogs—and that is obviously what we are dealing with primarily—from your perspective what other methods of control does your organisation support to go in conjunction with the barrier fence, knowing that, as I mentioned before, we are a large state with a lot of uninhabited land that creates enormous challenges. I am a rural producer myself. We are constantly battling wild dogs. I wonder what your perspective is.

Dr Paterson: It is a really difficult one, as you have said. I am not an expert in pest management, so I cannot give you the answer. I think it is a matter of looking at all the different possibilities and using them all. It may be that fencing has its place, but I think it should not be seen as that is where all our money goes. There is shooting. There is poisoning and I think improving the poisoning so that we have a humane death. I do not have an answer for you. I wish I did.

Mr PERRETT: It is a complex issue that from my observation is getting worse in respect of the established populations. While I understand sterilisation and I supported that in my local government role—and I think local government has an important role to play in that, particularly in the administration of domestic cats and dogs in respect of processes that they can put in place. We already have a well-established population of those animals across the state.

Dr Paterson: We do.

Mr PERRETT: It is trying to work with that and look for methods. That is why I was curious to see what your thoughts were.

Dr Paterson: The RSPCA does not support the idea of community cats or community dogs. There are other organisations—they call themselves animal welfare; maybe they are more animal rights. I do not know. The RSPCA does not support the concept that we will have a group of animals out there that we see as a community—community cats sound like a nice sort of thing. We actually think that cats and dogs should be owned or unfortunately they need to be humanely killed. They are not a wild animal in Australia. They are not a natural wild animal here.

Mrs GILBERT: Some of us were lucky enough to do a tour at the end of last year to have a look at some dog fences. Different shires proudly showed us what they were doing and then complained about the shire next door. With your dealings with feral dogs and pest species—that type of thing—do you have a view on how best we should be managing this as a government, as individual shires and as landholders? Do you have a view?

Dr Paterson: Not really. I think I would have to agree with Kirsty that we have to work together. We have to get everybody who is a stakeholder in the problem together so that you are not, as you suggest, one council combating another one. Rather, let's get together to see what can we do so we can integrate the approach. If it is good to have different shires baiting at the same time, do that rather than having everybody just doing their own thing and they are not controlling it.

Mrs GILBERT: It does seem like it is 'pick your own adventure' at the moment.

Dr Paterson: Yes, hit and miss. We will try this and then we will try that. It is affected by what the other shires are doing because if they are doing this then maybe animals will move into this other shire which makes them unhappy, and it is quite reasonable for them to feel that. That is why we need to get together so that from the top we have a management plan for the whole of the state.

Mr MADDEN: I just want to follow on from what you have been talking about. As we are all aware, councils in their own way generally have baiting programs. From your observations, are you not seeing any coordination between councils with regard to baiting programs?

Dr Paterson: We probably would not see that one way or the other really. The RSPCA has a presence in parts of Queensland but not out west. The only way that I had information on that is through people contacting me. I know that is just some anecdotal story. I am really not the person to be able to comment on that.

Mr SORENSEN: I was on council with a veterinarian once and there was an overpopulation of certain animals. He always recommended to chemically sterilise them to stop them from breeding. Is that a weapon that you would use against some of those feral animals?

Dr Paterson: That is a difficult one.

Mr SORENSEN: There are seasons when they breed. If you could sterilise them somehow by baiting or whatever, it would leave those animals there which were not doing any damage—

Dr Paterson: But they are doing damage still, aren't they?

Mr SORENSEN: But they would not allow others to come in.

Dr Paterson: That is another area that needs to be looked at further. Certainly there is a lot of research with cats in doing that very thing. They call it TNR—trap, neuter, release. It is very popular in the States and also in some places in Europe, but there is a move in the States away from it now because the cats are still doing the damage that they were doing. They are not breeding but there always seem to be enough new cats entering so that you have to keep catching cats every year and desexing them to keep the population at the same size. There is also evidence that a desexed animal—however you desex it, whether you do it chemically or surgically—changes its place in the hierarchy in any band of animals. You can get a new one coming in that can become the top one. It is quite complex and each species seems to react differently.

Yes, it is something to think about, but while an animal is out there in the wild it is still going to be killing. Even with trap, neuter, release they manage the populations and feed them, but the evidence is that the cats still go and kill. Even sterilised dogs are going to be killing things. If you are going to be baiting them, we would prefer that they were lethally and humanely killed by that baiting rather than desexed. Other people use the advantage of saying they take up the space but, as I say, that is complex. It is never as simple as it may seem when you first start thinking about it.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for assisting us today. Thank you for coming in.

Proceedings suspended from 11.25 am to 11.35 am

BERMAN, Dr David, Pest Animal Technician, Queensland Murray-Darling Committee, via teleconference

CHAIR: Thank you for joining us today. Would you care to make a brief opening statement for the benefit of the committee?

Dr Berman: My main interest is the Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Board fence and protection of that area. I think it is a very special place we have protected from the impact of rabbits for over 100 years and we are in danger of losing that. It would be a shame to lose that. That is my main interest.

CHAIR: You pointed out that rabbits are already established in the area supposedly that we are looking to protect by the rabbit fence and that the resources provided to the rabbit board probably are not at the level needed to eradicate them. Your submission outlines a possible solution where rabbits are treated as a class 1 pest and that eradication be used to train Biosecurity Queensland officers to respond to exotic pests or diseases. Could you please explain just a little bit more about what you actually mean by that statement in your submission?

Dr Berman: I worked for 17 years with Biosecurity Queensland, or what it was before that. We had an exotic emergency response unit. We worked to eradicate equine influenza and that sort of thing. When that actually started a lot of people were dragged in who had no idea what we were doing. We had no training. It would be really good next time something like that happens to have people who have actually been trained in that exercise. We have pests like rabbits in the rabbit board that can be eradicated and the methods used to do that would be the same as those used for any exotic disease or animal that you are trying to eradicate. It would be really good training for Biosecurity staff to do that. You do surveillance looking for where they are, mapping where the rabbits are, and then knocking them out in the key areas. There would be benefits for Biosecurity Queensland and also it would help get rid of the rabbit.

CHAIR: Would that be achievable given how big this actual issue is and the size of the state?

Dr Berman: Yes, certainly. The rabbits in the rabbit board can be eradicated, there is no doubt about that. We have controlled rabbits over really large areas in other parts of Queensland: Bulloo Downs out west. Rabbits can be controlled if you destroy their key breeding places. We can eradicate rabbits from the rabbit board area. There is no doubt about that.

CHAIR: How have we done it in the past and how come it has been allowed to get back to where we see the issues with it now?

Dr Berman: The rabbit board for most of its time just had to cope with a small number of outbreaks. One staff member could do that: run around and knock them out. Just in the last 15 years there has been an increase in the number of outbreaks inside and I believe that is due to rabbit calicivirus virus knocking out the large populations of rabbits outside and reducing the amount of disease that is floating up across the country. There are external factors like that that have made it more difficult for the rabbit board and they have not been able to cope with the increase in numbers. Once rabbits get established underground in warrens and start to breed really fast they can spread much more quickly and it is very hard to keep up with that. The rabbit board have not adapted to this too well. They have not kept up with it due to possibly lack of resources, but possibly a lack of understanding of the threat of the things that were happening.

CHAIR: We have some information that a further strain of calicivirus has been approved for release next year. Do you think that that will help?

Dr Berman: That will probably have very little effect. In some places it may have a 40 per cent reduction, but they are thinking more like only a five per cent reduction. That strain will probably only help where there was the non-virulent strain of the virus present. It can kill rabbits that have antibodies to that non-virulent strain whereas the previous calicivirus virus could not. It will have a little effect, but to control rabbits the best way is to destroy their breeding places, their warrens, where they are underground or under concrete slabs or in hay sheds, where they can keep cool and protected from predators. That is the way to control rabbits. The viruses, the biological control, helps to suppress the populations but you will not control them with those because they rely on there being rabbits present for them to work. Once the rabbit numbers go down a bit the virus drops out and the rabbits pop back up. It may have a benefit in some places, but it certainly will not help in the rabbit board area.

CHAIR: How do you go about destroying burrows for rabbits? What is the process?

Dr Berman: If it is a proper warren, which is a whole lot of openings, holes in the ground, joining together, you can use bulldozers, excavators or explosives. Excavators are really good: you dig down and destroy the structure. It takes many, many years for a rabbit to develop a sophisticated

warren and they find it very hard to re-establish once you have destroyed those warrens. Once they have got a warren they can keep cool. Once the temperature gets over 27 degrees they find it very hard to make enough milk to rear the young. Particularly in Queensland they need to get underground to breed and rear their young. Also, if there are foxes or dogs they are safe when they have a good warren. Two rabbits can turn into 120 rabbits in a year, whereas if they are above ground they might only have one or two litters which are picked up by goannas or foxes and they may not do too well. To destroy the warren you use ripping or explosives. Sorry, that was the question.

CHAIR: That is a great answer. There is some good information there. Is anyone actually still doing that now? Do farmers, the board or anyone do any of that sort of thing with warrens?

Dr Berman: Yes, the board do encourage people to do that and they also do some themselves. They are aware of that, but unfortunately there are places that they do not know about and there are places on land that they cannot. An example is next to the New England Highway in Highfields. It is on department of main roads land. The board cannot actually work on state land; there are problems with that. So there are places where there are warrens that they have not been able to deal with. They are forced to run all over the place and respond to any complaints about rabbits. They cannot really target the key areas for long enough to make a difference. That is the biggest problem I think.

CHAIR: There are some great answers there, some good information. I will hand over now to the deputy chair.

Mr PERRETT: You were pretty comprehensive there. I do not have any further questions. You covered a couple of the ones that I was going to ask. I am satisfied with that. Thank you for that information.

Dr Berman: You might realise that it took me maybe 30 years to learn all this stuff. It is important to understand it to actually make a difference with the rabbits. Most people do not have that information. You have to be able to access that information to really make a difference.

Mr MADDEN: I am fortunate in having heard you speak before. I have heard you speak about the importance of deep ripping and destruction of warrens. What concerns me as a former councillor with Somerset Regional Council is that at least Somerset has good pest control officers but they seem to be mainly focused on wild dog control. When I talked to those officers about rabbit control they seemed to be only focused on release of biological controls. I am picking your brain here. What can we do to get councils more interested in rabbit control?

Dr Berman: That is a very good question. That is common all over Australia, actually. Everyone is really keen on doing something about wild dogs. My view is that you need to tell people what damage the rabbits are causing. It is not as obvious as a wild dog ripping up sheep or something, but the damage is considerable. People just do not realise what that cost is or can be.

In the Somerset area and that of the Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Board it is very hard to convince people that in the future there is going to be considerable cost. I work on that a lot, trying to do that, but people just do not see that. They have limited resources, so they put it into the dogs, which is what everyone seems to want to do. Unfortunately, once you control the dogs you might actually make the rabbit problem a little worse.

Mr MADDEN: One idea I had was that we do more research with regard to the dynamics of rabbit populations and where we see a blowout, that the state government steps in and introduces myxomatosis, calicivirus or this new flu and be more proactive. At present we seem to be relying on councils contacting the state government requesting releases. What do you have to say about that?

Dr Berman: Yes, it would be really good to identify the key spots and where the rabbits are blowing out. Again, releasing the virus is only a short-term solution. It does not really make that much difference. The rabbits will come back very quickly. Within a few months they will be back. The virus very rarely will knock a rabbit population out. If they have good breeding spots, if they have good warrens and good places to breed, those places must be destroyed.

Mr MADDEN: We really have to get the word out about the importance of warren destruction. That is the key, is it not?

Dr Berman: Yes, or rabbit proofing hay sheds or rabbit proofing sheds if warrens are underneath. That is the key. Unfortunately, it costs us a bit more. Council pest control operators are actually rewarded. They feel pretty good when they go out and tip a bit of a virus out and they see dead rabbits. Then they can come back and they can get rewarded again next time. They feel good about that but it does not actually make a long-term difference. Those rabbits are breeding and then spreading elsewhere. You have to destroy the places where they are breeding to make a real difference. The Somerset fellows have been doing a pretty good job with that. They have been more proactive than others.

Mr MADDEN: Thanks very much. I really appreciate that.

CHAIR: Just to finish off, we just heard from a couple of different groups, particularly the RSPCA, about humane ways of killing animals. Ripping into a burrow obviously does not sound really humane for those animals. Is that part of what you have had a look at? What is your comment on that?

Dr Berman: We have ripped warrens with radio collared rabbits in them and they die very quickly. I do not think there has been any proper research on that. Our collared rabbits died very quickly. There is normally not that much opposition to ripping because it is a long-term thing. It happens once and then you do not have inhumane killing of rabbits in the future because the population has gone. In the long run it possibly causes the least animal welfare issues. You have to certainly keep that in mind and look into that.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, David. I appreciate your time with us in assisting us this morning with our inquiry. You gave the committee some very valuable information. Thank you very much.

Dr Berman: Thank you very much.

READY, Mr Mark, Principal for Conservation and Pest Management, Toowoomba Regional Council, via teleconference

CHAIR: Good morning, Mark. Thank you for your time. Would you like to make a brief opening statement for the benefit of the committee?

Mr Ready: Our council has responded to your inquiry based on the barrier fences that exist in our region. We have shied away from comment on fences that we have no direct involvement with like the main barrier fence to the west of us. Our comments are centred around the barrier fences for the Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Board and for the main wild dog check fence, which was not specifically one of your areas of interest but certainly is a major area of interest for council. Both of these fences are funded fully out of council contributions, through precept to the board or through direct investment by council with no state government contribution to the management of those fences per se in the same way that the main wild dog barrier fence receives state funding. It is on that basis that council's comments were directed.

CHAIR: Thanks very much. Just following on from that, in your submission you call for the fences to be maintained using an appropriate funding model which recognises the 'public good' nature of the benefits of barrier fences which shares the cost equitably across all Queenslanders who benefit from reduced losses in agricultural production. More agricultural production leads to more profitable farms which leads to higher tax payments and—I guess you would hope—better government services. Do you suggest that the barrier fences benefit everyone who lives in Queensland?

Mr Ready: Certainly anyone who draws on the agricultural production from these areas for their food resources and the prices that they pay through supermarkets for that. It is council's belief that in relation to all of the heavily populated coastal areas, it is our rural areas that supply the food for those regions, and the value of that agricultural production is something that benefits all of Queenslanders in the end. The benefit is not solely given to the farmers in our local areas.

CHAIR: You did not quite hit the nail on the head in your submission. Did you mean that you are looking to spread the cost of the fences statewide, to other regional councils across the state?

Mr Ready: Council's basic concern there is that you have a very extensive fence to which the state does provide contributions and yet we have these particular fences in our regions for which there is no state input. The thinking there is that we are not necessarily looking for individual councils to all contribute to a fund, but we are looking for a funding model that does not call purely on local inputters, as our particular fences appear to have. Something more in line with what exists for the main wild dog barrier fence would be more than acceptable to council.

Mr PERRETT: The council has come out strongly in support of a single controlling body for the wild dog fence, the rabbit fence and the wild dog check fence. You have based this view on the Hyder report of 2009. Would you mind telling us a bit more about that report and its conclusions based around a single controlling body for those fences?

Mr Ready: Without having the report directly in front of me and the sections, the Hyder report was an extensive report undertaken back in 2009 across all of the fences. It very strongly favoured the increases in the economies of scale, managing it all as one and a unified construction standard, and all of those things came into play with it. What we currently have in our area are two different models, one being the rabbit board model where we contribute through state precept to the running of the board and its costs, and the other one being the main wild dog check fence, which is fully funded out of the funds of the councils in whose area it falls. In that regard Western Downs actually has three fences through the area: one is the main fence, one is the rabbit fence and the other one being the check fence.

Our position on that is that we have our own staff dealing with one fence, we have the rabbit board staff dealing with another; we have levels of governance and oversight on all of those fences that could probably be provided by one body as opposed to three different organisations over three fences.

Mr PERRETT: You mentioned there about the state precept which is paid to the state government. Maybe you could expand a little bit more on that. Do you feel that you get value for money with respect to that and the interaction you have with the departments through that liaison and obviously that payment to the state?

Mr Ready: From council's perspective, our entire precept is in the order of \$700,000 a year, so it is quite extensive. In relation to the components dealing with the research components and the state pest contingency fund, council does not take issue with those. We believe that they are shared equitably across the state. When we look at the component that goes into the running of the Darling

Downs—Moreton Rabbit Board, in the 2013-14 financial year that was \$472,000-odd. That is going up every year. I think this year it was closer to \$500,000 for the rabbit board contribution. Looking at the year of full figures from the rabbit board's annual reports, we are paying in the order of 32½ per cent of their costs. We certainly do not comprise 32½ per cent of the length of the fence or 32½ per cent of the operational area of the board. Council believes that we are covering a lot of the cost of those services, and we have no way of knowing what percentage of that cost is actually returned to our ratepayers because the board's financial reporting requirements do not require them to divisionalise those expenses as to what regional council area their expense occurs in.

Mr PERRETT: Thank you for that, Mark. That was helpful.

Mrs GILBERT: This morning we heard from one of the witnesses who said that with the fences in their area it was a bit hard to determine at times which was the clean side and the dirty side when it came to dogs. You were just talking about the cost to your council and to your ratepayers of maintaining and building the fences. Do you think we should be looking at a different way of eradicating the dogs and the rabbits rather than just relying on the fences? It seems like it is a huge expense which is ongoing.

Mr Ready: There are varying opinions on that. I do not believe that we have any data locally as to whether one side of the fence or the other is any better as far as density of dogs is concerned. Certainly in our southern areas, the areas outside of the check fence we believe are lower in dogs. That said, we still encourage a lot of baiting programs through there and there are still significant dog issues in those areas. Our northern areas have quite a large percentage of dogs. We have less buy-in from our ratepayers, from our landholders, to our baiting programs. It seems less popular in those areas. Some of the drivers may come down to lifestyle choices, absentee landowners and those sorts of things—tree-change people as opposed to our more production areas to the south. As to any real level of confidence around whether there are more dogs on one side of the fence than the other, I do not believe that we could say confidently one way or the other.

Certainly with regard to rabbits, we are now getting outbreaks of rabbits to the north of us around the Hampton area, Cressbrook and Crows Nest all the way up to Yarraman, which are a long way to the north of the rabbit fence. Certainly the rabbit fence does seem effective in stopping south-north migration of rabbits. There are significant populations throughout the South Burnett and the Wide Bay-Burnett area, and they certainly do seem to be moving down or spreading through the Toowoomba region.

Mr MADDEN: I was interested to hear what you just said about the increase in the rabbit population. I was formerly a councillor on the Somerset Regional Council. It is very obvious in the Somerset region when you rabbits in the main street of some of our towns. Do you have any ideas about how the state government can better assist councils in dealing with this problem?

Mr Ready: That is a very good question. Certainly one of council's all-time concerns is our ability to fund positions and fund people on the ground to undertake the work and do the inspections. As the legislation currently stands, it is a landholder's responsibility to control pests on their land and council's role in that is more one of encouragement and/or enforcing of compliance. That is a bit of an interesting line to tread in that we do not necessarily want to punish people. We would rather they spent the money on controlling the pests than paying fines and those sorts of things for not having controlled their pests, but we still need to get the message out to them and give them the tools to do that.

With regard to rabbits especially, it is quite difficult. I believe the poison that works best for them—and that seems to be the most effective thing when they are not living in warren systems where the biocontrols do come into play—when they are free living in roadside tree piles and piles of dirt and that sort of thing, is pindone, which is the registered poison for rabbits or the main one of use. It is odd that the best antidote for a dose of pindone is a belly full of green grass, so it is something that really only works in drought times. The poison 1080 has its issues as to where we can use it in regard to areas of population.

With regard to wild dogs, the canid pest ejectors have recently been approved for use in Queensland, but the active with that is still 1080 and we are still bound by the restrictions around the use of 1080. A lot of our issues are in the peri-urban areas and dealing with the dogs that come into those areas. A lot of the tools that traditionally rural people would have—the ability to shoot on property and the like—do not exist in those areas. The registered poisons that we have available cannot be used within legislated distances of towns. There are some serious barriers there to what can be effective.

That said, we also have a large number of rural landholders where encouraging their buy-in to dealing with their issues is somewhat difficult. Growing essentially a sense of community whereby you get baiting syndicates and the like working together to generally reduce populations has been a more difficult path than we perhaps would have liked. Some of that is around the participants to a large extent perhaps expecting things out of council and out of government rather than taking the responsibility themselves. Anything that puts the onus more on government to provide the service would need to be closely thought about.

One of our issues here was the supply of meat baits for dog baiting. We would spend a certain amount of money on meat bait for these programs. That may or may not get an update. In balancing the cost of those programs with the cost of employing our weed officers, we withdrew the offer of free meat. That sent people away from baiting programs because they had to bring their own meat. We would give them the active, but it took us two years to get them back into participation once they realised that the little bit they were paying in meat they would more than get back in the fact that they baited and the impacts would be reduced through that.

As to what will be effective, I do not know that I have any great insight for you there. Everything comes down to the cost of running a property and people seeking to minimise their costs wherever they can.

CHAIR: Thank you very much for assisting us in our inquiry today. Our time is running short. Thank you for your answers to our questions.

BOWDEN, Mr Greg, Chairman, Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee, Longreach Regional Council, via teleconference

HOCKINGS, Mr Paul, Director, Corporate Services, Longreach Regional Council, via teleconference

MORTON, Mr David, Chairman, Rural Lands Advisory Committee, Longreach Regional Council, via teleconference

NEWTON, Mr Jeff, Local Laws Team Leader, Longreach Regional Council, via teleconference

CHAIR: Paul, would you like to make a brief opening statement for the benefit of the committee today?

Mr Hockings: That would be good. I am the Director of Corporate Services here at the Longreach Regional Council. I have only been with the council for about 12 months. I have a company secretary type role for the two advisory committees to council. The Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee was formed about four years ago. The Longreach Regional Council is traditionally a sheep-grazing area. With the collapse of the wool price scheme in the late eighties, a lot of landholders swapped from sheep to cattle. What has happened is that wild dog control has dropped off and the dog numbers have increased exponentially in this area. A lot of our towns are reducing in size because cattle is not a labour intensive industry.

The wild dog control committee was formed by Greg Bowden and a couple of other concerned landholders in about 2012. The council has really got behind that committee. We are doing a lot of really good things out here. We have a full-time wild dog trapper on at the moment, David Gessler. He is costing us about \$150,000 a year at the moment and we are starting to get some good results there. We are participating in two annual baiting programs in April and October. Jeff has just finished the April program. That is probably all I would like to say as an opening statement. We have these committees. I really think you are better off hearing from the actual committee chairman, Glenn.

CHAIR: Yes, most definitely. Is that David?

Mr Hockings: Greg might be the best one to talk first.

CHAIR: Okay. Greg, would you like to make a small submission?

Mr Bowden: Yes. The Longreach wild dog committee has been very proactive. We have four divisions within the Longreach shire and then we also have in those divisions two division leaders for each division and then we also have our syndicates. Some of these syndicates have been operating for over 50 years, especially in the west of the state, and some of those people were around when they still had their own wild dog fences. When 1080 came in, 1080 had such a good effect that a lot of those fences were let go. They were old at the same time.

Like Paul said before, with the collapse of the wool industry and people getting out of sheep, when they got out of sheep they did not see that wild dogs were a problem. A lot of them stopped any wild dog control. I think that is Australia wide. That is why, I think, we have seen such an explosion in wild dog numbers. They just breed up so quickly.

We have set up the two rounds of baiting. We also have reporting books for each division. When a dog is seen, or destroyed, we record those dog sightings and dog destructions on an Excel spreadsheet and they are also loaded in the Fulcrum software that you may be aware of that Desert Channels in Longreach has started, which is really good. You can see by zooming in any part of Queensland the shire and you can see where these dogs have been taken. That is an extremely effective way of recording just how many dogs there are out there.

We can always do more. We are still trying to get a few more syndicates up and running. We have areas in the shire that are not participating like they should. Between the Longreach council and ourselves, we have put on a trapper, like Paul said. He has been instrumental in trapping a lot of old dogs and problem dogs. We would like to think that any old dogs have reached their old age because they are not taking bait, but we certainly seem to be able to track them. Since he started, in the 63 days that he has been trapping this year, he has trapped 60 dogs. He is certainly having a huge effect.

Mr Morton: We are in the south-west corner of the Longreach Regional Council. We are in a syndicate down here that has been baiting for the last 30, 33 years. We have been doing an annual baiting program before the council started their biannual baiting program.

Last year, seven producers in this syndicate spent \$120,000 in 12 months in baiting and trapping to try to control the wild dogs within this area. They are all 100 per cent wool producers. Even with that council baiting plus what we are spending on spot baiting and trapping, we are losing the battle with the dogs at present.

It is a recognised fact that for every sheep that is in the area \$12 goes back into the local community. We have 50,000-odd sheep just in this syndicate. Unless we can do something that can get these dogs under control, within three years there will be no sheep left within this syndicate. The dogs are getting that bad. It is a loss to the community and there is going to be the great drama, too.

Mr Bowden: I would also like to add that on the western side of the Longreach shire is a range of hills. They start west of Winton—it actually goes up further than that—and comes right down the western side of the shire and right down through the Barcoo shire as well. The old fence that was put up by graziers years ago pretty much goes up there. A lot of people in the western side of the shire would like to see another fence come off the barrier fence and up that western side. That would make a really good start to controlling those dogs because, as we clean up the dogs on the downs, they come out of the hills. That is where they breed. Our reporting books show that and the number of dogs that get trapped up there. A lot of those hills have been baited for the last 40, 50 years by the Longreach council and by private syndicates as well.

As chair of the Longreach wild dog committee, I also sit on the western Queensland dog watch committee, which you may be aware of. That committee has been instrumental in planning the regional baiting calendar from Richmond, Flinders—those shires up that way—right down through Winton, Longreach, Barcaldine, Blackall, Tambo, all the way down to the New South Wales border. When we first started doing this calendar it took 12 weeks to get it all done, but now, with two aeroplanes, we get it done in five weeks. That has made a huge difference, we would like to think, but the numbers are still big. There is still more that needs to be done.

CHAIR: Thank you, gentlemen. That is a good opening statement. You mentioned that there is an extra \$12 in value that goes back into your local community for each individual sheep. Can you explain to the committee, and particularly for my benefit, what you mean by 'depasture'? Is that when sheep are sold and leave the area or is that when you change from sheep to cattle?

Mr Bowden: People end up having a gutful of dogs just tearing their sheep to bits. They get out of sheep and they go into cattle. For every sheep that is in the district, \$12 goes back into the community. That gets made up of contract musterers, crutchers and shearers. They live in these towns, because usually there is plenty of work for them to stay in town. They have wives. If they do not work in the sheds, they work in town. Then they have kids. The kids go to schools. The schools need more teachers. They all shop at the grocery stores. They are busier. The grocery stores need more staff to handle the groceries. More groceries get bought. The trucks that bring the groceries to town are busier. They may need to do more runs, which means more drivers. It just goes on and on. Then the money is spent in town in not only grocery stores but clothes stores, pubs, clubs, restaurants. That is where the \$12 comes from.

As people get out of sheep and go into cattle, I think it is something like only \$3 that goes back into the local community for every beast. Then you have to remember that for every 400 kilogram of dry beast or cattle you run nine sheep—a dry-sheep equivalent. If you do the figures, you have nine by 12 as opposed to \$3. It is a massive difference. In Longreach, I think there are something like 50-odd houses for rent. The drought has a lot to do with that as well, but three or four years ago it was hard to find a house in Longreach to rent.

CHAIR: Fair enough. You mentioned extending the fence up into the western area from the Barcoo area. Do you think adding extra fencing is the way to go, or do you think more effort should be put into the trapping side of it and trying to wipe out the population of wild dogs?

Mr Bowden: I think we really need both, but at least if you have a fence that is a line in the sand to say, 'Right, there are no more dogs that are going to get into the hills. Now, we can work on the downs. We will have to keep baiting those hills out there, but we can concentrate on those downs areas.'

The other thing it will do is inject confidence back into the sheep graziers to continue with sheep, knowing that they have a fence. There is a barrier to stop those dogs coming in. I know the argument—and I get tired of it hearing it—of the barrier fence. They say that there are just as many dogs inside the barrier fence. They should be saying ‘south of the barrier fence’. We know how far it goes and what a massive area it is in there. To me, that argument does not wash.

Mr Morton: Like Greg said, trapping and baiting is not controlling these dogs at present. It is at the stage now that we are just getting overrun and anybody who wants to stay in sheep has to outlay a lot of money to fence their own. If we can get that barrier fence up, it would be a big saving, especially for that western side. There are large areas there. A lot of those people now are into their fourth or fifth year of drought and they have just run out of finances to be able to do something for themselves. A lot of that country is far more suitable for sheep than for cattle production, just because of the type of country that it is. If we can get a fence up, as Greg said, it is a barrier where we can start from and, eventually, it can be added on to from there. The way I see it, fencing is the only way that we can get control of the dog problem at present.

CHAIR: Have there been any studies or any investigations into how long this fence would be and where it would go? Has anything been drafted or looked at, or is it just a thought bubble at the moment?

Mr Bowden: There was a group called the multishire check fence group. They had a feasibility study done, which was paid for by the Newman government, and they had an area where they thought the fence would go. It would come up through the Barcoo and the Longreach shire. Originally, it was going to go into the Barcaldine shire down through the Blackall and Tambo shires. It would come off the barrier fence and then back on to the barrier fence in a loop.

That proposal got changed. Barcaldine Regional Council decided that they did not want to be in that. That came to a halt and now we have this cluster fencing that has come up instead, which is being funded by the Labor government, which is fine. The clusters are good, but what some of us would like to see is either the multishire fence or some sort of fence come off the barrier fence, because we think that it would be far more effective and, like I was saying earlier, to fence off these hills on the western side of the shire.

Mr Hockings: I just wanted to add that there was a local landowner by the name of John Te Kloot who put a one-pager out to all the candidates at the recent council election. He is one of the landholders on the western end of our boundary. He asked for two things (1) that council investigate a scheme similar to the 1980s rural electrification scheme, about council trying to provide debt funding say for 50 per cent of the cost of putting up a linear fence on the western boundary of our council; and (2) whether council would look at charging the landholders on the Downs area so that the landholders bordering that western boundary or that range of hills could have funding to maintain that linear fence. One of the things that the mayor has me investigating at the moment, and we talked about it at length at our committee meetings yesterday, is whether it is legally okay under the Local Government Act to offer that sort of scheme similar to the rural electrification scheme in the eighties. There is really a group of landholders out there who are pushing this linear fence down that western boundary.

CHAIR: I have his submission in front of me at the moment and I am having a quick look. Just for clarification, a linear fence, what does that actually mean?

Mr Bowden: Instead of a cluster fence around a small area, it is just a fence that starts from one area, just to use an example, off the barrier fence up through Barcoo shire and it would stop somewhere up on the western part of the Longreach shire. Rather than being an enclosed cluster it is just a line.

CHAIR: It is a straight line fence and hopefully they do not go up and around it.

Mr Bowden: Yes, that is right, and then eventually to close in the whole of the shire or back down to the barrier fence.

Mr PERRETT: Thank you for joining us today. I want to touch on some of the issues that you mentioned earlier about an integrated response to wild dog management, typically with your local trapper. I am just drawing on my own experiences in the electorate that I represent and the local authority there being very proactive with respect to wild dog management, including running primary producer education forums. Our country is probably a little bit more settled than yours. In relation to how you integrate with your primary producers, do you get 100 per cent take up with respect to the work that you do, what the local trapper does and how he works in that environment with local primary producers?

Mr Hockings: I might get Jeff to talk about that one, because he has been organising the trapper right from the start.

Mr Newton: Basically how it works is landholders get in contact with me, I organise where the trapper goes and it is basically word-of-mouth. We have got a contract trapper on the council's books but there are also syndicates that have their own trappers working within those syndicates. I receive the scalps from those gentlemen, so we have a pretty good idea of where the activity is and how heavy the activity is. I can contact a landholder within our shire and talk to them and get a feel of how bad the dogs are there and where they are actually coming from. Previously it has worked well because we have targeted some of that rougher country where the dogs breed throughout the year and that is where all the numbers are so that is where we send our trappers. We get isolated pockets of dogs on the Downs which are much easier to get than what they are in the hills. Hopefully that answers your question.

Mr PERRETT: Does a trapper only trap or does he assist landholders with baiting and shooting as well?

Mr Newton: He does not actually assist with baiting, but he will set traps for landholders as part of his contract with us. It is not just about him going out and trapping himself; it is about that education and the transfer of knowledge to those landholders where he works as well.

Mr PERRETT: That is good. That is what I am familiar with in the region that I come from—that education and trying to encourage landholders to be proactive.

Mr Hockings: If I can just add to the trapper conversation, it was actually an idea of the Wild Dog Control Advisory Committee last year. Jeff has gone out for expressions of interest in the local paper. We have trialled it initially as a six-month contract with a six-month option. It is \$400 per day and he is working a 10-hour day on a 10-day-on, four-day-off roster and he is getting paid \$200 per dog. The numbers we talked about at the wild dog committee meeting yesterday was he has been going for 63 days and he has trapped 60 dogs, so about a dog a day and we have records on whether they are adult dogs or juvenile dogs. We are getting lots of good feedback from our landholders that he is taking the time to train them how to do the trapping. It is really an art form. Like I said at the start, we have put \$150,000 in next year's budget out of ratepayers funds to keep this going just because we can see it getting the old dogs.

CHAIR: The smart dogs.

Mr PERRETT: I am actually quite familiar with this. I run a couple of thousand head of cattle myself so I have a little bit of knowledge in and around these things and I do appreciate that you do have to work with landowners. That is why I am interested in the integrated approach. While fencing is one option, I do not think it is a silver bullet and obviously it needs to work with other programs. That is why I am keen to hear about that with respect to the recommendations that we may make into the future.

Mr Bowden: Our trapper, Dave Gessler, is only young but he has an absolute knack for it and just absolutely loves it, too. He just loves getting out there amongst the dogs. Recently he was driving around with a grazier in the western part of the shire who has lived on this place his whole life and Dave, the trapper, is in the passenger seat and this old fella is driving along and Dave tells him to pull up and he said, 'What for?' He said, 'There's dog scratchings back there.' Even driving along in a vehicle he can see the dog activity from the passenger seat, so they have torn back there. This bloke who has been doing quite a bit of trapping through his life did not even realise that the scratchings were there. You just have to talk to Dave and see how passionate he is about trapping. He just loves it. I think he would like to spend more time doing it rather than having those four days off to go back to his family.

Mr PERRETT: They do get very committed and passionate. Thank you for that, Greg.

CHAIR: Earlier you mentioned the Fulcrum mapping app. It is good to see that you guys in regional Queensland are starting to use this type of technology. Can you give us a bit more of an idea of how that works and what is the end result of that information that you are actually collecting on that app?

Mr Bowden: Desert Channels Queensland started this app. It is their idea but we have grabbed the bull by the horns and there are quite a lot of people, not only in the Longreach shire but in shires through a lot of western Queensland, who use this app. You can have it on your mobile phone or iPad and if you see a dog or shoot a dog—and it also works for other feral animals—you can go on there and enter exactly where the dog was. It is hooked up to a map program. I do not know which one it is. It seems it is a bit like the Hema map, if you are familiar with that. You put in

where you have either seen the dog or shot the dog and if it has been trapped, shot, seen, if it was tracks, the age, all the details about the dog. You can even take a photo of the dog and put it on there. You enter that. You need mobile coverage. When you save it, it goes to Desert Channels and then Jade Fraser in Longreach quality controls each entry. Once he has done that then it will pop up on the screen as a green dot. I have a council iPad at home and when you open the app all these green dots pop up. It only shows 500, but I think it is up to 2,500 recordings of dogs. You can zoom right in to an individual property to see where dogs have been taken. That is also linked to other software and you can print out maps to show anyone or for your own records so you have a paper record of where these animals have been destroyed.

Mr Hockings: If we pay the \$30 for a scalp on our council form we get those people to enter it into Fulcrum before we will pay the \$30, and anything that Dave Gessler, our trapper, gets is also put onto Fulcrum as well.

CHAIR: Fantastic. I just had a quick look at it while I was talking to you and it seems like a great initiative to show where they are and what goes on. Thank you very much, gentlemen. Your assistance today is much appreciated. That brings our hearings today to a close. I thank you for coming. I do not think we had any questions on notice from you. We will make the proof transcript of today's meeting available on our website as soon as we are able to. The next stage for this committee's inquiry is to hear from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries and the Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Board and to inspect some sections of the rabbit fence. I now declare this meeting closed and I thank you for your time, gentlemen.

Committee adjourned at 12.42 pm