

Responsibilities for dingo control under the *Wild dog Act 1921*

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Introduction

This address has two components. The first (Part 1) draws an analogy between urban development and the general history of Australian settlement including the dog fence; the second component (Parts 2-6) relates to the *Wild Dog Destruction Act 1921*. The conclusion draws on a Chinese proverb to link these components.

Part I. Comparison of urban development with Australian development

- Where are you from?
 - who is from overseas - where, why here?
 - who is from interstate - where, why here?
 - who does not live in Sydney?
- What am I going to talk about?
 - not dogs - enough of that as a Vet, and from today's seminar.
 - Get started with an issue we all can relate to - on a level playing field.
 - My topic-backyard cricket.
- Remember when we had an open paddock in neighbourhood, which we could all make use of:
 - as room to play
 - to walk the dog
 - to grow our chosen vegies
- Along came a developer
 - pushed us off
 - subdivided it up and sold it off
- New owners
 - build houses - on half the land

back yard pool

somewhere to hand clothes out to dry

fence - keep pet rabbit in and stray dogs out.

- Kids arrive

romp around the house

boisterous boys get sent outside and play (in backyard)

swim

trampoline

cricket

don't ruin the garden!

- Cricket

oldest boy makes up the rules, dictates the terms

garden, pool, clothes line compete for space

inevitable broken window

parents not impressed

- Oval in the centre of the whole area

(MUM) Why not go to the oval, and invite a few friends

(CHILD) Don't know anyone

(MUM) Get the neighbours kids to play

(CHILD) Qld kids big and bullies Vic old mexican couple - no kids

(MUM) Make family affair - good way of getting to know new neighbours - get Qld, South Australia, what about inviting a few of the people who used to use the paddock before we arrived - we've never spoken to them.

(DAD) The oval is big enough - we do not need to pull down some backyard fences.

Provided we all negotiate to play standard international rules everyone will be satisfied.

- Can anyone not relate to that story.

What has this got to do with today's agenda?

Relate this to the history of settlement in Australia, and the general history of the dog fence, thus:-

- First generation Australians:
 - introduced with them a dog species called dingo.
 - lived in harmony with the whole of Australia as an open paddock.
- Second generation Australians:
 - arrived 211 years ago, people and dogs and sheep and cattle
 - colonised Sydney and other coastal cities
 - ventured into backyards with dogs and livestock
 - divided the States
- 1895 - 107 years after first settlement - 1st rural settlement schemes in Western Division of NSW (as distinct from squatters).
- Since 1895 - subsequent 104 years - more compulsory subdivision and settlement - for grazing, must occupy leases, prescribed sizes and conditions.
 - Rated according to sheep carrying capacity.
- 1880s Fence built
 - keep rabbits in NSW (1880s)
- Border Fence Trust
 - to keep wild dogs out of NSW
 - levies paid by pastoralists
- Wild Dog Destruction Act commenced:
 - placed responsibility for the fence under the Western Lands Commission based in Sydney.
 - maintained levies from NSW pastoralists.
 - NSW took full control from Queensland in 1919 and from South Australia in 1934.
- Wild Dog Destruction Board created a decentralised (Broken Hill) Board of Management.

Part 2: The Dog Fence

National level

Runs from north east Queensland to Southern Ocean in South Australia.

Recorded as the longest single purpose structure in the world - over 5000km.

NSW Section

584 km long, being approximately 360 km along the Qld border and 224 km along the South Australian border.

The fence links with similar fences transecting Qld and South Australia to provide a barrier to the entry of wild dogs from north-westerly areas of Australia.

The NSW section is maintained in total dog proof condition, through a high standard of efficiency and effectiveness, involving 14 operational staff.

The annual budget for the total NSW operation and management is approximately \$1M, comprising:

80% raised by an annual rate imposed on every landholder in the Western Division - The minimum rateable area is 1000 ha, and the current rate is 2.5 cents per ha (1999).

10% direct from State Government, as determined by State Treasury in accordance with Section 18 of the *Wild Dog Destruction Act 1921*.

10% from the NSW Department of Land and Water Conservation.

The NSW fence has a nominal valuation set in 1985, of \$2.9M. However, the replacement value far exceeds this figure.

The remainder of this paper relates solely to NSW and the NSW section of the fence.

Part 3: Wild Dog Destruction Act 1921 No. 17

- The purpose of the Act is to make provision for the destruction of wild dogs in the Western Division and to provide for the imposition of a rate upon the owners and occupiers of land in the Western Division.

- The Act establishes the Wild Dog Destruction Board, with the Western Lands Commissioner as Chairman, and 5 members representing specific groups appointed by the Governor.
- Pertinent sections of the Act regarding destruction and possession of wild dogs specify:
it is the duty of the owner or occupier of any land, at all times, and at his/her own cost, to destroy all wild dogs upon the land owned or occupied.
a wild dog includes any dingo or native dog, or any dog which has become wild, or any dog which apparently has no owner and is not under control.
it is an offence for any person, who, without written authority of the Wild Dog Destruction Board, to have in his/her possession any dingo or half bred dingo.
provisions are made for payments of scalps.
- The Act and Regulations outline the conditions and processes for determining, collecting and accounting for rates and consolidated fund subsidies, and for the purposes for which the funds may be used.

Part 4: Wild Dog Destruction Board

- The vision of the Board is to allow the multi-million dollar sheep and goat enterprises to continue in Western NSW without the threat of wild dog attacks.
- The Board's mission is to maintain a cost effective barrier to prevent the entry of wild dogs from Qld and South Australia into Western NSW.
- The Board is committed to enhancing its management efficiencies through the ongoing development of:
a strategic plan
a business plan and
an operational manager's plan

Part 5: Benefit Cost Analysis of the Wild Dog Destruction Board

A commissioned benefit cost analysis of the Wild Dog Destruction Board was undertaken

in 1988 to determine if there was an economic justification for the Board's operations. The Executive Summary of that study stated the following:

- By harassing, biting and killing sheep, dingoes erode the viability of sheep production.
- Under the *Wild Dog Destruction Act 1921*, the Wild Dog Destruction Board is responsible for protecting the sheep flock of the Western Division from dingo attack.
- The Board's costs are met by a charge levied to Western Division landholders plus a subsidy from the New South Wales Government.
- The aim of this study is to determine if there is an economic justification for the Board's operations.
- The method chosen was a cost benefit analysis, which divides costs and benefits into tangibles and intangibles.
- The tangible cost of dingo control was the average of 10 years pastoralist levies, government subsidies and opportunity costs.
- Intangible costs are the cost to interest groups of decreased dingo numbers and greater grazing pressure from kangaroos and emus.
- The tangible benefit of dingo control was the ability to produce sheep and or cattle rather than cattle alone.
- Intangible benefits are protection for the feral goat, a limit to the potential spread of disease from dingoes to wildlife and stock and improved participatory benefits for visitors to Western Division National Parks and fauna conservation areas.
- The study concluded that for the assumptions made there was an economic justification for current levies and operations of the Board.
- Average tangible benefit was \$4.77 million for an outlay of \$732,000 i.e. benefit of 6.5:1.
- Break-even point, i.e. where costs equal benefits, occurred when 15% of the Division was protected from attack.

Part 6: Possession of Dingoes in Western Division

- In accordance with the *Wild Dog Destruction Act 1921*, it is an offence for any person, who,

without authority of the Wild Dog Destruction Board, to have in his/her possession any dingo or half bred dingo.

- The policy position of the Wild Dog Destruction Board is that the Board will refuse to grant such an authorisation. Only under special circumstances, will a written application seeking authorisation for possession be considered on its merits at a normal Board meeting, (held quarterly).
- The Wild Dog Destruction Board's policy is supported by the objective of the *Wild Dog Destruction Act*, a positive benefit cost study relating to the continuance of maintaining the dog fence, the recognised challenges of keeping captive dogs under control at all times, the difficulties in identifying the breed of dog other than taking measurements following the animals death, and importantly by the widespread support of Western Division landholders who pay an annual rate to ensure

the Wild Dog Destruction Board continues to carry out its duties.

- This policy position has the endorsement by resolutions from:-
 Western Division Shires Association
 Western Division Council, NSW Farmers Association
 Pastoralists Association of West Darling
 Western Division Conference of Rural Lands Protection Boards and Graziers Association

Part 7: Conclusion

Chinese Proverb - *The view of the mountain depends on how close you stand.*

While there are not a great number of mountains in inland Australia, the dog fence is an effective line in the sand, conveying ample opportunity for everyone's agendas to be satisfied when viewed from a national perspective.

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

CHRIS DICKMAN: Many thanks, Geoff. Are there any questions?

ANON: How much of the fence is electrified?

GEOFF WISE: The fence is not electrified. The New South Wales position is to maintain it as an obstacle fence rather than an electric fence. One of the most successful components of the fence is the fact that we use plastic-coated wire for all the wire that is buried underground. That has proved outstandingly successful. Given the history of the fence, we've chosen not to change its structure because we're happy with the way it is maintained.

ANON: I've had correspondence with someone in South Australia who said it was on the fence, that it was electric.

GEOFF WISE: On the fence going through the centre of South Australia there is electrification. I've been speaking about that section which adjoins New South Wales, both on the South Australian side and the Queensland side.

ANON: I meant the whole lot. You don't know the whole length of the fence.

GEOFF WISE: No, I don't know how much of the total length of the fence is electrified, but certainly, some of the South Australian is electrified.

ROLAND BRECKWOLDT: Geoff, I've been a beneficiary of a permit once or twice to take dingoes through the western division, so I don't want to be critical, I want to maintain that good relationship. But it has been an experience of mine to arrive in Menindee on a long weekend with two dingoes in the back of a ute, securely, securely, locked, with dingoes very precious to a film project. There was no way in the world that they were going to get loose. But arriving there, and seeing every manner of vehicle, with every manner of dog on the back of those vehicles, and loose, sometimes on a chain, pig dogs, Rottweilers, you name it, huge dogs. You know that some of those aren't going to make it back. I just wonder how you handle that differentiation between a rule against dingoes and a different rule against domestic dogs?

GEOFF WISE: Very valid comment. One of the issues that the Wild Dog Destruction Board is extremely conscious of is in fact of all those other breeds of dogs. We're also very conscious of how many of them effectively end up a wild dog. While Keith mentioned that there were 22 dingo scalps taken in the western division of New

South Wales last year, I suggest here that the local governments would have destroyed many, many times more wild dogs, most of which have had no association with dingoes. The concern is just how do we draw the line any differently.

The concern literally is that any wild dog is bad. If there is inbreeding between dingoes and some of the other breeds of dogs, it only gets worse. That's the real dilemma. I accept someone like you, and from the board's perspective I think that's a workable arrangement. If we don't have some rule it will quickly become open slather. From that point onwards, well, goodbye western New South Wales, not just the western division.

The suggestion was made earlier this morning in this symposium, "Shift the fence across to the barrier ranges, shifting it 100 kilometres or whatever". That doesn't make a big difference. The suggestion also came up to fence Sturt National Park on the other side. I don't think there would be anyone in this room, or anywhere else, who probably doesn't think that's a good idea, but again, you've got to have a line somewhere. For 100 years it happened to have been on the other side of the land, which is now Sturt National Park; we're only shifting it marginally.

To build that fence on the south and the eastern sides of the park instead of the north and the western side, we're looking at a boundary of about 277 kilometres, multiplied by the figure we heard here this afternoon, which we'd agreed was in the order of \$5000 per kilometre, for material alone. If National Parks or anyone else want to put up \$10 million for the sake of having a national park in New South Wales with, you know, absolute free range of kangaroos and dingoes, well, so be it. We'd probably all like that. But is it realistic for New South Wales to have to have one of them when there are similar ones in the other states? That's for public debate.