



Department of Agriculture

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# Farmnote



## Bounties and wild dog control

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### The bounty or bonus system

Bounties or bonuses have been paid on many species around the world for centuries. The payments are a reward for killing pest animals, usually on presentation of evidence such as scalps. Though now phased out over much of Australia, the bounty system is still occasionally suggested as a means of improving the management or control of certain pest animals, including wild dogs. This Farmnote provides reasons why a general bounty system would not prove beneficial to the management of wild dogs in Western Australia or elsewhere.

### Worldwide evidence against bounties

The experience worldwide has been that bounty systems do not deliver effective control of pest populations. In Australia, evidence from discontinued fox and wild dog bounty schemes has been the same. When the numbers of scalps taken for either species are plotted over long periods of time, the results invariably show a common outcome: numbers fluctuate over time, but there is no downward trend in pest numbers. This shows that the bounty system has not worked: if it had, there would be a progressive reduction in the number of bounties paid.

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As well, general bounty schemes encourage fraud. Historically, the variety of fraud has varied greatly, from the careful counterfeiting of scalps, through to the more common trafficking of scalps from other jurisdictions or localities.

### **Flawed rationale**

There is overwhelming evidence that wild dogs cause economic losses, particularly in the sheep industry, so livestock producers do not need the incentive of a bounty before undertaking wild dog control. The financial incentive to carry out dog control already clearly exists.

The argument is sometimes put forward that station workers, for example, might be more likely to hunt wild dogs if there were some kind of financial reward to do so. In that case, managers may well choose to reward their staff personally, but that does not require a general bounty scheme. General bounty schemes divert funds that could otherwise be spent on regional control programs, producing more widespread effects and benefits.

### **Losing focus of the main objective**

One of the dangers of a general bounty system is that it tends to encourage a scalp-count mentality. This means that success is incorrectly measured by the number of pests killed and collected. The real measure should be to achieve or maintain a reduction in the numbers of stock lost through predation.

### **Influence on control methods and strategies**

Bounty systems tend to encourage the hunting of wild dogs where they are easiest to find or kill. That too can take the focus away from where the real problem exists, such as in or close to the stocked paddocks where wild dog numbers would be lower, and where individuals would be quite likely to be harder to find and target.

Bounty systems also encourage the use of techniques that yield carcasses (trapping, shooting, inappropriate poisons). There is evidence in Western Australia that 1080 baiting had not been favoured in some areas in the past because carcasses were seldom found, and so bounties could not be claimed. Failure to use 1080 baiting for that reason has the potential to severely compromise the efficient and cost-effective control of wild dogs.

The incentive to improve a scalp tally has formerly led to extreme practices such as delaying the targeting of bitches until after pups are born. Waiting until pups are old enough to be collectable potentially increases the number of scalps (and payments) available to claim, though at great risk of losing track not only of the bitch, but her litter as well.

### **Individual rewards to remove rogue animals?**

Despite the arguments against general bounty systems, there is still some merit in providing financial incentives for the removal of specific individual wild dogs through the so-called 'smart bounty'. This is sometimes done effectively on individual properties, and more rarely over groups of smaller holdings. In these situations, the target animals are usually readily identifiable. The reward provides some recompense to operators who might spend a considerable amount of time dealing with the problem animal. These generally informal arrangements are set up and paid for by the relevant landholders themselves. This is quite different to a general bounty scheme.

### **Further information**

For information on wild dog control, contact any Agriculture Protection Officer or the Department of Agriculture at South Perth, tel. 9368 3333.

### **See also Farmnote**

- *Wild dog control* (Agdex 674)