

Media Release

BENEFIT FROM CLUSTER PEST FENCING IN ORDER OF \$1MILLION

The first cluster under Round 1 of the Queensland Government's Feral Pest Initiative has been completed well ahead of time and the cluster members are thrilled.

"Last year when the Queensland Government announced the funding of another \$5 million it was expected that by July 2017 we would see some finished clusters. Due to the leadership and enthusiasm of the Coordinator, Lauren Schmidt, the Cobun cluster, east of Cunnamulla is already finished," said Mark O'Brien, Queensland Government Wild Dog Fence Commissioner and Chair of South West NRM.

"This is a perfect example of how Collaborative Area Management Systems are supposed to work and we at South West NRM couldn't be happier for the graziers" Mark said.

The group of neighbouring graziers near Cunnamulla are celebrating this week the completion of close to 150 kilometres of pest fencing in attempts to reduce an annual impact of \$1 million to production.

The group of six graziers banded together in the hope of bringing wild dog numbers under control. The eight properties, stocking merino and dorper sheep, a merino stud as well as cattle, were experiencing particularly high impacts from wild dogs and on average only stocking 50% of the potential carrying capacity of their productive country near Cunnamulla.

Richard and Lauren Schmidt are only relatively new to their property "Harriman Park" just outside of Cunnamulla, but are part of a long-term wool producing family around south west Queensland. Richard Schmidt was surprised at the extent of impact despite the relatively small wild dog numbers in the area. 176 sheep within the cluster area have been killed by wild dogs since 2014.

"Some properties in the district have seen lambing drop from 100% down to 55% over the past few years and wool yields have also decreased", Richard Schmidt reported.

"We got together as a group to try and be proactive while dog numbers are relatively low and get on top of the impacts before it is no longer viable to run sheep. Since 2014, we have collectively trapped and shot 26 dogs within the cluster area and we all bait regularly.

"Other pests have also been targeted in efforts to improve production and health of our land. Nearly 1000 pigs have been removed as well as significant fox and feral cat numbers. The fence will make our job a lot easier so reinfestation doesn't occur, which has been our experience in other areas with just baiting and shooting.

"When the assistance for pest fencing was advertised our local group of neighbours were quick to jump at the opportunity to try and protect our good sheep country. The funding made it affordable to get a contractor in to construct the fence and we are pretty pleased to have it finished ahead of time," Mr Schmidt said.

A total of 93 kilometres of high integrity exclusion fencing made from Clipex materials was constructed four months ahead of time. Consistent with South West NRM's original goal of creating a 'honeycomb' effect of protective fences, the cluster only required 64% of the total perimeter of fencing to fully enclose itself, taking advantage of an adjoining existing cluster.

Project Manager and economist Jon Grant has estimated the impacts from pests to be close to \$1 million annually over the eight properties, covering 81,540 hectares. This is equivalent to \$12.15/hectare or \$49.18/current DSE being stocked. These impacts, collectively from wild dogs, feral pigs and excessive kangaroo populations, severely erode the profitability of agricultural businesses in the region.

During a fence inspection last week Mark O'Brien was told that current stocking rates are only 50% of what the carrying capacity typically is for this type of country.

"The project expects that carrying capacity can return to 100%, or where stocking rates remain lower the properties will be significantly stronger in drought conditions. The investment in fencing has potential to reduce costs for the federal government through delaying drought assistance."

Mr O'Brien said landholder group applications for the third phase of funding for a share of \$2 million is currently being assessed for the shires of Murweh, Paroo, and Quilpie, as well as Bulloo.

The Collaborative Area Management project was designed and incubated at South West NRM and has now become the high water mark for pest management. It is funded through the Queensland Feral Pest Initiative. This initiative has received funding through the Queensland Government to support the growth of a productive and prosperous food and fibre sector in Queensland. Funding has also been provided through the Australian Government's Plan for stronger farmers and a stronger farmers and a stronger economy.

Minister for Agriculture and Fisheries, Bill Byrne said "tackling the scourge of wild dogs has been a priority for the Palaszczuk Government. This government has been able to contribute to a renaissance in the sheep industry in Queensland by delivering funding to assist in the construction of cluster fencing.

"It is great to hear that part of our funding has already seen the completion of fencing projects ahead of time and is a credit to the community," the Minister said.

End.

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