

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

WEDNESDAY 23RD MARCH 2016

DOG FENCE (PAYMENTS AND RATES) AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Adjourned debate on second reading.

(Continued from 24 February 2016.)

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (16:20): I, too, rise to support the Dog Fence (Payments and Rates) Amendment Bill 2016. The object of this bill is to make sure that there are sufficient funds and resources available to maintain the Dog Fence into the future. There are six local boards which sit under the Dog Fence Board and ownership of the fence is vested in those local boards, apart from two private owners who manage sections of the fence on their properties. These boards administer the funds and are responsible for the employment of contractors who inspect and maintain sections of the fence.

Three amendments are proposed in this bill today. The act sets a cap of \$250 per kilometre which goes to the local boards for maintenance and it is proposed that this be lifted to \$400 per kilometre. The rate charged to pastoralists is currently capped at \$1.20 per square kilometre of rateable land and it is proposed that this is lifted to \$2 per square kilometre. The third amendment, obviously, is the minor technical amendment to remove a reference to the South Australian Farmers Federation, which, it has been indicated before in this house, is now defunct, and replace it with Livestock SA Inc.

The rate involved has historically been increased by the consumer price index and is collected through the sheep transaction levy. The minimum payment, which is based on a property basis, is \$100. The total of rates raised last year was \$508,000 and that was matched, I believe, dollar for dollar by the state government. I hope the state government, even with this extra funding raised, will also match it dollar for dollar.

The Dog Fence Board was one of those boards which was very fortunate to survive the recent legislative consolidation of government boards and committees. The member for Flinders talked about pressure on the fence from camels, and the federal government provided \$400,000 to electrify the top wire along the Lake Frome stretch of the fence. On our information, there have been no breaches of the fence by camels in the past two years. With continual maintenance and upgrades with electric wires, the condition of the fence is continually improving.

In regard to some of the history of the fence, it is obviously there to keep the dingo, Australia's wild native dog, from killing grazing animals, mainly sheep. The history of Merinos in South Australia, and Australia, goes way back to the 1800s when Merino flocks were brought out here. They were introduced to the northern plains of South Australia around 1860. It is interesting that, when you go through the Flinders Ranges, you can find historical monuments talking about

the station owners and graziers and their management of their sheep flocks around that time.

The first three decades of this period was relatively free of dingoes. However, dingo populations multiplied, and evidence suggests that they began to thrive on the newly imported European rabbits—they could have eaten a few more of them—which were running in feral plagues at the same time.

By the early 1900s, this made it impossible to establish a sheep industry. What happened was that in 1946 a single-line dog fence was established to align with the most northern boundaries of the properties contained within the vermin-proof districts that had been established earlier, with people putting in about 30,000 miles of their own fences to protect their flocks from these wild dogs.

As has been indicated in the house, the fence now extends from the Great Australian Bight in South Australia near Fowlers Bay, eastward across South Australia, through New South Wales to finish at the Bunya Mountains of Queensland near the Pacific coast. It is the longest continuous fence in the world at 5,400 kilometres long, with 2,178 kilometres being in South Australia. As has been indicated earlier, it is 2½ times the length of the Great Wall of China.

Under the Dog Fence Act of 1946 there was a rate levied on grazing properties based inside the fence to fund the wages for maintenance and patrol workers. Since 1947, the fence within South Australia has been continuously maintained, realigned and upgraded. New fencing technology has been incorporated so that dog-proof grids at road crossings and solar-powered electric sections have been introduced.

A few years ago I travelled around with the member for Stuart. While we were in Coober Pedy we were taken out to the Dog Fence and had a viewing of the grids and the well-maintained fence just outside of Coober Pedy. I note that there has been extra work done with electrifying the fence to keep camels out. There is nothing like seeing a mob of camels running alongside you on the other side of a fence, wondering what they are going to do next. We witnessed that as a family up at Innamincka and it is pretty ferocious. Evidently, there are millions of camels racing around in the outback that can cause this damage.

Certainly, in the main, the Dog Fence does its job. Cattle owners north of the line have had significant damage in the past, especially in times of drought. I have been at Cowarie Station, Sharon Oldfield's property on the Birdsville track, during the drought, where the property was virtually reduced to beach sand. Even though they had agisted over three-quarters of the stock off the property, the wild dogs were causing havoc for newborn calves. Because they are an organic property they were not baiting, so they were shooting hundreds of dogs, trying to keep ahead of the situation.

As has been indicated by the member for Flinders, there is baiting done by vehicle or by plane both inside and outside the fence. I think the restriction on how much aerial baiting you can do should be lifted so that a bigger attack can be made on these dogs so we can get a better result not just for the pastoralists who are doing this work, because essentially they are doing this work for the good of the state. Baiting is far more efficient than trying to bounce a Toyota

around a lot of inhospitable country in a lot of areas to put baits out by hand. I certainly think that should be opened up more to get more control of these wild dogs.

I know there has been a lot of consultation in regard to this with Livestock South Australia, Primary Producers South Australia, the local boards and the South Australian Sheep Advisory Group. My office put a call in to Geoff Power, and he is a very good operator. He is president of the Livestock South Australia board and he runs a self-replacing Merino flock near Orroroo. He is a past president of WoolProducers Australia and has been an executive member of the organisation since 2005.

Geoff has also been a member of the South Australian Sheep Advisory Group, and that group advises the South Australian Minister for Agriculture on sheep and wool matters. Geoff is also a member of the South Australian Wild Dog Action Group and is working with wool producers on a national approach to tackle increasing numbers of wild dogs in pastoral regions.

So, I thought, who better to contact than Geoff Power? He made a few quick phone calls today just to make sure everything was on the right track for us, and contacted us earlier today and said, 'No, it is all fine; we can support the increases and the increased funding going into keeping these pests out of the inside country.'

I do want it to be recorded—and it will obviously be recorded here today—that people in the outside country do suffer from dogs. Because a lot of these properties have organic status, there are issues around being able to use 1080 bait. Obviously, they cannot, so hundreds of dogs have to be shot. They can cause a lot of damage to cattle, tearing them down very cruelly and causing a very slow death for a lot of cattle, mainly calves.

It should be noted that if this fence was not there, the multimillion-dollar sheep industry that we have in this state would not exist. With those few remarks, I commend the bill.