

Wild Dog Barrier Fence

Dingo or Wild Dog Barrier Fence

The Dingo Fence or Wild Dog Barrier Fence was originally built in the 1880's by State governments, initially to stop the spread of the rabbit plague across State borders. This proved to be a wasted effort and the fences fell into disrepair until 1914 when they were repaired in order to keep the dingoes out and protect the sheep flocks.

The original fence was completed in 1885. In the 1940's, the fences were joined together to form one continuous structure, which was recorded as the longest fence in the world. Until 1980, the fence was 8,614 km long, but was then shortened to 5,614 km. The fence stretched from Jimbour on the Darling Downs near Dalby through thousands of miles of arid country to the Eyre Peninsula on the Great Artesian Bight.

The Wild Dog Barrier Fence, previously called the Dingo Barrier Fence, was first proposed in 1948 to protect sheep from wild dog attacks. However, erection was not completed until the late 1950's. Originally Landholders along the proposed line were informed that wire netting would be landed on their properties free of cost if they established the Barrier Fence to specifications and maintained the fence thereafter. A contribution would be made to the annual maintenance cost of the fence.

Six Inspectors stationed at Cunnamulla, Boulia, Cloncurry, Hughenden, Charleville and Brisbane supervised construction and maintenance of the fence.



Up until the early 1970's much of the Barrier Fence was generally maintained, however regular instances occurred where pressure had to be applied to landholders to maintain the fence. In their defence, landholders cited poor economic conditions, changes in land use, damage by fire and flood, difficult terrain for fence maintenance and the successful use of baiting for dingo control.

In 1982, a \$3.6 million Queensland State Government program was implemented to rebuild almost half the original Barrier Fence (2,125 km of the original 5,600 km). This program also realigned a large section of the fence to exclude previously protected areas in central-western and north-western Queensland. This meant that the Barrier Fence would only provide protection from wild dogs in central-southern Queensland. The current Wild Dog Barrier Fence is the result of that program.

In addition to the main Barrier Fence, a number of check fences were reconstructed and renewed in the southern Darling Downs area. Today, the Queensland section of the Wild Dog Barrier Fence is about 2,500 km long and protects 26.5 million hectares of sheep and cattle grazing country.

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Barrier Fence. It protects about 28,000 square km

Much of the state border between New South Wales and Queensland also takes the form of a Barrier Fence. This fence is maintained by their relevant Local Government Areas (LGAs)

Travel along the Dingo Barrier Fence is not permitted without prior authority from both the relevant Government department and each individual landholder.

Darling Downs–Moreton Rabbit Board Fence

When rabbits first reached Queensland in the 1880's from the southern States, a fence was quickly constructed along the border in an attempt to keep them out. Unfortunately, the rabbits had already invaded some districts before the fence was completed. Some of the invaded districts had inadequate financial and technical resources to cope with the problem and went bankrupt. Many other sections of the fence fell into disrepair and ceased being a barrier to rabbits.

In 1930, all existing Rabbit Boards were abolished except three – the Leichhardt, Darling Downs, and Moreton. In 1963, the Leichhardt Rabbit Board closed and the Darling Downs Rabbit Board took over 80 km of the fence, extending it west of Chinchilla. The following year, the Darling Downs Rabbit Board merged and became the Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Board (DDMRB). The fence is now 555 km long and stretches from Lamington National Park in the east to Goombi in the south-west where it connects to the Wild Dog

Barrier Fence. It protects about 28,000 square km within southern Queensland. The DDMRB Fence provides a unique form of protection against the incursion of rabbits, and has successfully prevented the establishment of rabbits within its boundaries. If rabbits are found within the fenced area, they are eradicated.

Fence Construction

The barrier fence is constructed using wooden posts, strainers, star pickets, wire and different types and sizes of netting. The fence line is cleared on both sides to a width of five metres. Floodway fences are constructed using heavy cable.

The fence stands 1.8 m high, and extends 30 cm underground with the netting at ground level laid a further 1.5 m along the ground. Wire netting is secured at ground level using straight timber logs placed on the downstream side of the fence. Star pickets are spaced every 9 m. The fence is held together by gripples. Grids are of similar construction as Department of Main Roads grids.

At first the fence was unsuccessfully used to try to keep out rabbits, with the fence built as a rabbit proof fence, however it was more successful at keeping out kangaroos, emus, brumbies and pigs. Parts of the Dingo Fence are lit at night by cold cathode fluorescent lamps, which are alternately red and white. They are powered by long life batteries, which are charged by photovoltaic cells during the day.



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A trial is being conducted on a buzzer to be used as a deterrent to stop dogs crossing over grids. If this proves to be a success, more research will take place to see how viable these would be as a replacement for grids.

Staff and Funding

Barrier Fence staff consists of 21 employees:

- A Project Officer who oversees all components of the Wild Dog Barrier Fence
- Two Inspectors (1 situated in Quilpie; 1 in Roma) who supervise Patrolmen on their sections of the fence
- One two-person Flying Gang (for immediate repairs of flood/fire damage and renewing aging or deteriorating sections)
- Eight two-person Patrols (for ongoing maintenance).

Each two-person crew has approximately 300 km of fence to maintain so that every section is patrolled once a week. Fully equipped Depots are situated at Quilpie and Roma.

Today, the Wild Dog Barrier Fence is funded through contributions from Government of approximately 50%, and from Industry (via Local Government contributions) of approximately 50%.

Dingos/Wild Dogs

The dingo is a primitive canine related to wolves and coyotes. The dingo is not a native of Australia.

Though its origins are not clear, it is thought to have arrived in Australia approximately 4,000 years ago.

It is the largest mammalian carnivore remaining in mainland Australia, and as such fills an important ecological niche.

The dingo has been regarded as a serious predator of domestic stock since early European settlement in Australia. A large percentage of the dingo population is no longer purebred but is the result of crossbreeding with domestic dogs. Yellow and tan are the dominant coat colours, though dingoes can vary from pure white to black.

Dingo numbers are believed to be higher today than in pre-European times.

Dingoes have only one breeding season per year (April to June).

Dingoes occupy a single area known as the "home range", and in an undisturbed area, generally run in packs of 3-12 members.

Wild dogs, on the other hand, have been proven to travel many hundreds of kilometres if pushed out of their home territory.



*Image thanks to Shelly Simmons,
Invasive Animals CRC*

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*Image thanks to Clare Mulcahy,
Invasive Animals CRC*

The sheep industry cannot co-exist economically with an unmanaged dingo/wild dog population and recent research in New South Wales has shown cattle production to be more greatly affected than previously thought.

Dingo Feeding and Hunting

Dingoes are opportunistic feeders, consuming anything that is available – birds, small mammals, large mammals, insects and carcasses, though in each region they do tend to have their favourite prey.

Observation shows that dingoes learn to hunt and kill sheep very quickly, even without prior contact with sheep. During the early 1990s, wild dogs were observed to have an extraordinarily high success rate when killing sheep, and did not have to hunt in a coordinated manner to achieve success. Often, a dog may chase and attack a single sheep, only to turn away suddenly and chase another. Therefore, only a small proportion of the injured or killed

sheep and goats are eaten, which seems to be the rule and not the exception. The dog probably falls into some kind of “killing spree,” due to the rather panicked and uncontrolled flight behaviour of the sheep, which run in front of the dingoes time and again and, therefore, cause one attack after another.

Dingoes often attack sheep from behind during the sheep’s flight, which causes injuries to the sheep’s hind legs. Rams are normally attacked from the side – probably in order to avoid the horns – or sometimes on the testicles.

This is in contrast to nearly all dingo attacks on cattle being directed against calves. Hunting success depends on the health and condition of the adult cattle and on their ability to defend their calves. The defence behaviour of the mother can be sufficient to fend off an attack. Therefore, the basic dingo tactics of attack are premeditated, including distracting the mother, rousing the herd/group and waiting (sometimes for hours), and testing of the herd to find the weakest members.

Other observed attack methods include, “subgroups” of a dingo pack taking turns in attacking and resting, until the cow is too tired to effectively defend her calf.

Despite frequent baiting and trapping by local graziers in response to dingo attacks, landholders are presented with a sometimes-constant population of wild dogs.

Dingoes and wild dogs are declared animals under the Rural Lands Protection Act 1985 and it is illegal to keep, breed or sell dingoes or dingo hybrids.

There is an individual \$30,000 Fine for each of the following offences:

Keeping Dingoes; Breeding/Liberating Dingoes; Selling Dingoes; Introducing Dingoes from Interstate, with a further \$225 on the spot fine for feeding Dingoes.



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