

"Araluen"
Little River Road
Ensay North. Vic. 3895.

September 23, 1985.

The Hon. Mrs. J. Kirner
Minister for Conservation, Forests
and Lands
240 Victoria Parade
EAST MELBOURNE. VIC. 3002.

Dear Mrs. Kirner,

As an interested livestock owner, and one who was a member of the Electric Fence Working Party established by Mr. Mackenzie, I feel that the following comment should be made on aspects that tend to be overlooked, atleast in public comment, in respect of the wild dog problem in Eastern Victoria.

The major reasons underlying the growing wild dog problem in recent years are myxomatosis and increased wild life protection.

The present structure of the Department of Conservation, Forests and Lands should enable an effective plan to be more easily formed and implemented than would have been possible under the previously separated departments.

Upto some thirty years ago boundary fences were mostly wire netted and serious attempts were made to maintain most of them so that the rabbit population within could be controlled. At the same time, landowners took action they considered appropriate to deter troublesome wild life.

Since then Governments have policed the protection of various wildlife and have more recently allowed wombats greater opportunity to multiply near settled areas.

Repeated outbreaks of myxomatosis during the past thirty years have relieved farmers of the perennial effort to destroy rabbits. There are many more survivors than is generally realized, especially in the foot-hill country where resistance to the disease appears to be developing.

Most fences have degenerated to a very sub-standard condition allowing rabbits and wildlife generally to take cover in the bush and enter improved pasture as they please.

The incursion of wild animals, protected or not, has greatly increased and wild dogs that follow their natural prey soon find sheep and lambs much easier to catch. The most prolific hunting ground available to them has developed in these areas.

Dog trappers of years ago were able to reasonably contain the dingo problem, but present conditions make their task more difficult and virtually impossible from time to time.

If any doubts exist that fences will not alleviate or indeed solve the problem in most places, I suggest that the few people who have been able to maintain effective fences be contacted to learn of the losses that they have had from wild dogs. These will be found to be little or none except perhaps the occasional experience where dogs have been fenced in.

Both landowners and departmental authorities are mutually tardy about burning off fire hazards near boundary fences because of inevitable damage and possible claims and litigation to follow. This situation will only be relieved when a cleared easement is established where practicable along boundary fence lines from which fire protection work and fence maintenance can be achieved.

There is no need to waste time and money on pilot schemes to test fences as ample evidence of their worth already exists and wild dog control should be considered in the wider field of animal pest and fire control.

I share the view adopted by the Victorian Farmers and Graziers Association that a need exists for a co-operative effort by landowners and Government to maintain sufficiently cleared land to make it possible to establish vermin proof fences, as well as enable protection against wild fires for the whole countryside whether fires start in forest or farm.

Since landowners on the frontier of settlement have to bear the first impact of invading wildlife and escaping forest fire, they feel that they alone should not have to bear all the cost of regional protection in this area.

Former Minister, Rod Mackenzie recognised the value of adequate fencing and had plans to help landowners in this area, and I will be interested to learn if the Government intends to implement them.

Yours faithfully,

JAMES A. COMMINS.