

WILD DOGS

201. Hon MURRAY CRIDDLE to the Minister for Agriculture and Food:

I refer to a discussion at Mt Magnet the other day about wild dogs. I understand that the federal government made some money available for a fence in that area. What is the state government's view in regard to the control of wild dogs?

Hon KIM CHANCE replied:

I thank Hon Murray Criddle for raising this important matter. I will put the question of the state and commonwealth in their proper context in relation to wild dog control. Over the past few years, the state has spent somewhere in the order of \$11.9 million of public money on wild dog control. The commonwealth has not spent a cent on wild dog control.

Hon Norman Moore: Whose responsibility is it?

Hon KIM CHANCE: That is an interesting question. Prior to the last election the commonwealth talked about spending money on dogs; otherwise, I would not have raised the matter. Prior to the last election it promised local government in the Kalgoorlie area a sum of \$300 000 to spend on wild dogs. Local government is still waiting to see the first cent of that \$300 000. We are already into the next election cycle and now it is talking about spending \$100 000 on a feasibility study for a proposal to put in a \$30 million fence. However, the federal government will spend \$100 000 only if the state puts up \$100 000 as well. The process for an investment of public money such as that proposed for the feasibility study is that the zone control authorities, which represent farmers in agricultural areas and pastoralists in pastoral areas, put a proposition to the Agriculture Protection Board, which is the statutory body charged with advising government on matters of this nature. As far as I am aware, the process for a proposal to fund the feasibility study for the dog fence has yet to begin. There are people with an interest in short-circuiting the process, but that does not particularly interest me. Nobody has been able to give me a cogent answer to my concern about the argument for the fence, which is based on the presumption that all the dogs are in the desert and all the sheep are on the inside of the proposed route of the fence. That is simply not the case. If the fence were constructed at or anywhere near the alignment that has been suggested, there would be as many dogs inside the fence as there were outside the fence. Anybody with a long memory or a good sense of history will recall that that is precisely the reason the rabbit-proof fence failed. We established the rabbit-proof fence many years ago to stop rabbits coming from east to west. We had just finished the fence when we found that there were as many rabbits west of the fence as there were east of the fence, so we gave it up as a bad joke.

Hon Bruce Donaldson: Isn't that what happened with the Great Wall of China?

Hon KIM CHANCE: That is possibly true. However, having said that, I do not deride the idea. I believe the dog fence, largely constructed by pastoralists in South Australia, has worked quite well and is a genuine example of a fence that keeps dogs - in this case dingoes in South Australia - on one side of the fence and livestock on the other. However, those presumptions simply do not work in Western Australia. Additionally, we are talking about a problem in Western Australia that is fundamentally different from a problem that occurred in South Australia nearly 100 years ago. The issue in Western Australia is not about dingoes; it is about hybrid dogs. The closer to town that people live - for example, Leonora or Laverton - the bigger the problem they have. A fence would do absolutely nothing to control that dog problem. As I said, it works on a presumption that dogs are migrating east to west. Nobody has shown me that it is the case; and if it is not the case, there is no point in establishing the fence. However, if there is sufficient support for the proposition to pass through the zone control authorities and through the appropriate statutory body, the APB, and to come to government as a recommendation for consideration, I will consider it seriously.