



**DOG FENCE
B O A R D**
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Response due:	

Soil & Water Environs Centre
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8 August 2014

The Honourable Ian Hunter
Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation
GPO Box 1047, ADELAIDE, SA, 5001

Dear Minister Hunter,

RE: Reform of South Australian government boards and committees

I write to you today to provide you with information that may influence your decision to recommend that the State Dog Fence Board (the Board) and its six Local Dog Fence Boards (the Local Boards) should be exempt from being abolished in the above reform.

The Board was established in 1946 to administer the Dog Fence Act 1946; this Act established the Dog Fence Fund. Our five member Board is responsible for maintaining the Dog Fence (the Fence) in a dog proof condition. The Board sets and collects from ratepayers, rates that are matched by government; it makes payments to private fence owners and six Local Boards for maintenance of the fence and it ensures that owners of the fence including the Local Boards fulfil their statutory role in maintaining the Fence in a dog proof condition. We believe that the operation of the fence is truly commercial in nature; we have full control of our strategy, have the power to acquire and dispose of assets and the power to set prices (Dog Fence rates).

The Fence itself protects a vibrant and valuable sheep industry to the south and is recognised by South Australia's \$0.9 billion sheep industry as a fundamental tool to minimise the risks of significant losses caused by wild dogs. This figure represents 14% of total agricultural production in this State (LambEx figures - D. Crabbe, *pers. com.*).

In terms of community engagement, four of our members are landholders who pay Dog Fence rates. The fifth member is your nominee to the Board. The Board (and its Local Boards) provides a representative voice to stakeholders in setting rates, making payments and managing the Fence. Members have great credibility as peers rather than bureaucrats and effectively liaise with owners of the Fence to make sure that their statutory duties are fulfilled. Without landholder, and particularly sheep industry, representation there is a risk of loss of confidence in the oversight and maintenance of the Fence. The Board receives payment of approximately \$213K per annum through voluntary payments to the Sheep Industry Fund by sheep farmers. Concerns that funds are not being expended well could risk these voluntary contributions by sheep farmers or, worse, precipitate a decision to cease funding by this mechanism. An alternative would be annual invoicing of 3,000 landholders




adding considerably to government costs. Altogether, abolition of the Board (and the Local Boards) would erode confidence and have a real negative impact on business and community confidence in the Fence.

The Board meets four times a year including a week-long annual inspection of half the fence. For this, the Board receives a total of \$5,350 in sitting fees per annum divided among five members. Approximately \$14,000 is spent on travel costs for the three members who live near the Fence some hundreds of kilometres north of Adelaide, bringing the total cost to government of running the Board to around \$19,000. All Local Board members are volunteers and spend approximately \$2000 collectively a year in administrative costs. There is a significant financial advantage to government in retaining the Board; the whole operation runs essentially "on a shoestring" and we do not believe that any alternative models would cost less than the current structure. Incidentally, the South Australian Dog Fence Board oversees 2137 kilometres of fence with a budget of around \$1M per annum; our colleagues in NSW oversee 584 kilometres of fence at over three times that cost which is all paid for by the government!

I commend these matters to you and your government and look forward to a positive response; I believe we are efficient, competent, low cost and well regarded and trusted by the community.

Yours sincerely



Dr Carolyn Ireland
Acting Chair
The Dog Fence Board

