



Pastoralists welcome dog control funds

By **JACINTA BOLSENBROEK**

SOUTHERN Rangelands producers have welcomed \$1.13 million in federal funding allocated to the WA government to boost efforts to combat wild dogs.

The funding is designed to assist landholders conduct control activities, including fencing.

Pastoralist Ash Dowden, Challa station, who has been trying to protect the Southern Rangelands against wild dogs said it was fantastic news that the federal government had decided to allocate the funds.

"WA always seems to get left out. But this funding has been specifically earmarked for our dog control and fencing fits that criteria," he said.

Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce said \$1,133,219 would be spent to help WA producers lessen the significant financial and social burden of wild dogs.

"This funding will assist the WA government to engage landholders and increase effort and collaboration to combat wild dogs which can have a massive impact on producers' bottom lines," Mr Joyce said.

"The latest studies from the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES), commissioned by Australian Wool Innovation, suggest livestock producers in WA spend about 32 days and more than \$9000 per year on wild dog management.

"Those figures only take into account the direct costs of management efforts, like baiting, trapping, and so on. When you consider livestock losses, disease transmission and control costs, wild dogs were estimated in 2004 to cost

our agricultural industries up to \$66m per year nationally. The current costs could be significantly higher."

Mr Joyce said the WA government was finalising a State-wide action plan and would consult with landholders, industry, government and community representatives on how best to allocate the resources.

"Farmers and pastoralists across WA consistently list wild dogs as a huge pressure on their productivity and profitability and this government is committed to helping address this issue," he said.

Mr Joyce said this funding complemented work already underway on combating wild dogs.

"The Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper will invest \$50m for better tools and control methods against pest animals and weeds," Mr Joyce said.

"This funding is in addition to the \$2.98m we have invested to implement the National Wild Dog Action Plan and the wild dog early alert warning system.

"This investment is essential to the long-term protection of the contribution that our livestock industries make to Australia - wool exports alone were worth \$2.9 billion to the national economy in 2013-14.

"We will continue to back our producers and help strengthen returns at the farm gate."

Mr Dowden said he plans to discuss the funding allocation with WA Agriculture and Food Minister Ken Baston.

"I would be very disappointed if the funding didn't go into fencing," he said.

"I believe the federal government's intention is that this funding will go to the vermin cell fence.

"My understanding is that it is up to Mr Baston's department to release that funding.

"I will be making contact with Mr Baston, and I hope to catch up with him about that."

Mr Dowden and other pastoralists have been lobbying for State government assistance for funding to finish the vermin cell fence.

Under the project, 480 kilometres of dog proof fencing would be constructed between the existing State barrier fences - creating a vermin proof cell covering 7.5m hectares and surrounding 53 pastoral stations and nine reserves.

The cell would connect to the Number Two barrier fence south east of Meekatharra to the State Barrier Fence north-east of Mullewa.

Mr Dowden said while the funding wouldn't cover the full cost of the fence, he hoped it could be combined with additional State government funding through the Royalties for Regions (RfR) program.

A business case has been in process for more than a year to gain access to the funding required to get a Murchison vermin cell fence project completed.

"If we are successful with the RfR funding we could add that to this funding," he said.

"We could make this work.

"We are truly committed.

Once the fence is built we will be clearing out the dogs, as landholders and producers that's when the hard work will begin."

WA Liberal senator Dean Smith and Durack Liberal MP



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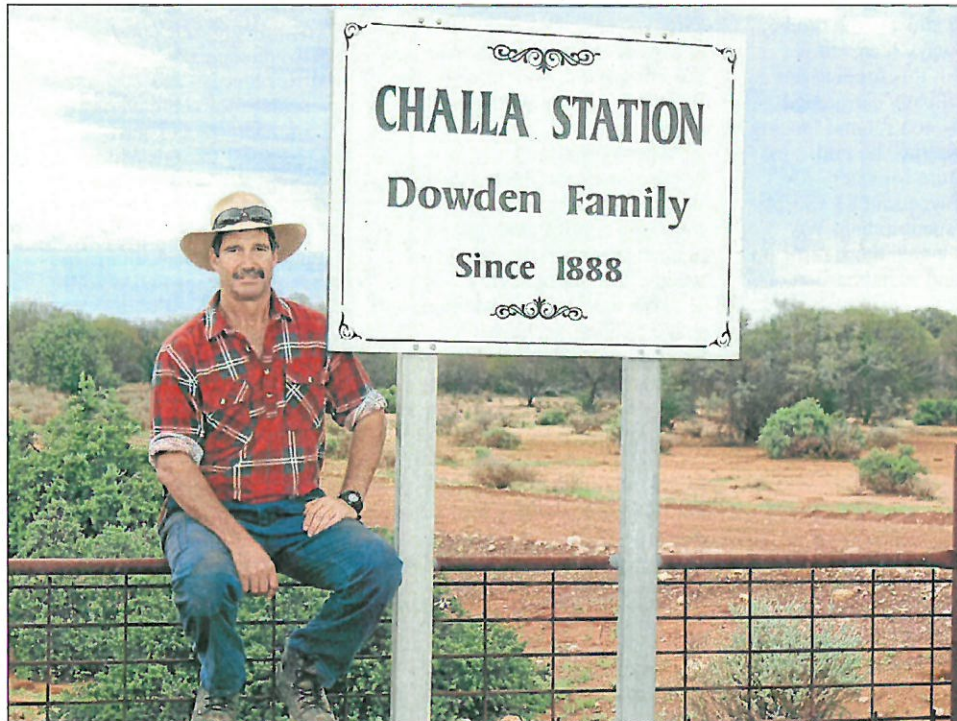
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Melissa Price attended one of the bait days at Challa Station earlier this year and were pleased with the outcome of additional funding.

“This is tremendous news for WA livestock producers, especially for those pastoralists in the Murchison who have been struggling to obtain State financing for the completion of the Murchison Vermin Cell fence,” Mr Smith said.

“Wild dogs are causing havoc for producers throughout the State, with stock losses due to wild dog attacks costing producers more than \$7m annually, and forcing many pastoralists, especially in the Southern Rangelands, to destock.”



† Pastoralist Ash Dowden, Challa station, welcomes new funding to help control wild dogs.