

# Upkeep of dingo fence dogs farmers



Jeff Boland and Missy at the fence ... 'one of these dogs can attack 20 to 30 sheep a night. Once they get a taste, they can't stop' — Picture: TONY LEWIS

By ANDREW RAMSEY

FOR 329km of parched, barren earth stretching either side of the Oodnadatta track, Jeff Boland and his red kelpie sidekick Missy cruise along searching for breaches in the dingo fence.

Kangaroos cause the most damage to Jeff's run of the world's longest fence, which stretches more than 5600km from cliffs above the Great Australian Bight through South Australia's north and along the NSW border before terminating near Jandowae in south-eastern Queensland.

The roos crash into the 2m-high wire barrier, causing it to lift at the bottom. This gives the dreaded yellow dogs access to valuable sheep country to the south.

Floodwaters, particularly South Australia's summer deluge, which took out about 25km of fence in 60 places earlier this year, are another pest, as are foxes, corrosion and occasional human interference.

Indeed, it seems the least likely cause of disturbance along the fence comes from dingoes, whose numbers have fallen since a concentrated

baiting program was undertaken around dams and waterholes within 35km zone to the fence's north.

However, Jeff is quick to point out the scourge of the sheep industry remains.

"You still see a few. I shoot one every now and then and I saw a couple of sets of tracks just recently, so God knows how many got through after the flood," he says between deep drags on a rollie.

"We need the fence. One of these dogs can attack 20 to 30 sheep a night. Once they get a taste, they just can't stop."

But Boland and the other boundary riders who patrol its length are not alone in watching the fence.

The South Australian Farmers Federation, concerned by what it claims are inequities in the collection of levies used to maintain the fence, has called on the State Government to reassess the process.

All South Australians with mainland grazing properties smaller than 10sq km pay a flat annual levy of \$45 a year and those with larger proper-

ties are charged a rate of 85c per square km with all revenue matched dollar for dollar by the Government.

Louise Elleway, executive officer of the federation's wool and meat section, said yesterday there was growing resentment among graziers in the State's north over being forced to contribute a greater portion of the fence's maintenance costs because their land was drier and they needed more of it to sustain a commercial enterprise.

In addition, farmers further south believe they face a minimal threat from dingoes and should accordingly be charged proportionately less the further they are from the fence line.

"The problem is that the current system is completely inequitable and it's an issue that's been festering for at least 15 years," Elleway said.

The SAFF wants the Government to use power it has under the Dog Fence Act to extract the maintenance costs from local councils, which could then recoup them in rate revenue based on property values rather than size.