Case Study

Changes Over Time in Wild Dog Management – 1080 Supply, Enterprise Type, Enterprise Mix, and On-Farm Workforce

Executive Summary

Wild dog management in Queensland has undergone significant changes in recent years, shaped by shifts in government policy, enterprise structures, economic pressures, and workforce dynamics. This case study explores how these changes have impacted the use of 1080, the mix of enterprises, the economic realities for cattle producers, and the availability of skilled on-farm labour. It draws on qualitative interviews and survey data from Southern Queensland to highlight key trends, challenges, and recommendations for the future.

Introduction

Queensland's wild dog problem is dynamic, with management strategies evolving in response to regulatory, economic, and social changes. The supply and use of 1080 poison, the rise of exclusion fencing, shifts from sheep to cattle, and changes in the rural workforce have all influenced how landholders and councils approach wild dog control. Understanding these changes is critical for designing effective, sustainable management strategies.

1080 Supply: From Government-Led to User-Pays

For decades, the Queensland Government supplied 1080 toxin to councils, enabling large-scale, coordinated baiting programs at low or no cost to landholders. Recently, the government has stepped back from direct supply and funding of 1080, shifting responsibility to councils and landholders. Councils now often provide a limited number of free manufactured baits, with additional baits available for purchase. Landholders must often supply their own meat for baiting and cover the cost of toxin.

The increased cost and complexity have reduced participation in baiting programs, especially among smaller or less profitable enterprises. Some landholders have shifted to other methods or reduced their control efforts. Negative stories about 1080 use, amplified by social media, have led to increased complaints and pressure on councils to limit or justify its use.

Enterprise Type: Family Farms vs Corporate Operations

Traditionally, family-run enterprises have been more likely to participate in coordinated wild dog control, including baiting, trapping, and fencing. They often rely on local knowledge, neighbor cooperation, and a mix of methods. The rise of corporate ownership has brought new dynamics. Some corporates are less willing to be associated with lethal control methods due to reputational concerns, while others may lack the local connections or motivation to participate in collaborative programs. High turnover in management can disrupt continuity in pest management. An update on the most recent 2017 data available on corporatising of farms would better inform engagement approaches for wild dog management.

The influx of new, often inexperienced landholders (including absentee owners and lifestyle farmers) has created knowledge gaps and inconsistent participation in control programs. For example 44% of the Bulloo shire population resided at a different address in 2016 compared to 2021. This was 33% for Murweh Shire and rural areas of Toowoomba Regional Council.

Enterprise Mix: Economic Impacts and the Shift from Sheep to Cattle

Wild dog predation has devastated the sheep and goat industries in many areas, leading to a shift toward cattle, which are less vulnerable but still affected. Survey respondents report massive losses—over 700 sheep in 12 months in some cases—and some are considering leaving the industry altogether.

While cattle are less susceptible to wild dog attacks, losses still occur, especially among calves. Producers report stress, injuries, and economic losses, with some noting that wild dogs are now a significant cost for cattle operations as well. Unfortunately, the most readily available data on economic impacts from wild dogs was authored by L. Hewitt in 2009. This data indicated over $22 million in calving losses and $2 million in dog-bite carcass defects for 2008-2009. An update on the impacts of wild dogs on cattle to reflect the prices and wild dog populations of today, would support improved decision-making on risks at industry scale.

Some landholders have diversified into other enterprises or invested in exclusion fencing to remain viable. However, the cost of fencing and ongoing maintenance is a barrier for many.

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On-Farm Workforce: Skills, Labor, and Knowledge Loss

The loss of experienced biosecurity officers, contractors, and long-term land managers has reduced the capacity for effective wild dog management. Many new landholders lack the skills or confidence to use traditional methods like trapping or shooting.

Rising labor costs and reduced availability of workers for stock work have led to greater reliance on working dogs and guardian animals, which in turn makes the use of 1080 riskier. For example the agriculture, forestry and fishing workforce shrank by 21% between 2011 and 2021 in the Bulloo Shire. There was a similar 17% decline in the Murweh Shire, though only 3.5% in rural SA2 areas of Toowoomba Regional Council.

There is limited investment in training and skill development for new landholders who can also be representing new land uses (carbon farming and alternative energy). While these landholders still have a general biosecurity compliance obligation, the risk profile of these land uses is very different to agriculture. The need for targeted education, workshops, and support is frequently mentioned in both interviews and survey responses.

Community and Regional Differences

Peri-urban and eastern regions have different expectations and resources compared to western rangelands. In the west, exclusion fencing and individual property management are more common, while in the east, there is greater reliance on council support and less economic motivation for coordinated action.

Declining participation in council-run programs and differences in priorities between neighbors have made coordinated, landscape-scale management more difficult.

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Recommendations

- **Renew government support** for 1080 supply and training to ensure coordinated, cost-effective control remains accessible.
- **Tailor management strategies** to enterprise type and workforce capacity, recognising the different needs and motivations of family farms, corporates, and new landholders.
- **Support economic resilience** through diversification, innovation, and investment in exclusion fencing and non-lethal methods.
- **Expand education and outreach** to build skills and knowledge among new and existing landholders.
- **Foster community-wide participation** and collaboration to maximise the effectiveness of control programs.

Voices from the Field

"State Government has stepped back from 1080 use in a big way. Would no longer fund on-ground baiting activities. DAFF no longer manage 1080 supply shifted to QLD Health." – Interviewee

"Decline in participation when people went out of sheep and into cattle with corporate owners." – Interviewee

"My family have lived on this property since 1911 and I am nearing retirement age myself and I am a merino wool sheep producer (and cattle) and we have lost over $40k in sheep/lambs in the last 12–18 months. We have participated in council baiting programs, extra 1080 baiting and currently constructing new electric fencing to have some safe paddocks. Our ewes are lambing and you may see 30 or so new lambs on the ground and within days they are gone. We are expecting that we may, for the first time in my life, have to leave the sheep–fat lambs/wool industry." – Survey respondent

References

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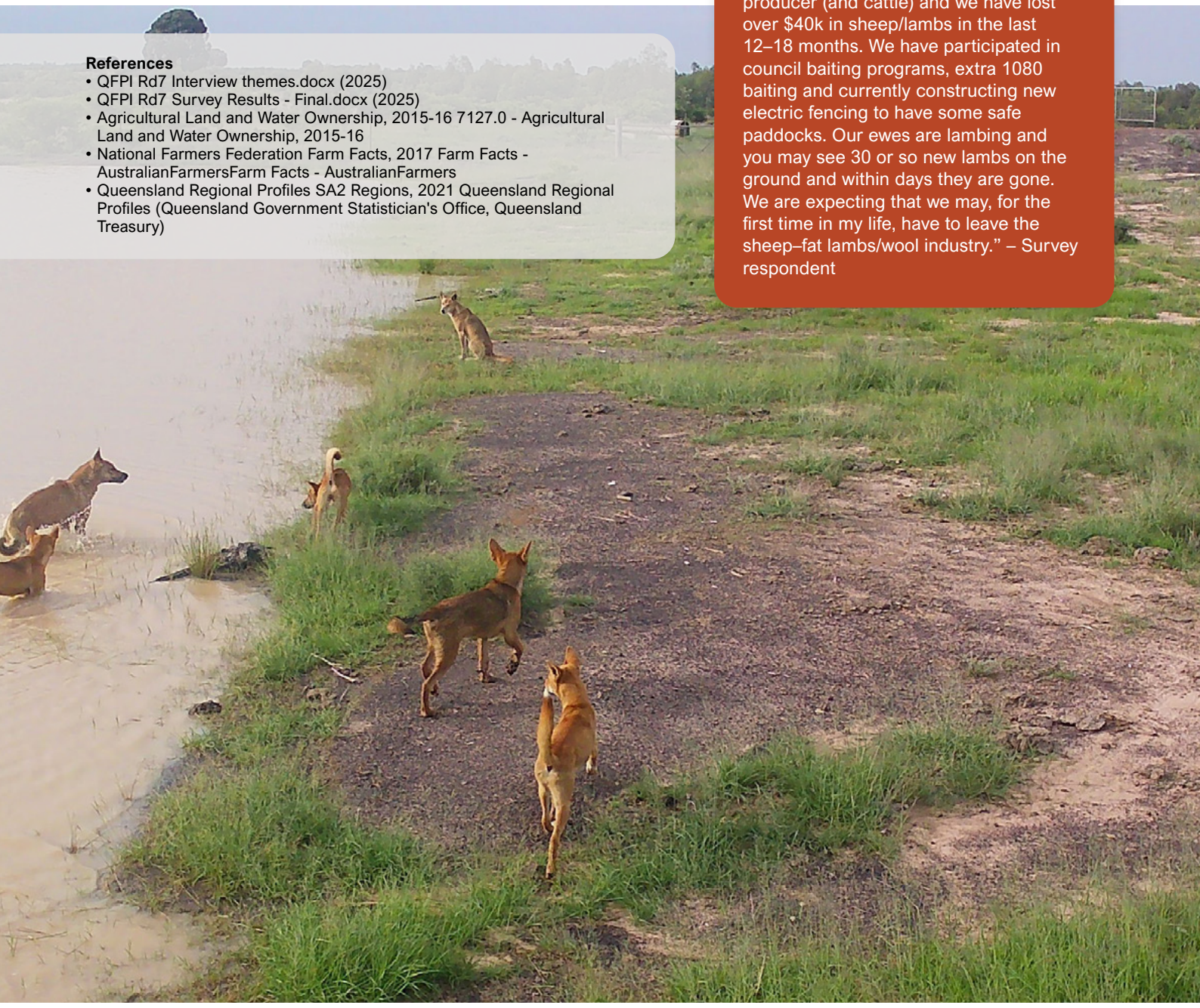

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