



DOG FENCE 9 February 1995

Mrs PENFOLD (Flinders): The dog fence has particular benefit to the Eyre Peninsula area of my electorate. Its retention and maintenance contributes to the State's coffers through the protection it gives to stock, thus allowing a higher standard of husbandry along with fewer deaths and a consequent drop in farm income. Eyre Peninsula has approximately 2.6 million sheep contributing about 14 per cent of South Australia's wool. As recently as 1989, three dingos penetrated the dog fence near Ceduna and killed more than 120 sheep. It does not take long to total the financial loss which depredations of this magnitude would bring across the State. We are so accustomed to the protection of the dog fence that few, even pastoralists and farmers, know what life was like prior to its erection.

Going back to the first years of settlement in South Australia, I understand that sheep were looked after by shepherds who were with them day and night. Sheep were regularly yarded at night to protect them from dingo attack. Something like the magnitude of the loss from dingos can be ascertained by the experience at Cowell in the 1890s recorded in local history books. It was reported that Mr Melrose shored in the vicinity of 30 000 sheep in about 1890, but by 1897 when he sold out he could muster only 1 300 sheep, which he drove around Port Augusta to other properties. The same book told of an old timer who, in the 1960s, recounted how the South Australian Government offered a bounty of two and six (25¢) on dingo scalps. The old timer said it was possible to make up to £100 (800 scalps a week) around Wudinna without much effort. He said the bounty law was soon repealed because it would have bankrupted the Government had it continued.

As late as 1920 in the Butler districts, farmers were asked to cooperate by yarding their sheep each night from 10 April to 24 April and doing everything possible to kill the dingos in the district. Killer dogs occasionally ravage sheep, but they are quickly hunted down and killed. The losses which they cause demonstrate only too vividly what would happen should the dog fence be dismantled. It takes only one or two dogs to cause hundreds of dollars worth of damage in a few hours. South Australia and all the people in it benefit from the income derived from sheep, and our standard of living would take a nosedive if the sheep industry were excluded from the State.

The dog fence is a unique part of Australia's history and heritage. It is something which no other nation in the world has. Its construction and continued maintenance is a tribute to the cooperation of several States working together for the common good and to

those who serve on the voluntary boards involved. I believe this is a structure which we could build into tourism, something along the lines of the Great Wall of China—which everyone has heard about. The dog fence is easily accessible from Ceduna but I do not know of any move to use it as a tourism drawcard. Much of the impact of tourism is the spiel that goes with it, and there would be plenty of stories about the dog fence and those who have patrolled it over the years to keep visitors interested for a couple of hours or even more. The maintenance of the dog fence over the years has been a lonely job for the fence riders. It has taken a special sort of person to do this job. It is not one for chatterboxes and those who like the high life. It has taken a long time for technology to come into this area. Again, we in Australia can be proud of our use of technology applied in unusual circumstances and in innovative ways.

Rural people, who are compelled by isolation and the environment to be innovative and self sufficient, are seldom aware of their skills in this area. I believe that solar powered electric fences have been trialled for some time on the dog fence. One advantage is that they provide an alternative to fence riders, whose safety in the event of an accident could not be guaranteed, for some of our communication facilities, which we take for granted in the more populous areas, do not work in remote locations. Even in my electorate of Flinders, which is nowhere as remote as the dog fence, mobile phones cannot be used away from Port Lincoln.

There is also the cost of employing people physically to patrol the dog fence. With the solar guards, the number of fence inspectors can be reduced without reducing the effectiveness or viability of the dog fence. The patrolling of the dog fence should be more practical with solar powered electricity. Patrols back up the solar generators, which are set to give warning of any breakdown in the fence itself. This would be a definite benefit to those living along the fence. I am sure that records will be kept and the operation of the dog fence reviewed regularly to check efficiency and, of course, its primary purpose of keeping dingos from the agricultural districts of the State. It would be a great thing if foxes could be treated similarly to dingos, for foxes cause great damage to fauna, particularly around nesting birds or those animals which live mostly at ground level.

I congratulate those responsible for working out how to harness solar power in order to electrify the dog fence. We must pay more than lip service to the environment, and this is environmentally friendly technology which will fit in well with the region it serves. Most see the more arid areas as fragile, so the use of solar power is particularly apt for the area of Australia through which most of the fence passes. One of the great plusses of solar power is that no refuse is generated. The pristine environment of much of outback Australia is another tourist drawcard. The erection and maintenance of this fence has had little effect on the overall environment.

The board's responsibility of ensuring the continued maintenance of the dog fence at a high standard is important to the survival of sheep farming in my electorate. I am delighted to see that its powers have been extended to better enable it to continue to provide this great service. I commend the work of the people on the boards, both past and present, and I support the Bill.

