



Business Plan

2014-2016

A three-year strategic framework (and priorities) for future operations

Darling Downs – Moreton Rabbit Board



Foreword

The Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Board accepts that the rabbit-proof fence is a living asset of the State of Queensland and our nation, and should be treated as such.

The original Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Board was established under *The Rabbit Act 1964* and the current board is established under the Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Regulation 2003. Some board members are nominated by the local governments concerned, but all final appointments are approved and made by the Minister to whom the board is answerable.

Funding is derived from the local governments considered to be benefiting from the rabbit-proof fence, and consequently funded from the ratepayer.

This business plan is designed to build on the legacy and commitment of previous boards. Importantly, the transparency of the plan enables a basis for negotiating commitments and the best use of available resources. The plan will be delivered through annual work planning and budgeting. It is a living document which can accommodate changing circumstances, and to which the board is committed to reporting and communicating.

The board's plan recognises the need to be consistent with government policies, strategies and the principles of pest management.

The key objectives of this plan are simple; the continuous maintenance and renewal of the rabbit-proof fence, and the protection of the natural environment and economic prosperity of much of south east Queensland.

The rabbit-proof fence is a state asset dating back to the nineteenth century, which highlights the forethought of our forebears. With this in mind, this plan sets the basis for the current board, and future boards, to continue to protect south east Queensland communities from one of Australia's worst invasive animals.

Cr Ross Bartley
Chairman

Executive Summary

Rabbits cost the Australian economy and environment up to \$1billion annually. They pose a constant threat to the sustainability of our natural resources and the economic viability of highly productive agricultural land.

The Darling Downs – Moreton Rabbit Board (DDMRB) was established in 1964 through the amalgamation of two remaining district rabbit boards. The DDMRB is the only pest operational board under the Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Regulation 2003 and is responsible for maintaining 28,000 km² of south east Queensland free of rabbits, including the maintenance of a 555km rabbit fence. The DDMRB is appointed by, and reports directly to, the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

This plan provides a three-year strategic framework and priorities for future operations of the DDMRB which aims to maintain the rabbit fence in a rabbit-proof condition and ensure, as far as practical, that the protected area is maintained free of rabbits.

The successful implementation of the plan will be assessed on the extent to which the DDMRB satisfies minimum construction and maintenance standards for the fence, and the extent to which rabbits are prevented from establishing in the part of the State shown as the Darling Downs–Moreton Rabbit District (the **rabbit district**) on map number RF01 held by the department.

Key issues addressed by the plan include asset renewal (fence, plant, equipment and housing), the need to control infestations within the protected area, illegal keeping of rabbits, the management of public perceptions, and attracting and retaining staff in a competitive employment environment. The potential for the DDMRB to adequately respond to these challenges will depend on improved collaboration with local governments, landholders and other stakeholders, and the need for significant additional public investment in the operations of the board.

The plan identifies five (5) key inputs (leadership, workforce capability, partners/collaborators, clients/public, resources), and eight (8) key outputs (information/data, communication, risk management, policy, planning, innovation, accountability, evaluation).

The plan will be delivered through 56 complimentary and prioritised strategies/actions which will provide the basis for annual work planning and budgeting. These strategies/actions include an undertaking to renew this plan every three years.

Introduction

History of Rabbits

The European Rabbit arrived in Australia with the first fleet in 1788 and extensive feral populations had established in Tasmania by 1827. Twenty-four rabbits arrived on mainland Australia in 1859 and by 1866 they had become a significant problem for landholders in Victoria and South Australia. By 1900 rabbits had spread to Western Australia and the Northern Territory. The rate of advance varied from 10 to 15 kilometres per year, but deliberate releases assisted the rapid spread of rabbits to all states in Australia. The spread of rabbits throughout Australia was the fastest rate of any colonising mammal anywhere in the world.

The Threat (if we do nothing)

Rabbits cost the Australian economy and environment (natural and built) up to \$1 billion annually. They compete with native animals, destroy the landscape, cause erosion by preventing the regeneration of native vegetation, reduce pasture availability for livestock, and impact on predator numbers. Therefore rabbits pose a constant threat to the sustainability of our natural resources and the economic viability of highly productive agricultural land. Rabbits have been listed by the Australian Government Department of Environment and Heritage as a “key threatening process”.

Creation of the Darling Downs–Moreton Rabbit Board

When rabbits first reached Queensland from the southern States in the 1880s, a fence was quickly constructed along the border in an attempt to keep them out. Unfortunately, the rabbits had already invaded some districts before the fence was complete. Some of the district rabbit boards had inadequate financial and technical resources to cope with the problem.

In 1930, all existing rabbit boards were abolished except for Leichhardt, Darling Downs and Moreton. In 1963 the Leichhardt Rabbit Board closed and the Darling Downs Rabbit Board took over their 80 km fence. In 1964, the two remaining boards merged to become the Darling Downs–Moreton Rabbit Board.

Our Role

The Darling Downs-Moreton Rabbit Board (DDMRB) is a pest operational board established under the Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Regulation 2003 and is responsible for maintaining the **rabbit district** (as shown on map number RF01 held by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) free of rabbits.

The DDMRB employs 15 officers to provide a rabbit control and eradication service to 8 local governments and their rate payers within the 28,000 km² rabbit district (the board’s operational area) of south east Queensland. The delivery of this service is achieved through the maintenance and upgrade of the 555km rabbit-proof fence, and the provision of expertise and technical information to assist landholders to eradicate rabbits from their land.

The DDMRB is responsible to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry but its operations are fully funded by local governments.

Justification for the rabbit fence

The DDMRB area is a very special part of Australia. It is the only sizable area that is suitable for rabbits that has never suffered the impact of large numbers of rabbits. Outside the DDMRB area, plants and animals experienced incredibly high grazing pressure from rabbits particularly up until myxomatosis arrived.

Fox numbers are generally highest where there are rabbits and these introduced predators have caused considerable damage to native mammal populations. By keeping rabbits out, the DDMRB has probably protected native animals from introduced predators. We suspect there are more healthy populations of native mammals in the DDMRB area, and to the north east of the area, because rabbits have been prevented from establishing properly.

The value to agriculture of keeping rabbits out is also considerable and has been estimated to be many millions of dollars per year. Although there appears to have been an increase in rabbit outbreaks within the DDMRB area during the last five years they have not been allowed to properly establish large warren systems. Without large warren systems in Queensland, rabbit populations are unlikely to survive.

Powers and responsibilities

Rabbits are declared in Queensland as a Class 2 pest animal under the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002* (the Act).

The Act, and the Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Regulation 2003 (the Regulation), provides powers for the management of declared pests in Queensland. Specific provisions include powers for the DDMRB to maintain the rabbit fence, and to appoint authorised persons who in turn have the powers to inspect land, seize declared pests, and require landholders to undertake rabbit control.

Purpose of this plan

This plan provides a strategic framework for future operations of the DDMRB. Due to continually changing circumstances, including new opportunities that may arise, the plan remains a living document. It therefore represents a statement of intention at a point in time.

The plan builds on the previous strategic plans and identifies future priorities for the DDMRB. The plan also has a critical role in the identification and negotiation of stakeholder commitment to its successful implementation.

Linkages

This plan is consistent with:

- (8) Principles of Pest Management listed in the *Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002*
- Queensland Pest Animal Strategy
- Queensland Rabbit Control Strategy
- National Threat Abatement Plan for Rabbits

Key Stakeholders

- Biosecurity Queensland (BQ), Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF)
- Local governments (within and adjoining the DDMRB area)
- Landholders – adjoining, and within protected area
- Regional NRM bodies – QMDC, Condamine Alliance, etc
- Queensland and NSW parks and forestry services
- Industry organisations
- Suppliers

Key Issues

- Education and responsibility – landowner obligations
- Fence renewal
- Plant and equipment replacement/upgrading
- Terrain – access/safety
- Risk management
- Rabbit control inside the fence
- Attracting and retaining suitable staff – preferred employer
- Illegal keeping of rabbits – efficiency in responding to reports
- Internal delegation of authority (discretion)
- Land tenure and access rights for fence construction/maintenance
- Resources

Key Dependencies

- Grids – depend on Department of Transport and Main Roads and local governments to undertake construction and maintenance on major roads
- Precept funding – depend on DAFF to calculate and collect annual payments (precepts) from benefiting local governments
- Technical advice – depend on DAFF and others for technical expertise
- Control – partnerships with local governments and landholders for rabbit control in their area
- Communication – partnerships with Landcare Groups, DAFF and local governments to promote the need for rabbit control

Core Values/Beliefs

- Wild or domestic European rabbits remain a major threat to the Australian economy and environment.
- The rabbit board's operational area is the premier agricultural region in Queensland.
- The ongoing commitment of DDMRB members, staff, and many stakeholders is essential to protecting south east Queensland.
- The DDMRB recognises that funding is provided by ratepayers and their local governments.

Strategic Framework (and Priorities)

Our Mission

To maintain the Darling Downs – Moreton Rabbit Board barrier fence in a rabbit-proof condition and ensure, as far as practical, that the Darling Downs – Moreton Rabbit District is maintained free of rabbits

We will achieve our Mission through the following:

1. Maintenance/inspection of fences:

| Priority Definitions | |
|----------------------|---|
| Priority 1 | Paramount to achieving our objectives |
| Priority 2 | Enable our objectives |
| Priority 3 | When resources are available will enable objectives |

Key Outcome: The rabbit fence is maintained

Performance Criteria: The extent to which DDMRB staff satisfy minimum fence maintenance standards

| Performance Indicator | Target | | |
|--|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| | 2013-2014 | 2014-2015 | 2015-2016 |
| The length of the fence patrolled on a weekly basis | 555 kilometres | 555 kilometres | 555 kilometres |
| The proportion of reported holes/damage repaired within 48 hours | 100% | 100% | 100% |

| Strategies/actions | Priority | Who |
|--|----------|------------------------|
| 1.1 Undertake weekly inspection/patrols of entire length of fence | 1 | Patrolmen |
| 1.2 Undertake minor repairs of fence (in conjunction with inspections) | 1 | Patrolmen |
| 1.3 Respond to reports of damage to the fence | 1 | Inspector |
| 1.4 Remove/destroy vegetation along/within the fence | 2 | Maint. Men / Patrolmen |

2. Reconstruction, upgrading and realignment of fences:

Key Outcome:

The rabbit fence is continually renewed to enable effective and efficient maintenance

Performance Criteria:

The extent to which the fence satisfies a minimum construction standard

| <i>Performance Indicator</i> | <i>Target</i> | | |
|--|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | <i>2013-2014</i> | <i>2014-2015</i> | <i>2015-2016</i> |
| Proportion of fence that is rabbit proof* | 98% | 98% | 98% |
| Percentage of fence that is in optimal construction standard** | 75% | 80% | 85% |

***100% is not achievable to due to circumstances beyond the DDMRB control e.g. gates being left open; grids etc.**

****The fence is regularly upgraded or replaced in accordance with the annual works plan.**

| <i>Strategies/actions</i> | <i>Priority</i> | <i>Who</i> |
|---|-----------------|------------------------|
| 2.1 Upgrade/replace high priority sections of the fence | 1 | Inspector |
| 2.2 Undertake emergency restoration works in the event of a natural disaster | 1 | Inspector |
| 2.3 Undertake soil erosion prevention/remediation and overland water flow control works | 2 | Maint. Men / Patrolmen |
| 2.4 Assess the potential for significant realignments of the fence to avoid hazardous and costly maintenance operations | 2 | Inspector / CEO |
| 2.5 Establish and maintain a system of unique identifiers for each section of the fence and associated facilities | 2 | Inspector |

3. Control inside the protected area:

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Key Outcome: | Rabbits are prevented from establishing within the protected area |
| Performance Criteria: | The extent to which rabbits are prevented from establishing within the protected area |

| Performance Indicator | Target | | |
|---|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| | 2013-2014 | 2014-2015 | 2015-2016 |
| Proportion of known infestations subject to control | 100% | 100% | 100% |

| Strategies/actions | Priority | Who |
|---|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| 3.1 Investigate reports of rabbits inside the fence (kept rabbits and wild populations) | 1 | Compliance Officers / Inspector |
| 3.2 Undertake control (including biocontrol) of known wild populations inside the protected area | 1 | L'holders / Compliance Officers |
| 3.3 Confiscate and dispose of illegally kept rabbits | 1 | Compliance Officer / LG Officers |
| 3.4 Expand networks for the detection/survey, reporting and notification of rabbit infestations | 2 | Compliance Officers / Inspector |
| 3.5 Monitor the effectiveness of operations for the control of wild populations | 2 | Inspector / Compliance Officers |
| 3.6 Serve pest control notices where uncooperative landholders have the capacity to undertake control of wild populations | 3 | Compliance Officers |
| 3.7 Undertake prosecutions for serious breaches of responsibilities (including illegal keeping, breaches of the fence) | 3 | Chief Executive Officer |

4. Information/data:

Key Output: Reliable information is available for decision making

| <i>Strategies/actions</i> | <i>Priority</i> | <i>Who</i> |
|---|-----------------|---|
| 4.1 Collate and analyse information on known wild rabbit infestations and associated control actions | 2 | Compliance Officers |
| 4.2 Collate information on all reports/complaints of damage to fences, keeping of rabbits, new infestations | 2 | Compliance Officers/Inspector |
| 4.3 Maintain and enhance networks for information exchange with current and potential collaborators | 2 | Board / CEO / Inspector / Compliance Officers |

5. Communication:

Key Output: Internal and external stakeholders are supportive of DDMRB activities

| <i>Strategies/actions</i> | <i>Priority</i> | <i>Who</i> |
|--|-----------------|------------------|
| 5.1 Develop and implement a communication plan (including media, web site enhancement, public signage) aimed at the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Improved community awareness of the need for rabbit control and the role of the DDMRB – awareness ○ Improved stakeholder understanding of the objectives and achievements of the DDMRB (and its collaborators) - marketing ○ Improved landholder knowledge of the need for, and options for, rabbit control – extension | 2 | Board / CEO / BQ |

6. Risk management:

Key Output: Business and operational risks are identified and adequately managed

| <i>Strategies/actions</i> | <i>Priority</i> | <i>Who</i> |
|---|-----------------|------------|
| 6.1 Maintain and regularly review a register of major risks to the DDMRB, its directors and staff, and others | 1 | CEO |

7. Policy:

Key Output: DDMRB policies are developed and reviewed on a regular basis

| <i>Strategies/actions</i> | <i>Priority</i> | <i>Who</i> |
|---|-----------------|------------------|
| 7.1 Collaborate with similar organisations to document operational and administrative procedures and standards | 2 | CEO / Inspector |
| 7.2 Develop/review DDMRB policies that enable appropriate delegation of authority and discretion with operational decision making | 2 | CEO |
| 7.3 Seek amendments to the <i>Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act 2002</i> and Regulation 2003, enabling greater specificity with the appointment of directors, and empowering local government and other officers to respond to rabbit reports | 2 | Chair / CEO / BQ |

8. Planning:

Key Output: DDMRB priorities are agreed to and reflected in resource allocations

| <i>Strategies/actions</i> | <i>Priority</i> | <i>Who</i> |
|--|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| 8.1 Renew this business plan every three years | 1 | CEO / Board / Minister |
| 8.2 Develop/review (annually) a work plan and associated implementation plans | 1 | CEO / Inspector / Board |
| 8.3 Participate in the development/review of relevant Local Government Area and Regional pest management plans, Regional NRM plans, and State pest management strategies, where relevant | 2 | CEO / Inspector / Board Members |

9. Innovation:

Key Output: New and improved technologies/practices are incorporated into DDMRB activities

| <i>Strategies/actions</i> | <i>Priority</i> | <i>Who</i> |
|--|-----------------|--------------------------------|
| 9.1 Cooperate with DAFF and other officers/organisations undertaking research on rabbits and their control | 2 | Inspector / Compliance Officer |

| | | |
|---|---|-------------------------------|
| 9.2 Liaise with barrier fence managers throughout Australia in relation to potential improvements to best practice for barrier fence construction and maintenance | 2 | Inspector / CEO / Chair |
| 9.3 Participate in relevant conferences and study tours | 2 | Inspector / CEO / Chair |

10. Accountability:

Key Output: Regulatory and administrative obligations are met

| <i>Strategies/actions</i> | <i>Priority</i> | <i>Who</i> |
|--|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| 10.1 Prepare and present administrative/financial reports suitable for review by the Office of the Auditor General | 1 | CEO |
| 10.2 Prepare and submit an annual report to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry | 1 | CEO / Chair / Inspector |

11. Evaluation:

Key Output: Performance is known (and communicated)

| <i>Strategies/actions</i> | <i>Priority</i> | <i>Who</i> |
|--|-----------------|-------------------------------|
| 11.1 Undertake an annual assessment of achievements/performance against the business plan, and incorporate findings in the DDMRB's annual report | 1 | CEO / Inspector / Board |

12. Workforce Capability (staff):

Key Input: The DDMRB attracts, develops and retains highly skilled and motivated staff

| <i>Strategies/actions</i> | <i>Priority</i> | <i>Who</i> |
|--|-----------------|--------------------|
| 12.1 Maintain a safe and healthy work environment for staff, contractors, suppliers and visitors | 1 | CEO / Inspector |
| 12.2 Provide appropriate incentives to attract (housing, allowances etc) and retain (recognition/reward) staff | 1 | Board / CEO |

| | | |
|--|---|----------------------------|
| 12.3 Provide externally accredited training (4WD vehicles, machinery operation, remote areas, WH&S/first aid, ChemCert etc) | 1 | CEO / Inspector |
| 12.4 Develop improved succession arrangements eg. job sharing/relieving, documentation of procedures, collation of information | 1 | CEO / Inspector / BQ |

13. Partners/collaborators:

Key Input: Partners actively contribute to the achievement of DDMRB related activities

| <i>Strategies/actions</i> | <i>Priority</i> | <i>Who</i> |
|--|-----------------|--|
| 13.1 Develop and maintain Memoranda of Understanding / Agreements with current and potential collaborators, including access agreements with NSW authorities | 2 | CEO / Inspector / Board |
| 13.2 Participate in Queensland Rabbit Research and Control Advisory Group | 2 | CEO / Inspector / Compliance Officers |
| 13.3 Promote broad representation of key stakeholders on the board and their participation in DDMRB related activities | 2 | Board / CEO / Inspector |

14. Clients/Public:

Key Input: DDMRB staff are responsive to public concerns/interests

| <i>Strategies/actions</i> | <i>Priority</i> | <i>Who</i> |
|--|-----------------|---------------------------------------|
| 14.1 Acknowledge and quickly respond to reports/complaints with regard to illegal keeping, new infestations and damage/breaches to the fence | 1 | Inspector / Compliance Officers |

15. Resources

Key Input:

The DDMRB has adequate resources for meeting its responsibilities

| <i>Strategies/actions</i> | <i>Priority</i> | <i>Who</i> |
|---|-----------------|---------------------------------------|
| 15.1 Establish and regularly review the following rolling long term programs aimed at re-instating /maintaining the value of key assets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • plant and equipment replacement (including disposals) • fence realignment, replacement and renewal program (including grids/gates) • accommodation (housing, office) and storage/workshop facilities (including disposals) • vehicles | 1 | CEO / Inspector / Board |
| 15.2 Negotiate access to locally available fence construction materials | 1 | CEO / Inspector |
| 15.3 Allocate resources to agreed priorities (through planning processes) | 1 | Board / CEO / Inspector |
| 15.4 Develop, submit and promote a business plan to support long term investment in DDMRB operations | 1 | Board / CEO / Inspector / BQ |
| 15.5 Collect annual payments (precepts) from local governments in the DDMRB's operational area | 1 | BQ |
| 15.6 Enhance relationships with potential suppliers and purchasing partners | 2 | CEO / Inspector |
| 15.7 Review the apportionment of precepts across local governments | 2 | BQ / Board |

16. Leadership

Key Input:

Leadership for meeting the DDMRB's responsibilities is evident at all levels in the organisation

| Strategies/actions | Priority | Who |
|--|----------|---------------------------------|
| 16.1 Ensure all DDMRB related activities are strategically aligned (basis of this strategic plan) | 1 | Board / CEO / BQ |
| 16.2 Build broader/shared ownership/responsibility for DDMRB related activities | 1 | Chair / CEO / BQ |
| 16.3 Empower staff and collaborators to respond to needs and opportunities for improved DDMRB related activities | 1 | Board / CEO / BQ |
| 16.4 Encourage improved co-operation and participation (commitment) by external parties (local governments, Regional NRM bodies etc) | 1 | Chair / CEO / Inspector / BQ |
| 16.5 Conduct quarterly meetings of the Board of Directors | 1 | Chair / Chief Executive Officer |
| 16.6 Identify, negotiate and communicate key roles and responsibilities (internal and external) | 2 | Board / CEO / Inspector / BQ |
| 16.7 Regularly review the justification for rabbit management and the role of the board, its staff and collaborators | 2 | BQ / Board |

