



Meeting the wild dog challenge at Longreach

Coordinated regional groups are an effective method in taking on the wild dog challenge in Queensland. It's not a new concept, but one Queensland group has proven that good communication and using information collected by the group to make more informed decisions can effectively take control of dog problems.

The South Dog Action Working Group (South DAWG) was formed in May 2012 near Longreach and the 60 dogs killed over the past three years is proof of the success of landholders working together.

The group was formed by concerned landholders to assist with communication, responses to wild dog sightings and the formulation of a more effective, cooperative and proactive program. The South DAWG group operates with minimal outside assistance and without the motivation of the landholders, the

group wouldn't exist and more importantly would not be as effective.



South DAWG Coordinator David Paterson and Assistant to the Coordinator Cindy Taylor at a General Meeting held at Boree Downs in 2014.

It's made up of 37 properties with 25 owner occupiers. While mixed sheep and cattle operations make up the majority of the group's enterprises, there are also several cattle only operations who participate.

The properties take in around one third of Division 3 of the wild dog divisions within the Longreach Shire – an area with one of the highest concentrations of sheep enterprises in central west Queensland.

"In the 10 years prior to the formation of the group, many properties south of Longreach had gone from virtually no dogs, to 10 sightings within the month of May 2012 alone," South DAWG Assistant to the Coordinator Cindy Taylor said.

"Sheep producers in the area lacked the experience on what to do when they noted wild dog activity or sightings.

"Our producers in the group are passionate about protecting their sheep from wild dogs. Working together, we are all kept informed about where dog activity and stock losses are occurring and can act on it."





The South DAWG has achieved their objective of at least 90 per cent of landholders in the region who:

- actively trap, shoot or 1080 bait when activity occurs
- respond within 36 hours of reported dog activity, over a 25 square kilometre radius of the activity
- participate in 1080 baiting campaigns twice a year.

How does it work?

Sharing information about dog sightings to a central point is the key to the success of the group.

A central spreadsheet is maintained by Ms Taylor, which provides landholders with current information on where dogs have been sighted or stock killed. Ms Taylor emails the spreadsheet to all members of the group as soon as possible once she has been notified about the activity.

Landholders can then prepare by setting traps, organise a baiting campaign or put guardian animals in the paddock where sheep are likely to be attacked.

The group has the objective to respond to dog threats within 36 hours of notification. Ms Taylor also emails the spreadsheet to the group with the details of when and how the wild dog was eradicated.



Landholders discussing the new traps that the group bought.

Group activities are coordinated by three elected representatives – South DAWG Coordinator David Paterson, Cindy Taylor and Senior Biosecurity Officer Garry Pidgeon from the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries (DAF). The group meets three times a year to discuss issues and results. Guest speakers with wild dog knowledge are occasionally invited to group meetings.

“Many in our group are happy to help out or provide meat for 1080 baits for other members,” Ms Taylor said.

“When a producer has an animal that needs to be put down then they can use this meat for baiting. It is cut to bait size and stored in one of the four freezers purchased for the group to use when required.

“Producers inform me when they have contributed meat to one of the freezers so a record is kept for emergencies.”





South DAWG Structure and responsibilities

1. Coordinator - David Paterson
 - Provide group leadership
 - Provide producer and working group views to Longreach Wild Dog Advisory Committee
 - Coordinate meetings and activities of South DAWG
 - Facilitate area consensus for local dog control strategy
 - Facilitate landholders to make control activities effective
2. Assistant to the Coordinator – Cindy Taylor
 - Ensure effective communication between all group members
 - Facilitate area meetings, record minutes and decisions
 - Record wild dog sightings and stock losses
 - Disseminate information relevant to South DAWG as quickly as possible
3. Advisor – Garry Pidgeon (Senior Biosecurity Officer, DAF)
 - Provide technical assistance
 - Provide access to research findings
 - Provide mapping assistance

Funding

South DAWG applied for Australian Wool Innovation (AWI) funding for wild dog control and received approximately \$20,000 in 2012.

Of this, \$10,000 was used to employ a professional pest controller to spend 10 weeks when and where necessary to help clean up existing dog populations. Producers who had the pest controller on their property provided in-kind support, such as accommodation, fuel and meat. The group was able to easily identify areas that needed the pest controller by analysing the data the group collected on dog sightings. This meant better value for money when it came to employing a pest controller.

The remaining AWI funds received were used for:

- four freezers to store meat for 1080 baits
- signage, including permanent '1080 baits laid here' signs
- the purchase of wild dog traps for the group's use.

South DAWG is also funded by subscriptions, a voluntary levy of \$70 plus GST/year. The levy is used for paying pest controllers a bonus and for any incidentals that the group may require.





The group also initiates extra educational activities such as a bus trip to visit local properties that had constructed predator control fences. They suggested the idea and approached Leading Sheep (the AWI & DAF extension network in Queensland) to help organise and fund the trip.

Conclusion

South DAWG members now have a better understanding of the dog activity in their region and are more knowledgeable about how to deal with the problem. They use the data collected to make informed decisions on dog control methods, which provides better control and value for money.

“This system is appropriate everywhere, especially in sheep regions,” Ms Taylor said.

“It requires a group leader to be an active communicator with members and it’s really important to have producers communicate to a central point of contact, who then informs the group when and where wild dog activity is occurring.

“We are very pleased that the group has inspired other landholders in the region and another division in the Longreach Shire is setting up a similar group based on the South DAWG model.

“It helps everyone cope better with the problem knowing they are a part of a proactive group. We are just a small group which makes communication easier but there is great camaraderie amongst the members,” she said.



South DAWG participants at a General Meeting held at Boree Downs in 2014

