



Excluding dogs once and for all at Banff Downs

Morven grazier Tim Williams is running more stock than ever and hasn't had a problem with wild dogs thanks to a decision to put in exclusion fencing in 2012.

He has even increased the carrying capacity of his property 'Banff Downs' by more than 10 per cent despite a two and half year dry period, and has plans to increase stocking by a further 10 per cent to 16,000DSE. Most of this increase will be in sheep numbers, which Mr Williams says will be easily achieved now that grazing pressure from kangaroos has been reduced to a



Tim Williams with wife Marie and sons Hamish and Lachie.

manageable level and wild dogs are no longer a major issue.

In 2011 lambing on 'Banff Downs' was as low as 40 per cent in some paddocks and wild dogs were slowly encroaching. Mr Williams decided that he had to fence the property or leave the sheep industry for good.

The reduced impact of wild dogs and pigs has resulted in average lambing rates across Banff Downs of up to 96 per cent.

Costs and maintenance

The fence was completed in June 2012 and took around 18 months to install.

The average cost of materials for the fence was \$2850/km which took into account contributions from neighbours and the use of some old fence in some sections. Mr Williams estimates that site preparation and construction cost an additional \$2000/km. The total cost was approximately \$4850/km or \$204,000 for the entire 42km fencing project. This translates to an investment of \$10 per acre.

Mr Williams checks the fence once a month by motor bike, which takes around two hours. He also checks it after a storm. In contrast, before the fence was built he was spending a day a week on wild dog control.



“More checking was required in the first two months after construction, as there was a lot more pressure from kangaroos at this time,” he said.

“There has been some extra maintenance needed on a section of fence that was constructed right next to an old dog netting fence.

“The roos tend to follow the same tracks as they always have, which led them to the old fence holes and they end up hitting the new fence at speed. They always hit the same spot, which has caused a weak point and some holes.

“If I started this project over, I would pay the extra money and make sure all old fences were knocked down and started afresh to avoid these problems.

“I am surprised at how little maintenance the fence needs – there may be more in the future as the fence ages but this shouldn’t become an issue for a few years yet.”

Was it good for business?

Mr Williams started seeing results from the fencing during lambing in 2012. Two paddocks achieved 97 per cent, while a third mob achieved 70 per cent after it was compromised by a



A comparison of the grazing pressure on either side of the exclusion fence.

dog that entered (via a gate that had been left open). 2013 was the first proper lambing that he achieved, with no dogs present at lambing time.

In 2014, three paddocks averaged 95-100 per cent, while a fourth paddock only achieved 60 per cent due to pig pressures, which had increased in the absence of wild dogs which had previously kept their numbers in check. The pigs were inside the fence before it was closed, and were eradicated with a shooting and baiting program.



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Overall, he has increased his lambing rates from 40 per cent or lower to his current average of 87 per cent. Based on an average value of \$50 per lamb, he estimates that his income has been boosted by as much as \$47,150 through increasing lamb numbers from 684 to 1627.

Working on this increased income each year, it means that the fence cost (\$207,000) will be covered in five years by the extra income. This also doesn't take into account the reduced ewe mortality, increased land condition and the control Tim now has over his business.

“More ewes mean I can start classing them harder and cull non-performing animals. I can make management changes to the business that will improve production, rather than just surviving and making decisions dictated by predators influence,” he said.

Mr Williams is now in the process of building up his ewe numbers. He will be joining 2300 ewes in 2015, with the intention of joining 3000 in 2016.

Lambing results and ewe mortality from Banff Downs 2010-2014

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Ewes	1600	1600	1490	1710	1562
Lambs	1400	1080	1280	1627	1358
Lambing %	87	67	86	96	87
Ewe Mortality %*	8	9	5	1.5	1
<i>Predicted Lambing %</i>	<i>87 (actual)</i>	<i>67 (actual)</i>	<i>47**</i>	<i>30**</i>	<i>20**</i>
<i>Predicted Ewe mortality %</i>	<i>8 (actual)</i>	<i>9 (actual)</i>	<i>9 ***</i>	<i>9 ***</i>	<i>9 ***</i>

* ewe mortality is calculated from joining to lamb marking

** prediction of lamb marking % going forward without fencing, based on 2010/11 figures when lambing dropped by 20%.

*** predicted ewe mortality without fencing





Additional benefits

As well as dog control, a key benefit of the fence is making kangaroo numbers manageable, and thus the ability to spell and improve grazing country with confidence.

“The fence means that there won’t be a big migration of kangaroos onto the place every time there is a storm,” Mr Williams said.

“I am currently stick raking some country to develop and grow some oats to help finish lambs and young cattle. This was previously done on Banff Downs but it was stopped when grazing pressure got too much and the crop was eaten by kangaroos as soon as it came up.”

“I am also not feeding as much lick to cattle and sheep this year, and I’m not supplementing ewes at joining this year, as I normally would have to do because of the reduced grazing pressure from kangaroos.





Tips

Put an apron on the fence, it is essential.

Put the time into fence line preparation.

If possible put up a new fence with new materials; don't try and use an old existing fence.

Spend time talking to neighbours and ask them to contribute something towards the cost or construction as it makes a big difference.

Do some research into fence types and talk to those that have already constructed them. Go and visit them if possible.

Remain vigilant for signs of pigs and dogs inside the fence and act on them quickly

Click [here](#) to read another case study on Banff Down's exclusion fencing which gives more details about the fences that were built.