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Life changing: Exclusion fencing secures future for Ilfracombe wool growers

- Cost \$8000-\$9000/km with contractor doing the fencing.
- The Hains cleared the fenceline at a cost of around \$600/km.
- The fence is 1500mm high with netting topped by two strands of barbed wire.
- They are also experimenting running shade cloth along the netting apron in creek crossings to reduce the pest pressure on the fence.
- Lambing rate has gone from 40-60 per cent to 100 per cent within fenced areas in 12 months.

Name: John and Jane Hain

Property: Summer Hill, Ilfracombe

Enterprises: Sheep, wool and cattle production

Size: 17,000 hectares

Flock size: 10,000 merinos



Ilfracombe grazier John Hain believes the introduction of exclusion fencing to keep wild dogs out of sheep and wool properties has 'energised' communities in western Queensland and has the potential to bring people and profitability back to the region.

John Hain says exclusion fencing has galvanised the local community and prompted a recovery in the sheep and wool industry.

At a personal level, Mr Hain and his wife Jane have fenced almost 17,000 hectares of their Ilfracombe property 'Summer Hill' against wild dogs, at the same time as wool prices set record highs.

"Everyone can see the recovery of the sheep industry is a good thing, because it will bring people back to Longreach and the smaller towns and return a bit of prosperity back to the district," Mr Hain said.

"On the home front it will be great for our productivity, because for the past few years we have spent all our spare time dogging and other things get behind."

The Hains have already tried alpacas and Maremma guard dogs to protect their flock of up to 10,000 Merino sheep from wild dog attacks, but the damage has been steadily worsening during the past decade.



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The true extent was revealed last year when, thinking they had a problem with three wild dogs, the Hains joined with their neighbours to engage a dogger employed by the Longreach Regional Council. In one month, he trapped 19 dogs.



The Hains estimate the 54km of exclusion fencing cost them \$8000-\$9000 per kilometre.

“The worst thing is seeing your sheep torn apart or maimed animals that are still alive,” Mr Hain said.

“For the past few years whenever we mustered sheep to the holding yards for shearing or crutching, we would take our swags and camp next to the yards for the night to protect them.

“Now we are hopeful that the fence will give us peace of mind and the chance to focus on good management.”

The Hains didn’t rush into exclusion fencing, but took their time researching construction methods, and joined a bus tour organized by Leading Sheep to visit a number of fences on properties in the central west.

Today, Mr Hain estimates the 54km of exclusion fencing that borders their property will have cost them between \$8000 and \$9000 per kilometre, with a contractor doing the fencing and the Hains responsible for clearing fencelines and supplying the materials.

“This cost takes into account the cost of heavy duty steel strainers at each end and every 500 metres along the new netting fence, as well as fencing for creek crossings, corners, gateways and end assemblies,” he said.

“It also includes a cost of around \$600 a km to clear the line, which may be less in open country, but dearer if you are fencing through scrub.”

A third of ‘Summer Hill’ is open Mitchell grass country, a third is gidyea scrub that has mostly been pulled, and the remainder is channels and flood country along the Aramac and Rodney creeks, which run into the Thomson River near the property’s western border.

Mr Hain said it was unlikely they would fence through these major creeks and channels, given the scale and size of floods through these watercourses every ten years.



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The 25,000ha property halfway between Ilfracombe and Aramac normally runs 10,000 sheep and 500 Droughtmaster breeders, but drought and wild dogs have forced the couple to reduce stocking rates back to 4000 sheep and 300 cows.

Despite it being early days the producer said he has already noticed ‘measurable benefits’ from the exclusion fencing.

“Even before the cluster fencing was finished, we had gone from 40-60 per cent lambing in paddocks along the creeks to averaging 100 per cent,” Mr Hain said.

The fence comprises Waratah Stocksafe-T netting that is 11/115/15 in size - 115cm high with 15cm between each vertical wire and 11 horizontal wires with spacings of 150mm at the top, decreasing to 100mm at the bottom.

Two barbed wires on top take the height of the fence to 1500mm, the same height as a lot of the original dog fence that ran from South Australia up through western Queensland.

The netting is attached to Waratah galvanized posts, with each fifth post a stronger and larger Jio MaxY post, and is fitted with a 30cm hinged apron on the bottom. Creek crossings are built to lift in the case of a minor flood or run-through.

Mr Hain has also included another useful addition that he observed on the Leading Sheep bus tour.

“Some people are putting shade cloth under the netting in creek crossings, which seems to stop roos and pigs from getting underneath,” he said.

“The black or green shade cloth is attached to the fence about 500mm above ground level and just runs under the netting apron, and pests don’t seem to pressurize it, whereas I’ve seen pigs and roos press against the wire netting.

“It doesn’t seem to rot either. The green shade cloth we saw had been in place for 10 years.”

Once the exclusion fencing is completed it will have the capacity to contain 10,000 sheep and will assist in the eradication and exclusion of other feral pests.

Mr Hain said they have decided to use the same feral-proof netting on any internal fences that are replaced or built on the property in the future.

“It should be pretty effective, so that when you put sheep in the paddock they’ll stay there and if there is a dog we can isolate it to that paddock,” he said.

“We will still have to be vigilant and drive around about once a week for the first 12 months to keep an eye on stock and make sure there’s no holes.

“We’ll eradicate any dogs and pigs inside and from the experiences of people who have completed their fencing, we can expect a much greater response in our pasture growth.”



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Mr Hain said he was grateful for the information on exclusion fencing gathered through Leading Sheep programs.

“We rate the importance of Leading Sheep very highly, whether it’s the bus trip or reading the newsletters, taking part in webinars or going to field days,” he said.

He believes where possible, producers who intend running sheep, goats or other small animals anywhere in Australia should thinking about using exclusion fencing when replacing boundary fences, as the dog problem seems to be growing nationally.

“It’s much easier financially to justify and find the money to build exclusion fencing when your production is unaffected, rather than when lambing percentages are low and the dogs are harassing and killing your ewes.”