The WA Government is beginning a program of upgrades and extensions to the State Barrier Fence, once known as the Rabbit Proof Fence. This program will lead to significant impacts on wildlife, including the deaths of tens of thousands of emus on their seasonal migrations.

The work is a reaction to concerns raised by some farmers over the impacts of wild dogs, emus, and dingoes on agriculture.

The program of State Barrier Fence upgrades and extensions should not continue – it is cruel, unscientific and uneconomic. Alternatives which equitably support both the environment and agriculture must be pursued and implemented.
CRUEL, UNScientific AND UNEconomic

The West Australian Government has begun pouring millions of dollars into extending and upgrading the State Barrier Fence. The existing 1,170 km State Barrier Fence, from north of Kalbarri to east of Ravensthorpe is being substantially upgraded, and construction of a 160 km extension is already underway.

A further extension, of up to 730 kms, is planned to cross woodlands and wildlife habitats from east of Ravensthorpe to Cape Arid, east of Esperance (see map). This ‘Esperance extension’ will cost an estimated $15-20 million of taxpayer funds for its construction. The WA Government has already allocated $5 million of Royalties for Regions funding to fence upgrades and extensions, including a pilot project to construct a 30 km section of the Esperance extension.

There is no science supporting the value of the Esperance extension or government claims that it has a minimal impact on the environment. The Government has undertaken no open public consultation, no independent environmental or economic assessment and no review of alternatives. The fence is a cruel and clumsy method of addressing the concerns raised by a small number of farmers with little respect to the wildlife and environment of the Great Western Woodlands and beyond.

A CRUEL DEATH FOR TENS OF THOUSANDS OF NATIVE ANIMALS

Cross-landscape fences are a cruel approach to managing wildlife. Thousands of emus will be shot, poisoned or starved if they become trapped behind the fence in their mass migrations from the inland towards the coast. With the existing fence (see map) this has happened seven times over the past 40 years. In the past wildlife have been treated savagely, as happened in 1976:

“One Sunday morning there were 4000 emus reported to be congregated at the Ajana [northern wheatbelt] spur fence. By the time I arrived there in the late afternoon there were approximately 10,000 emus there and by Monday morning there were about 20,000 in the mob. That is the type of numbers we had to deal with. Shooting was the only answer, so we shot emus eight days a week. They were so thick that we often shot 20 to 30 per shotgun shot. It was slaughter.”

[War, Norm & Diver, Ron (1992) ‘The 76 Migration, in The State Barrier Fence of Western Australia - CENTENARY 1901 – 20011992].

Kangaroos regularly get entangled and caught in barrier fences when trying to get through them. They hang trapped on the wire, and die slowly.

The Government’s program of upgrades and extensions to the State Barrier Fence raises significant animal welfare issues which have been ignored by agencies. The WA Government does not have procedures for the humane treatment of wildlife trapped by the fence, and has an appalling history of disregarding animal welfare along the existing fence.

“East of Lake Varley this kangaroo was trapped in agony for weeks.”

Frank Rijavec

Existing and proposed sections of the State Barrier Fence would significantly restrict wildlife movement across the south west of Australia
NATURAL MIGRATION PREVENTED

The natural movement of many native animals will be stopped or hindered by the fence and associated clearing. These animals need to move across habitats in order to follow seasonal supplies of water and food.

The southward movement of tens of thousands of emus in certain seasons is one of Australia’s greatest wildlife migrations. Emus have an important role in dispersing native seeds because they carry large amounts of seed in their gut while travelling large distances. The proposed fence extensions will stop this important seed spread across the various habitats at the very time climate change makes this migration even more important.

Apart from emus, the fence will also stop kangaroos, dingo, Echidnas and Black-gloved wallabies and hinder the movement of many other wildlife.

FRAGMENTING THE LANDSCAPE

Wildlife and plants need to be able to move in the face of a changing climate. Yet the Esperance extension is specifically designed to cut off and fragment inland and south coastal habitats and be a barrier to the movement of native wildlife.

One option being considered for the proposed Esperance extension would slice hundreds of thousands of hectares off the Great Western Woodlands, which is recognised nationally as the largest, healthiest and most intact temperate woodland remaining on Earth.

LARGE SCALE CLEARING

Depending on the route adopted, extensions to the fence would result in the clearing of at least 1000 hectares of healthy woodland and endangered species habitat. Many more thousands of hectares of bushland would become degraded by regular scrub-rolling and burning to protect the fence.

WHAT IMPACT ON ENDANGERED SPECIES?

The fence would slice through the habitat of a number of endangered and vulnerable wildlife species, like the Chuditch, Dayang, Dibbler and Numbat. Critically, the cleared bush and access tracks associated with the fence give cats and foxes ‘hunting highways’ from which to further decimate these threatened species.

DINGOES

The fence ignores the ecological importance of dingo. Dingoes are important native animals, part of a long established food chain. As the top predator in the landscape (excluding humans), dingoes prey on cats and foxes, restoring the original balance and providing protection for the small to medium-sized mammals, such as Woylies, Numbats and Dibblers. This works even better if dingoes are left in intact, functioning packs.

FINDING AN EQUITABLE SOLUTION

The extension of the fence north of Esperance is in response to a small number of landholders in the Esperance region who want to keep dingoes, feral dogs, emus, and kangaroos off their lands. However there are much cheaper, more humane and environmentally sensitive ways of stopping wildlife and wild dogs from becoming a problem on private property. Many local landholders say that targeted control of wild dogs near properties works well. Such approaches have much less impact on native wildlife than barrier fences.

Conservation organisations are dismayed at the WA government’s willingness to spend significant amounts of public money on the fence upgrades and extensions without investigating their environmental impacts, humane management of trapped wildlife, the costs and benefits to the WA community, alternative options, and whether the fence extensions would provide an effective and ethical solution to the concerns raised by farmers.

The program of State Barrier Fence upgrades and extensions should not continue. The program is cruel, unscientific and uneconomic. Instead, funding already allocated should be redirected to developing alternative solutions which equitably support both the environment and agriculture.
Please join our campaign and help achieve an alternative solution which is more humane and equitable.

Sign our online petition at www.ccwa.org.au/stopthefence, or use the QR reader on your phone.

Contact the politicians who have the potential to change the Government’s policy:

- **Colin Barnett, WA Premier**, ph (08) 6552 5000
  email: wa-government@dpc.wa.gov.au

- **Albert Jacob, WA Minister for Environment**, ph (08) 6552 5800
  email: Minister.Jacob@dpc.wa.gov.au

- **Ken Baston, Minister for Agriculture and Food**, ph (08) 6552 5400
  email: Minister.Baston@dpc.wa.gov.au

- **Wendy Duncan, Member for Kalgoorlie**, ph (08) 9021 6766
  email: Wendy.Duncan@mp.wa.gov.au

- **Graham Jacobs, Member for Eyre**, ph (08) 9071 6555
  email: graham.jacobs@mp.wa.gov.au

- **Tony Burke, Federal Minister for the Environment**, ph (02) 6277 7640
  email: Tony.Burke.MP@aph.gov.au

You can donate to raise awareness of the fence and the important wildlife issues involved at www.ccwa.org.au/stopthefence.

For more information on the fence proposals and the Great Western Woodlands see http://www.gondwanalink.org/whatsupwhere/gww.aspx