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State Barrier Fence - Esperance extension project overview 2024

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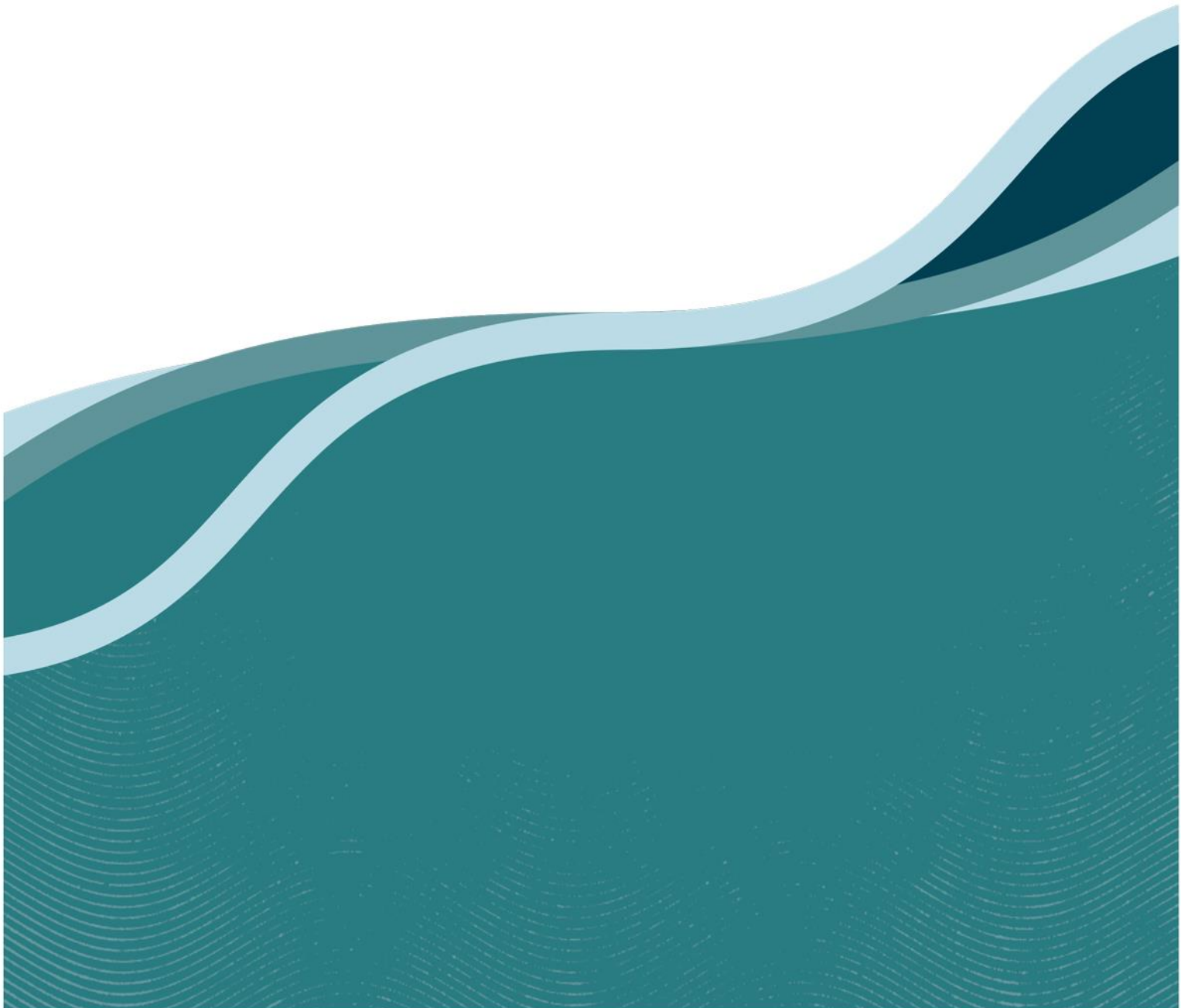
Department of
Primary Industries and
Regional Development

Protect
Grow
Innovate

Esperance Extension

Project Overview

(Updated January 2024)



Introduction

Western Australia's State Barrier Fence plays an important role in protecting landholders inside the fence by preventing the movement of animal pests, including wild dogs and emus, from pastoral areas into the agricultural regions. It is a state asset which is managed by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development.

The original fences (numbers 1, 2 and 3) were constructed between 1902 and 1907. Originally known as the Rabbit Proof Fences, it has also been known as the State Vermin Fence, the Emu Fence and now the State Barrier Fence. Since 2010, the fence has been upgraded to wild dog standard.

The current fence is approximately 1209 km long, extending from the Zuytdorp cliffs north of Kalbarri (in the State's north) through to Jerdacuttup east of Ravensthorpe (in the State's south). A significant gap in the State Barrier Fence remains to be constructed near Esperance.

The 660 km extension to the State Barrier Fence will protect south-eastern agricultural enterprises from the impact of emus, wild dogs and kangaroos coming from the rangelands and adjacent woodlands. Once completed, the Esperance Extension will provide confidence to livestock industries for new investment and increased production in the region.

The proposed Esperance extension will provide significant benefits to agriculture and have other associated positive impacts for the region. These benefits were endorsed by the agricultural industry in the Esperance community. The Esperance Extension has been supported by successive State governments, with initial scoping for the project undertaken as far back as 2011.

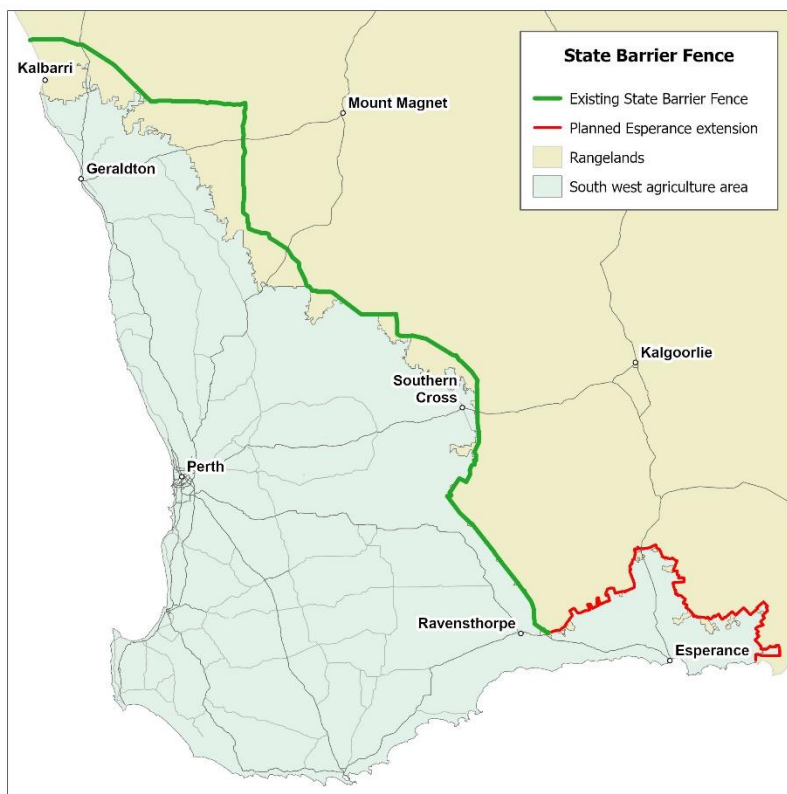


Image 1 – Map of the proposed Esperance Extension

Design and Planning

Significant consultation, planning and biological studies were undertaken to avoid or mitigate potential ecological and cultural impacts of the proposed Esperance extension and to involve stakeholders in developing the project.

Consultation with stakeholders

The Esperance Extension Reference Group (EERG) was formed in late 2011 and met regularly until 2016 to advise the department throughout the development and approvals processes.

The EERG was comprised of representatives from:

- Department of Agriculture and Food WA (now DPIRD)
- Ravensthorpe Declared Species Group (now Southern Biosecurity Group)
- Northern Mallee Declared Species Group (now Esperance Biosecurity Association)
- Shire of Ravensthorpe, Shire of Esperance
- South Coast Natural Resource Management Inc.
- WA Department of Lands (now Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage)
- WA Department of Parks and Wildlife (now Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions)
- WA Department of Premier and Cabinet.

Meetings were also held with the Goldfields Land and Sea Council Aboriginal representative body, the Esperance Tjaltjraak Native Title Aboriginal Corporation and Ngadju Native Title holders regarding the proposal between 2013 and 2016.

The department continues to liaise with relevant stakeholders as the project is implemented. Once complete, the department will maintain an ongoing relationship with Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA), landholders and/or local bushfire brigades to ensure appropriate fire mitigation and management strategies are implemented.

Alignment

Potential impacts on Aboriginal cultural heritage, wildlife and the broader ecosystem have been mitigated or avoided through careful choice of fence construction materials and structure, modified clearing practices and the final chosen alignment.

The proposed fence alignment was determined following detailed assessment and mapping of environmental and cultural values, in accordance with relevant Commonwealth and State policy and legislation.

Most of the proposed alignment for the Esperance extension is adjacent to agricultural private property boundaries on vacant Crown land along an existing cleared fire break and/or following existing roads or tracks.

Assessments and Key Reports

The values of the Great Western Woodlands and adjacent areas are well recognised, as are the concerns expressed about potential impact on these values.

Environment

Environmental referrals for the proposed 660 km Esperance extension were made by the department to the Commonwealth Department of Environment and the WA Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) in June 2016.

The Commonwealth assessed the proposal in relation to matters of 'National environmental significance' and determined that the project could proceed as described in the department's referral, subject to meeting any other relevant State or local government legislation (see [EPBC Act referral # 2016/7722 decision](#)).

The WA Environmental Protection Authority assessment process required DPIRD to make the Environmental Review Document and any other information or report available for public review. This information is available from the [EPA website](#). Following the review process, the EPA assessed the proposal to be environmentally acceptable and recommended the proposal may be implemented subject to specific conditions.

The proposal to construct an approximately 660 km long, 1.35 m high barrier fence in the Goldfields-Esperance Region of Western Australia for the purpose of limiting impacts by wild dogs, emus and kangaroos on agriculture, was approved by the Honourable Stephen Dawson MLC, Minister for Environment, on 15 April 2019.

The Minister for Environment released [Ministerial Statement 1095](#) stating all conditions required for the construction of the fence to comply with the *Environmental Protection Act 1986*. The department is committed to implementing the proposal in accordance with these conditions.

Cultural heritage

Site Avoidance surveys were undertaken by the Esperance Nyungar and Ngadju Traditional Owners on the proposed alignment in mid-late 2015. The *Report of an Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Survey of the State Barrier Fence Proposed Extension, Esperance Shire, Western Australia* was prepared by Applied Archaeology Australia Pty Ltd. The *Anthropological Heritage Survey Work Area Clearance, Ngadju People DPIRD State Barrier Fence Esperance Extension* was prepared by Dr James Taylor, Consultant Anthropologist. These reports are not publicly available.

The alignment of the fence was amended to the extent possible in order to minimise impact on sites of significance, however there were sections of the alignment where activities on Aboriginal cultural sites was unavoidable.

Where construction activities on Aboriginal cultural sites is unavoidable, consultation with Traditional Owners will be undertaken and appropriate consent sought as required under the relevant legislation, including consent from the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs under the *Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972 and Aboriginal Heritage Regulations 1974*.

The department continues to work with the Traditional Owners to ensure that all activities continue to be undertaken in a way to avoid or minimise harm to Aboriginal cultural heritage sites.

State Barrier Fence Reserve

The *Biosecurity and Agriculture Management Act 2007* (BAM Act) provides the authority for regulations to be made for the erection and maintenance of barrier fences as a means of controlling animals that are declared pests.

The State Barrier Fence is set within a 20-metre reserve. This reserve is vested with the WA Agricultural Authority (WAA) which enables the department to enforce powers granted under the BAM Act.

Indigenous Land Use Agreements

An Indigenous Land Use Agreement is an agreement with native title parties about the use and management of areas of land and/or waters.

A significant proportion of the proposed alignment is situated on crown land over which native title exists. Before works are undertaken on crown land, the State must enter into an ILUA with the relevant Native Title holders to provide authority to create the reserve.

Approximately two-thirds of the proposed Esperance Extension falls within or adjacent to lands within the Esperance Nyungar Determination Area. The State Barrier Fence (Esperance Nyungar Country) ILUA (WI2022/001) was registered with the National Native Title Tribunal in April 2022.

Accessing the State Barrier Fence Reserve

The fence and reserve are considered a work site. The department has a responsibility to ensure the worksite is safe for use by its staff, contractors and approved permit holders. The department issues Licensed Pest Management Technicians access to the reserve for the use of poisons and traps to control wild dogs and also provides permits to mining companies, state government agencies, utilities providers and engages contractors to inspect and repair the fence on a regular basis.

It is illegal for the general public to travel on the track that runs alongside Western Australia's State Barrier Fence without a permit. There are surveillance cameras in place to record unauthorised vehicles, which could face a \$10,000 fine.



Image 2 – A section of Esperance Extension.

Construction

Clearing and construction cannot commence until all required approvals are in place. This includes, but not limited to the registration of an Indigenous Land Use Agreement with the Native Title holders and the creation of the State Barrier Fence Reserve.

Phase I

The Honourable Alannah MacTiernan MLA, Minister for Regional Development; Agriculture and Food launched construction of Phase I of the Esperance Extension at an event on 23 May 2019.

Phase I covered a small portion of the Esperance Extension along existing fence boundaries and not subject to native title.

The first 8.5 km of fence commenced at the end of the existing State Barrier Fence near Jerdacuttup. Department staff provided training to the Esperance Tjaltjraak Aboriginal Rangers in fencing to build their capacity for future contracting opportunities.

An additional 55 km of fence on freehold boundaries was completed in April 2020 by Esperance Tjaltjraak Aboriginal Rangers.

Phase II

Further clearing and construction of the Esperance extension will be progressed in a staged approach and in accordance with relevant Commonwealth and State policy and legislation.

A contract has been awarded for up to 300 km, over two sections, of vermin proof fencing erected commencing east of Ravensthorpe, through to Beaumont, east of Esperance.

Construction of the western section, from Jerdacuttup to west of Salmon Gums is expected to be completed mid-2024, and on-ground preparatory works will commence in the Beaumont area in early 2024.

The State Government is progressing necessary approvals to finalise the remaining 286km of fencing for the Esperance extension project.

Further information

Information on the project and other activities under the Wild Dog Action Plan is available from the department's website <https://www.agric.wa.gov.au/invasive-species/state-barrier-fence-overview>

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