

Rural Crime and Animal Activists

The Nationals WA plan to protect farmers, families and communities from rural crime

If returned to government in 2021 we will act to protect agricultural properties from rural crime and dissuade criminal activities from animal activists, including reforming the WA Police Rural Stock Squad.

Discussion

Throughout 2019, regional communities in WA were placed under siege by an increase in harassing, intimidating and illegal activities by self-proclaimed animal activists.

Activists posted attack maps detailing farming operations and encouraged their members to show up at farming properties and commit offences against them.

The beginning of 2019 saw an escalation in the types of incidents being perpetrated by activist groups, with farming properties, sale yards, restaurants and cafes, and even schools being targeted.

While the Federal Government and other States have taken action to introduce harsher penalties to deter rural crime in their jurisdictions, the Labor Government has dragged its feet, leaving our agricultural sector exposed.

Rural crime is not limited to animal activists. Due to their geographical isolation, farms can be targets for stock, equipment and machinery theft. Farmers have also had to contend with illegal hunting, fishing and poaching taking place on their properties, often aided by the use of drones to conduct illegal surveillance.

The Nationals have led the campaign to address these challenges, including calling for increased trespass penalties, reviewing the legislation around drone use, and the need for additional police resources in rural areas.

Agriculture remains one of the most important economic drivers for WA – and regional WA in particular – with over 7,200 farming properties directly employing 23,000 workers to contribute \$8.6 billion towards our State's economy.

Recommendations:

If The Nationals WA form government in 2021, we will introduce the following measures as a priority.

- **Urgently introduce an aggravated trespass offence:** We will update the Criminal Code to include aggravated trespass as an offence. This charge can be enacted when multiple offenders are present or in circumstances of geographical isolation or biosecurity risk. Aggravated trespass charges will carry significantly higher penalties.
- **On-the-spot fines of \$1,000:** These fines will deter activists from interfering with lawfully operating businesses including farms, abattoirs, saleyards, cafes, restaurants and schools.
- **Reform the Rural Stock Squad:** The Nationals WA support the delivery of an additional 20 regional police officers to form a new Rural Stock Squad tasked with delivering specialised support to prevent regional crime.
- **Update the Surveillance Devices Act:** We will modernise the Surveillance Devices Act to consider appropriate drone use and prevent the use of drones to aid criminal activity or unlawful filming of agricultural properties.

The Nationals WA invite feedback on this discussion paper.

