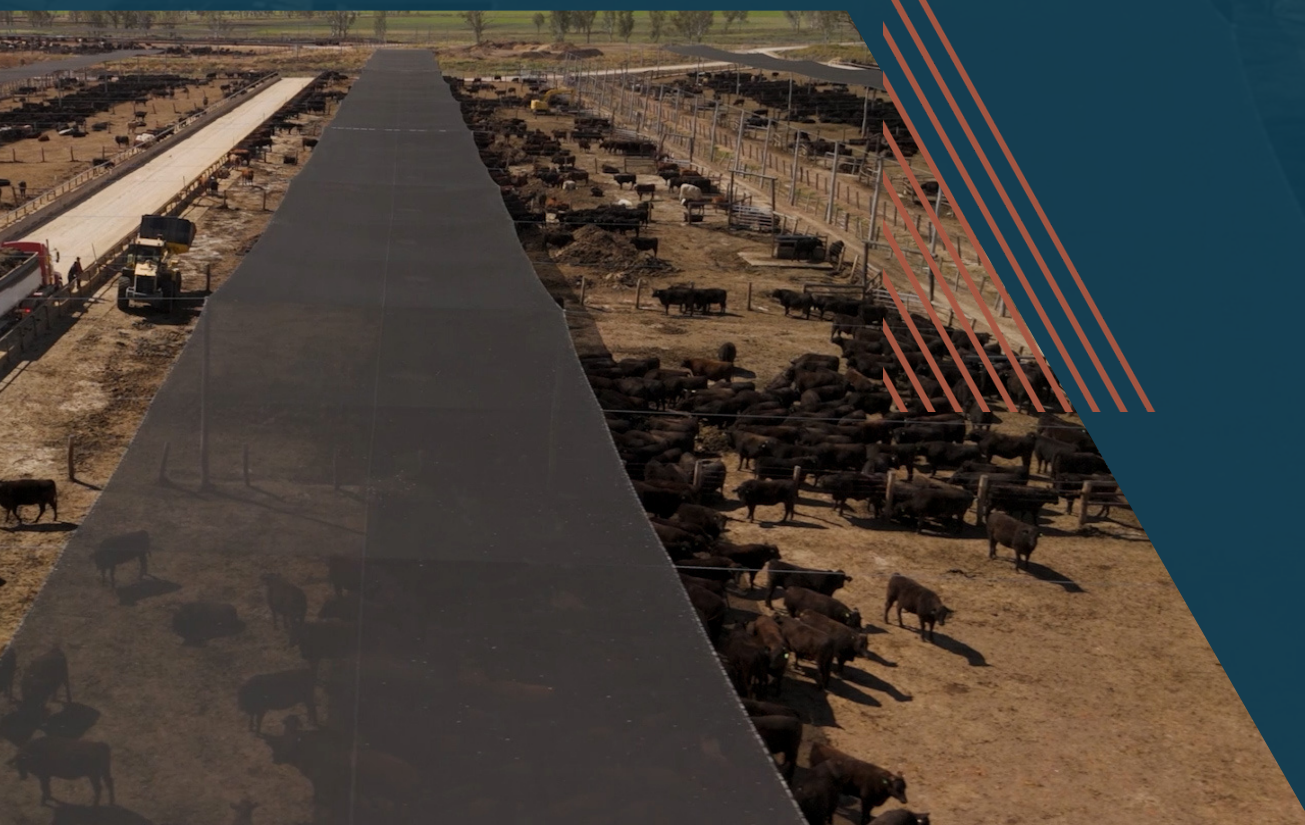




QUEENSLAND
FARMERS'
FEDERATION



Crisis hits home when least expected

Lessons in communications from the Lemontree Feedlot Invasion

This project is a collaboration between the Queensland Farmers' Federation and the Queensland Government to support Queensland farmers.

Introduction

In March 2019, on a Saturday with minimal staff on site, David McNamee was sitting down to eat on the veranda with his family when they noticed cars and then busloads of people parking at the front entrance of Lemontree. Around 100 animal activists started stepping through the boundary fence and heading towards the family's feedlot.

About the Property

Built on a foundation of care for animals, the environment and people, the McNamee family has operated Lemontree Feedlot at Millmerran on Queensland's Darling Downs for 26 years.

Founded by John McNamee, Lemontree is now operated by his sons David, James and Benjamin, with David's daughter, Alexandra, the feedlot operations manager.

Lemontree Feedlot has an annual turnoff of 48,000 head, with about 40% of capacity used for long-fed Wagyu programs, with the balance being various 100-day feeding programs supplying Kilcoy Global Foods and JBS Dinmore for their export markets.



The McNamee's family values of hard-work, resilience, compassion and pursuit of quality mean the complex tasks of ensuring the health and wellbeing of their cattle is top priority.

As such, they have significant permanent shedding that houses 2,000 cattle, and they have invested in additional shading, and employ a specialist nutritionist to formulate rations for their cattle.

The Crisis Event

On Saturday, 23 March 2019, with minimal staff on site, David McNamee was sitting down to eat with his family when they noticed cars and buses parking at the front entrance of Lemontree.

Around 100 animal activists, dressed in uniform black t-shirts and white jump-suits, with mobile phone cameras raised high, stepped out of the vehicles. The group breached the boundary fence and stormed across the biosecurity zone towards the feedlot.

The activists chanted slogans while live-streaming the raid on social media.

David and Alexandra were verbally abused and slandered by the activists, who called them "murderers and rapists".

“The activists just invaded the property. I didn't know which way to run, which way to hide, so I just went with them. They proceeded to walk into the main feedlot ...then get a group photo, you know, smiling. And all my cattle, [along] that laneway, rushed, jumped fences. It was a nightmare.” David said.

The Crisis Response

The McNamee family managed the invasion by remaining calm during the crisis and avoiding confrontation – with the activists live-streaming the raid, any aggressive response could be used against the family.

David called police and they, in turn, called for back-up. Meanwhile, the few weekend staff on site at the time focused on blocking laneways, containing cattle movement, and ushering the activists around to minimise further harm to the livestock.

The unexpectedly tense and stressful Saturday didn't finish with the departure of the activities. It took the McNamees and the staff several hours to restore the feedlot to a normal state.

The aftermath was confronting, both personally and professionally for the McNamees. The family - proud of what they had built - suddenly felt unsafe in their own workplace.

Staff were shaken, cattle welfare and biosecurity had been compromised.



Crisis Communications

The invasion drew intense media scrutiny, with journalists from all of the major national television, radio, newspaper and online outlets turning their attention to Millmerran to cover the story.

Reporters and film crews flew in from interstate and were camped at the front gates Lemontree chasing comments from David and his family.

He turned to his industry bodies for advice and support, with industry leaders easing the burden on the McNamees by speaking to the media about the invasion and the risk it posed to the family, their animals and the industry.

“ We were inundated by calls. You've got to...just get their names and say, we'll get back to you. Think about what you're going to say, talk to your industry bodies and get their advice before you talk to any media.” David said.



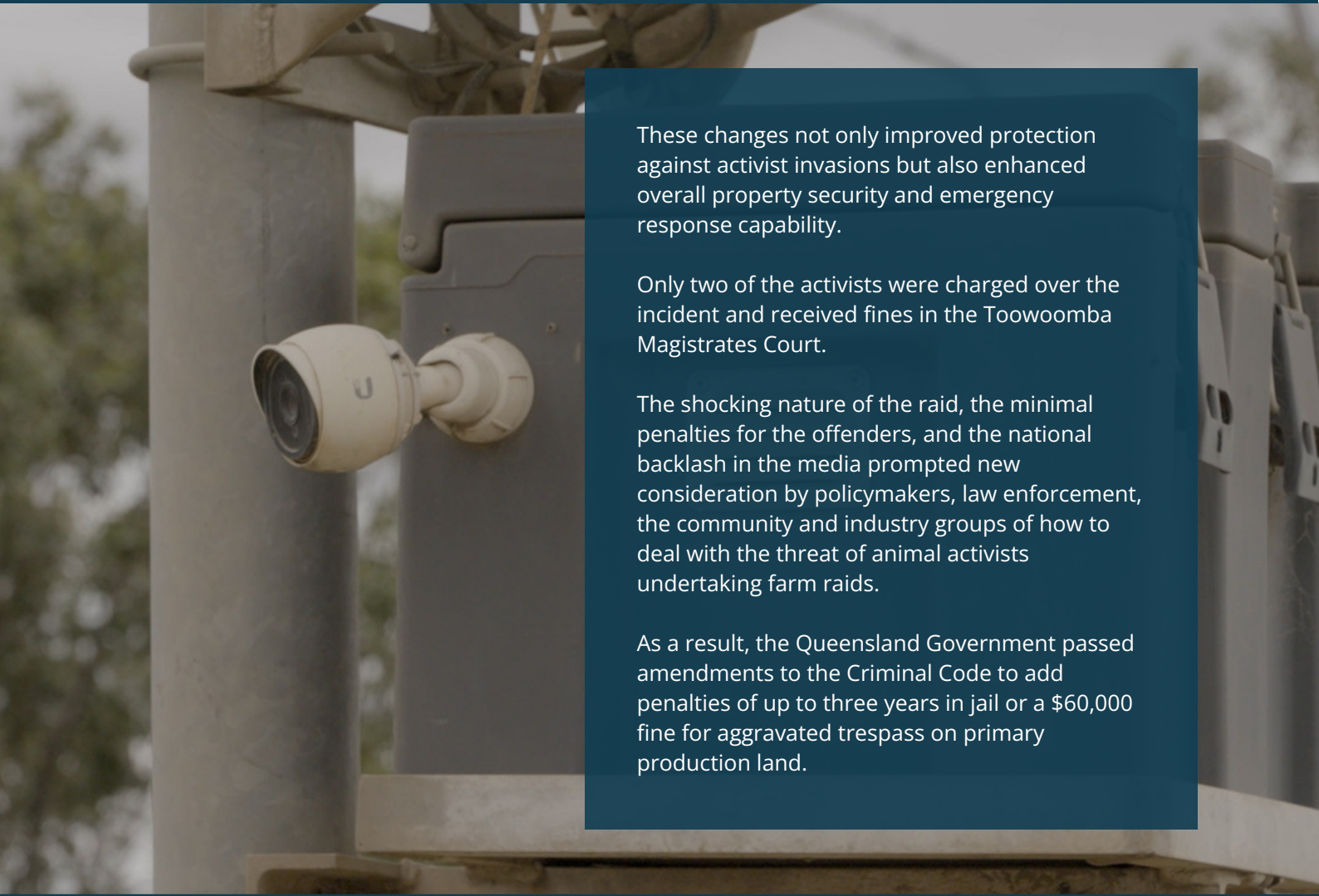
The aftermath and lessons learned

The McNamees' experience raised collective awareness amongst feedlot operators, farmers and industry groups of the real-time risk of activist incursions. David McNamee has shared a number of key lessons for other farmers to consider:

- Stay composed and prioritise safety—both for yourself and your staff;
- Contact police immediately;
- Avoid physical confrontation and document the incident if possible;
- Carefully manage public communication messages;
- Plan ahead by reviewing security, training staff, and establishing clear procedures for emergencies or activist incursions.

In the aftermath, the company invested in new strategies to strengthen security and preparedness, including installing cameras across the feedlot and ensuring staff carried mobile phones to communicate more easily and record evidence.

“If anything like this happens again, (the staff) can film it and at least get the faces of the activists so that the police can then charge them.” David said.



These changes not only improved protection against activist invasions but also enhanced overall property security and emergency response capability.

Only two of the activists were charged over the incident and received fines in the Toowoomba Magistrates Court.

The shocking nature of the raid, the minimal penalties for the offenders, and the national backlash in the media prompted new consideration by policymakers, law enforcement, the community and industry groups of how to deal with the threat of animal activists undertaking farm raids.

As a result, the Queensland Government passed amendments to the Criminal Code to add penalties of up to three years in jail or a \$60,000 fine for aggravated trespass on primary production land.

Managing communications during a crisis

This project is a collaboration between the Queensland Farmers' Federation (QFF) and the Queensland Government to support Queensland farmers.

QFF is the united voice of agriculture in Queensland, representing the collective interests of peak agriculture industry organisations (both state and national) to build a strong future for Queensland's agriculture sector.

To deliver the skills and training component of the Managing Communications during a Crisis project, QFF has partnered with Blue Hill Agency – an agriculture communications company – to equip farmers with tools to better handle communication during a crisis.

This project provides training sessions for stakeholders and farmers to prepare them to navigate future crises, ensuring a coordinated and responsive communication approach that mitigates risks, enhances decision-making, and maintains the integrity of businesses during disruptive events. The goal is to build a culture of preparedness and resilience through improved communication and crisis management practices.





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Access Crisis Communication Resources

The Managing Communications During a Crisis project provides practical tools, resources and training to help Queensland farmers prepare for and respond to unexpected events.

The Lemontree Feedlot invasion highlighted the importance of planning ahead, staying calm under pressure and carefully managing communications during a crisis.

Scan the QR code to access resources, guides and training materials developed through this project.



Additional Media Resources

For further information about the Lemontree Feedlot invasion and its impact on the agricultural community, readers can explore the following ABC News articles:

Animal activist protest a harrowing experience for family feedlot

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2019-08-03/animal-activist-protest-harrowing-experience-for-family-feedlot/11376768>

Protesters charged with trespass over mass property invasion

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-04-05/protesters-charged-with-trespass-over-mass-property-invasion/10976572>

These articles provide additional perspectives on the incident, the response from the McNamee family and the broader discussion around farm security, biosecurity and activist incursions.