

Killer barbs hit wildlife

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ENVIRONMENT REPORTER

WILDLIFE carers have called on cattlemen to abandon the use of barbed wire because it kills thousands of native animals each year.

They say that cattlemen should replace the top one or two strands with plain wire wherever possible.

Wildlife carer Daryl Dickson, of Mungarra Lodge Sanctuary in the Kennedy Valley north of Cardwell, said an endangered mahogany glider died on a barbed wire fence last week near her home.

Ms Dickson said about 90 per cent of gliders in care over the past 15 years had been injured on fences.

"That, of course, is only the tip of the iceberg. Lots of other species of glider get trapped too," she said.

"Thirty-eight gliders were found dead on one fence on a cattle property west of Townsville.

Research by scientist Carol Booth found that barbed wire kills thousands of bats, birds, gliders, kangaroos and wallabies each year.

AgForce president Brent Finlay said he understood the concerns but did not know of any alternative to barbed wire.

"Most landholders really care for the environment, especially wildlife," he said.

"Barbed wire is a lot about trying to educate cattle. If they get close, they get an adverse outcome. It helps livestock to respect fences."

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Brent Finlay**

Mr Finlay said even quiet and often-handled stock such as dairy cattle would push through and damage fences.

He said he had seen animals entangled and anyone who could use plain wire or an electrified strand at the top should do so.

"No one wants to see animals hurt, that's for sure," he said.

Dr Booth said there was little awareness of the issue because there was so much barbed wire in Australia and most animals entrapped were scavenged from fences by wildlife.

More than 60 species had been recorded entangled, including squirrel and sugar gliders, bettong, koalas, wallaroos, quails and cranes.

Ms Dickson said she understood that in areas where there were wild cattle, barbed wire might be a deterrent but there were many situations where it was not essential.

