

Rogue cattle pose threat

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Sam Bettess' vehicle was written off after he hit a cow on the Great Northern Highway, about 5km from Willare.

Cattle roaming free between Broome and Derby have been involved in 32 vehicle accidents over the past five years, including one fatality and another requiring medical attention.

Eighteen Kimberley Brahmans were recorded on the Great Northern Highway, 12 on Derby Highway and two on Broome Highway.

And 68 of the dead animals were removed from the same stretches of road at the expense of Main Roads - apart from Broome Highway - from June, 2013, to October, 2014.

The figures released by Transport Minister Dean Nalder in State Parliament have prompted local police to warn that stray cows were a "reality" and have urged motorists to exercise caution.

Derby police officer-in-charge David Dench said the most effective way to avoid potential accidents with the beasts was to obey the speed limit and not drive while under fatigue.

"This has become a reality in our region," he said.

Broome resident Sam Bettess had a lucky escape last July when his four-wheel-drive struck a cow about 8pm on the Great Northern Highway.

"I was towing a boat and had the wife and our two kids in the vehicle. It was a very scary experience," he said.

In response to questions from MLC Robin Chapple in State Parliament, Mr Nalder revealed the owner of the animals was unknown.

He said adjoining pastoral leases were Yeeda, Roebuck Plains and Mowanjum as well as unallocated crown land.

Mr Chapple said Main Roads and the Pastoral Land Board should be doing more to ensure pastoralists carried out proper maintenance of their fences, especially on major thoroughfares such as the Great Northern Highway.

But Mr Nalder said fenced properties have been known to be damaged by storms, fires or by the cattle themselves or by gates being left open for extended periods of time.

He said all Pastoral Lands Board directives and notices were issued with regard to specific circumstances of the case and would prevail until the board was satisfied - a process he admitted that could take "several years".

"The time it takes for lessees to comply also varies and can take anywhere between one month and several years," Mr Nalder said.

Mr Chapple said the statistics did not paint an accurate picture of the sheer number of cattle roaming free over this section of highway or the risk to drivers.

"I recently received a report of 97 cattle counted in just one morning on one small section of the Great Northern Highway," he said.

"This same report also claimed there are very obvious sections of downed fence and in some areas, gates that are wide open or non-existent.

"As someone who drives this section of road several times annually - my home residence is in Derby and I have an office in Broome - I have also seen large numbers of cattle roaming the road verge."

Mr Chapple said the Department of Transport and Main Roads should be doing everything in their power to upgrade Great Northern Highway "to ensure it is safe for road users".

"I would go so far as to say this is a case of out of sight and out of mind for the department and quite frankly, it is an attitude faced by Kimberley residents all too often," he said.

Under Main Roads current policy, once fencing is installed the pastoralist is responsible for any ongoing maintenance or replacement.

Mr Nalder said the fencing of highways alone was not economically sustainable because of the vastness of the State's pastoral region and the cost per kilometre would be about \$5000.

The State Government has established a Pastoral Fencing Advisory Group chaired by Main Roads to reduce the risk of crashes through "management solutions" rather than relying on fencing alone.