Anti German Sentiments towards German Shepherd Dogs.

Introduction:

The purpose of this research paper is to investigate whether or not there was a spill over of anti-German feeling from the Great War and the ban placed on German shepherd dogs in the inter-war period in Australia.

German Shepherds were used by both sides to fight during the Great War [1914-1918]. But the British didn’t want to call their dogs German so they decided on the name Alsatian. The original name is German shepherd Dog. During the Great War Britain named it Alsatian, after the German French border area of Alsace-Lorraine.

From the research undertaken so far, it needs to be concluded that there is no evidence to support the claim that the German shepherd importation and breeding ban was motivated by anti-German feelings.

In having said this, there seems to be very little research, scientific or sound arguments for the ban.

In fact the ban and sterilization of German shepherd dogs was motivated by an article that appeared in the Country Life and Stock and Station Journal 3 May 1927, p.1.

This article was the basis of a national movement, which spurred on the Graziers’ Federal Council of Australia, to lobby both the Commonwealth government and consequently the State governments.

The article “The Alsatian” was very influential and was cited in a number of reports, discussions and debates.
THE ALSATIAN
HARMLESS PET OR MENACE?

FEARS FOR OUR FLOCKS.

The Alsatian, that huge, majestic dog imported from Germany, is at present the idol of the dog fancier. Fabulous prices, it is said, are being paid for this highly valuable canine, which is becoming widely known throughout at least three States—New South Wales, Queensland, and South Australia.

Until recently the importation of Alsatians was a rarity, but last year eighteen were brought from their continental place of origin to this State. They comprised eleven males and seven females.

Even the best informed of dog fanciers disagree in regard to the history and the temperament of the Alsatian. Some declare that it is docile, affectionate, obedient and intelligent. Others say that its huge, square jaws are not to be trusted owing to the splash of wolf in the Alsatian’s origin.

CAUSE OF CONSTERNATION.

It is this possibility that is causing some consternation among the sheep and cattle breeders of the three States mentioned.

A number of P.P. Boards in New South Wales have carried resolutions requesting the Stock Branch to get an embargo against the further importation of the breed.

Officers of the branch are sympathetic, and discussed the question at length with the Queensland authorities, when it was complained that dogs with a splash of the Alsatian were invading the northern part of his State.

A FEDERAL MATTER.

The Kennel Association of New South Wales, too, has entered its protest.

No action, however, can be taken by any State, as the matter is one for the Commonwealth Government, to whom the Queensland authorities have appealed, so far, unavailingly.

What the sheep breeders fear is that the Alsatians, crossing with the sheep and cattle dogs of the outback, will sooner or later establish a blood relationship with the dingo.

An infusion of Alsatian blood in the sheep and cattle dogs of the far west, it is claimed, would be quite/sufficient to produce a breed that would be a serious menace to the settler and his flocks or herds.
Graziers’: Federal Council of Australia.

This group represented a number of different organizations’ throughout Australia and were extremely powerful representing the rural interests of Australian farmers, graziers, pastoralists, stockowners and orchardists groups.

In 1927 the Graziers ’Federal Council of Australia was represented by the following organizations:

In 1927 the Graziers’ Association of New South Wales
The United Graziers’ Association of Queensland
The Stockowners’ Association of South Australia
The Pastoralists’ Association of West Darling
The Pastoralists’ Association of Western Australia
The Tasmanian Farmers’, Stockowners’ and Orchardists’ Association
The Pastoralists’ Union of Southern Riverina
The Pastoralists’ Association of Victoria
The Northern Territory Pastoral Lessees’ Association

These groups were extremely powerful in lobbying both the Commonwealth and State governments on issues effecting the rural community, farmers and pastoralists.

They mounted High Court challenges on Land taxes
They put together Awards, including Federal Pastoral Awards
Peak body for the selling of Australian Wool.

This organization wielded considerable political clout both at the Federal and State level of government.

In the inter-war years [1921-1939] there was considerable political chatter in all of Australia’s newspapers and periodicals about the “Alsatian Wolf Dog”

This was the label placed on the German shepherd breed.

The newspapers were full of articles about the origins of German Shepherds’ and the link with wolves in Europe. There was other articles about Alsatians being “sheep dogs:
In South Australia the Adelaide Observer, ran a series of articles about the Alsatian Wolf Dog.

For example in 1922
This was followed up by the Adelaide Observer on the again running the line that the German shepherd dog was dangerous.

Observer (Adelaide, SA : 1905 - 1931), Saturday 6 August 1927, page 15

ALSATIAN WOLF-DOGS.
Are They a Danger?
The fear of certain pastoralists that Alsatian dogs - will mate with dingoes appears to have no foundation in fact (writes a correspondent). It is probable that much of the antipathy is the result of the English translation of their name. In America this breed is called the "German shepherd dog." These fine dogs have centuries of sheep dog training behind them, and it is unlikely that aces with such strong affection for their masters will desert them for the hard life of the Australian bush.

Dog fanciers have, out of curiosity, in isolated cases, mated Alsatian with captive wolves. The progeny, however, are not recognised by the European kennel clubs, and the crossing is discouraged. Most of these crossings took place some 40 years ago, and even should the line have been continued, experts state that the wolf strain would rapidly die out.

Alsatians differ from wolves in many important anatomical particulars, such as shape of head and feet, and carriage of tail. In the Alsatian the eye opens more at a right angle, whereas in the wolf and its descendants the eyes are very oblique, and placed in the direction of the nose.

These are peculiarities which would, in the opinion of experts, infallibly betray the possession of wolf blood.

Alsatians are very popular in the United States of America, where conditions are similar to ours. During the war British soldiers recognised the qualities of the breed, which, in France and Belgium are extensively used by peasants for working sheep, drawing carts, and similar duties, and have imported many of them into England. The breed is one of the most intelligent, useful, and fearless in the dog world. They make admirable watchdogs, and are at the same time gentle and quiet in disposition, showing great affection for their masters.
Articles throughout the twenties in the popular press in Australia were advocating negative sentiments about the Alsatian Dog and casting spurious claims about the breed. What is interesting about most of the newspaper accounts are that their concerns are not based on actual factual evidence of the German Shepherd Dog behaviours or even anecdotal evidence of stock worrying by the dogs, but the name, the look, and the image of the breed was sufficient to worry farmers, ranchers, grazier and pastoralist groups. - Guilt by Association.

Support for the breed only came from the Commonwealth Director of Veterinary Hygiene – Dr W. A. N. Robertson. Under his leadership he commissioned two reports, which were tabled in the Commonwealth Parliament.

A report on the subject was furnished by Dr W. A. N. Robertson. Director, Division of Veterinary Hygiene, Commonwealth Department of Health.

On September 1928, Dr Robertson tabled the report “Alsatian Dogs-Admission to Australia. Examination of Evidence For and Against”. See Appendix 1

This was a well researched and balanced report.
Turning Point for the German Shepherd.

The Graziers’ Federal Council of Australia held its fortieth Convention in Adelaide on the 29th June 1927. On the agenda was Item 17- Alsatian Dogs.

At this convention, there was a motion put by the Graziers’ Association of New South Wales.

“Item 17”: Alsatian Dogs:
That consideration be given to the advisableness or otherwise of requesting the Commonwealth Authorities to prohibit the importation or breeding of Alsatian Dogs”.

When reading the arguments to support the motion, the following reasons were provided.

“The Alsatian that huge, majestic dog imported from Germany, is at present the idol of the dog fancies. Fabulous prices, it is said, are being paid for this kingly canine, which is becoming widely known throughout at least three States-New South Wales, Queensland, and South Australia.

Until recently the importation was a rarity, but last year 18 was brought from continental place of origin to this State. They comprised eleven males and seven females. Even the best informed of dog breeders disagree in respect to the history and temperament of the Alsatian.

Some declare that it is docile, affectionate, obedient and intelligent. Others say that its huge square jaws are not to be trusted owing to the plash of wolf in the Alsatians’ origin.

Causes of Consternation.

It is the possibility that is causing some consternation among sheep and cattle breeders of the three States mentioned.

A number of P.P. Boards in New South Wales have carried resolutions requesting the Stock Branch to get an embargo against the further importation of the breed.

Officers of the branch are sympathetic, and discussed the question at length with the Queensland authorities when it was complained that dogs with a splash of the Alsatian were invading the northern part of this State.

A Federal Matter.

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No action however can be taken by any State, as the matter is one for the Commonwealth Government, to whom the Queensland authorities have appealed, so far, unavailingly.

What the sheep breeders fear is that the Alsatian, crossing with the sheep and cattle dogs of the outback, will sooner or later establish a blood relationship with the dingo.

An infusion of Alsatian blood in the sheep and cattle dogs of the far west, it is claimed, would be quite sufficient to produce a breed that would be a serious menace to the settler and his flocks or herds.”

SIR GRAHAM WADDELL.
The information we have had, verbal and otherwise, seems to throw a grave doubt as regards this dog. They say there are two breeds—One is of a docile nature, and the other the opposite. I think that we, as stock owners and sheep owners, are perfectly justified in asking the Commonwealth Government not to bring in anything here that might prove doubtful. We have too many instances of things that have been imported into Australia and which have caused tremendous trouble to the industries. In view of that and the grave doubt as regards the character of this particular dog we would be perfectly justified in asking the Commonwealth government to put a restriction on that particular dog.

Moved: MR GRAHAM WADDELL

MR TOUT—I second the motion.

MR TOUT—These dogs were only imported a short time ago and I have seen four or five in Brisbane lately.

MR GORDON—There was a dozen bred in one litter in Sydney a few days ago.

Carried Unanimously.

The Commonwealth and State authorities moved swiftly to prohibit the importation or breeding of Alsatian Dogs.

Prohibition of Import of Alsatian Dogs

Throughout Australia, newspapers ran with stories, advocating Sterilization.
ALSATIAN DOGS
Sterilisation Advocated

BRISBANE, August 26.
Mr. Bedford asked in the Assembly if the Minister for Agriculture would introduce legislation for the sterilisation of Alsatian dogs before they became a menace to the pastoral industry and the public generally. He drew attention to a report from Sydney of an Alsatian dog attacking and injuring its master.

Mr. King said the Department was now alive to the danger which might arise from introduced species of animals, and appropriate action could be taken if the necessity occurred.

ALSATIAN DOGS.
IMPORT PROHIBITED.
Danger to Flocks.

MELBOURNE, Thursday.
It was announced to-day that the importation of Alsatian dogs into Australia will be prohibited by a regulation to be gazetted after the Federal Executive Council meets on Monday.

The decision was reached at a recent meeting of the Cabinet. The regulation, it is stated, is the result of representations made to the Ministry by pastoralists, who stated that Alsatians presented a potential danger to flocks. They pointed out that if the Alsatian became wild and mated with dingoes, the cross-breed would combine the intelligence and ferocity of the Alsatian with the cunning of the dingoes.

Alsatian dogs already in Australia are not affected by the Government's decision, and any action taken to destroy or sterilise them will have to be taken by the States.

The Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria has accepted entries for Alsatians for its annual show next month. The council has decided to carry on as in former years, and it expects a display equal to that of last year.
The Sydney Morning Herald reported that the importation of Alsatian dogs will be prohibited by a regulation.

The Adelaide Register reported:

Register (Adelaide, SA : 1901 - 1929), Tuesday 15 November 1927, page 5

South Australia’s Response:
At the conference of Ministers for Agriculture on the 11th June 1929, Item 17 dealt with the issue of prohibition of importation of Alsatian Dogs in South Australia.

At this meeting the feeling was that the Commonwealth prohibited importation for five years did not go far enough. There was some talk that the States have the power to destroy existing stock of dogs.

The Stockowners’ Association of South Australia requested:

“...We know that they are sheep killers and, personally, I have a hatred of the animal. After listening this morning to the experience of one gentleman, it appears they are not only destructive to animals; but they are also very dangerous to human beings. I think we ought to take a definite stand and see that all these now in Australia are absolutely destroyed, even though compensation has to be paid to the owners.”

There were other government representatives who believed Alsatian Dog owners should receive no compensation, for their dog being put down.

H.V.C.Thorby believed:

“To me it is unthinkable that we should prohibit their importation from now on, and yet allow people who have those dogs here to go on breeding them in the various States. I quite agree with Hon.Mr.Walker that they should be sterilised. , instead of having to indulge in their wholesale slaughter.”

In the debate they advocated sterilisation of both male and female dogs.

After more emotive discussion, the Ministers agreed and moved the following motion:

“That this conference of Ministers of Agriculture place on record its appreciation of the Commonwealth Government in prohibiting the further importation of Alsatian dogs and agrees to recommend to their respective Governments to introduce legislation at the earliest opportunity to destroy or sterilise all Alsatian dogs in their respective States.”

Motion was carried.

Their fate was sealed.

There was little support in the papers, for the Alsatian.

Support for the Alsatian, as a valuable farm dog and sheepdog came from the Dr Robertson, Director of Veterinary Hygiene. They commissioned research, from all parts of Australia. The conclusion of their extensive research showed that the Alsatian was a valuable sheepdog and recommended the dog not be interfered with.
Footnotes

1  SRSA GRG 10 /000141. Conferences on Agriculture 1929-1933. 1929 pp 248-252
2  SRSA GRG 10 /000141. Conferences on Agriculture 1929-1933. 1929 pp 251-252
3  SLNSW “The Alsatian” From Country Life and Stock and Station Journal (SRL RAV/FM4/1086) on 3 May 1927.P1
4  Various South Australian Newspapers
5  Robertson Dr .W.A.N. Report Alsatian Dogs-Admission to Australia. Examination of Evidence For and Against. 19/9/1928


Robertson Dr .W.A.N. Report Alsatian Dogs-Admission to Australia. Examination of Evidence For and Against. 19/9/1928

Appendix 1:

Dr W.A.N.Robertson, Director, Division of Veterinary Hygiene, Commonwealth Department of Health. Report Alsatian Dogs –Admission to Australia. Examination of Evidence For and Against.19/9/1928
Re Alsatian Dogs.

The Director-General.

I have to report having examined the evidence submitted for and against the Alsatian dog and attach hereto a summary of the file and resume of the evidence.

Those who desire the prohibition of the introduction of the Alsatian assert that—

(a) the dog is vicious;
(b) it has wolf blood in its veins;
(c) it is a sheep killer;
(d) if crossed with the dingo it would be dangerous.

It is estimated that there are between 500 and 700 representatives of the breed in Australia and only one case has been reported of a dog attacking a human being. This is the case of Miss Pennington of St. Arnaud. In this case Mr. Pennington has informed me that the dog was "angry" from the time of its arrival.

That any dog may on occasion attack man must be admitted, and several cases are recorded in English newspapers. The Secretary, Shepherd Dog Association of Australia, however, states that in many of these cases it has been proved that the dog concerned was not an Alsatian. In any case since there are some 1,000 or 5,000 representatives of the breed registered each year in Great Britain, the number of cases is small. It is probable that every day some person is bitten by a dog of some sort. The last reported case occurred in Sydney when a greyhound sprang at its owner's throat.

Numerous instances are given on the file of the Alsatians love for children.

The charge that there is wolf blood in the dog is not supported, and in any case it has been bred in stud book lines in Germany for the past 27 years, so that, even if present, such taint would be almost entirely eliminated. The contention that the progeny of the wolf and the dog is sterile is probably correct.

Only two cases are reported in Australia of Alsatians attacking sheep. Against this is the statement by some pastoralists and many owners that they take the dog amongst sheep without fear. For many years the dog has been used on the Continent of Europe as a shepherd dog. It must be admitted that any dog may attack sheep, and there is no worse offender than the fox terrier and the cross-bred sheep dog. For years complaints have been lodged, particularly by those adjacent to towns, of loss of sheep caused by all breeds of dogs, and it is safe to say that some sheep are killed every day by other than Alsatians. Instances are given on the file of the Alsatian being the playmate of lambs, and running freely about sheep without causing injury.

That a cross between the Alsatian and the dingo would be dangerous is possible, but no more so than a cross with some of the larger breeds of dogs, such as kangaroo dogs and cattle dogs now existent. In olden days the Alsatian was used as a guard to keep wolves from the flock, and I think it would be probable that he would be very destructive to dingoes. The Alsatian is a home loving dog not given to wandering, and would be less likely to cross with the dingo than any other breed.

Summarised the position is that any dog may attack man or sheep since there are savage representatives in every breed, but I can see no reason why the Alsatian should be single out as being either vicious or a sheep killer.

(sgd) W.J. Robertson
Director
Division of Veterinary Hygiene.

19/9/28.
THE CASE AGAINST THE ALSATIANS.

Various organisations of pastoralists have entered a protest against the further introduction of the dog on the grounds that -

(a) it is savage;
(b) it has wolf blood in its veins;
(c) it is a sheep killer;
(d) if crossed with the dingo it would prove a dangerous pest.

With regard to -

(a) 'The dog is savage'

the evidence produced consists of newspaper cuttings from English papers in which it is reported that the dog has on occasion attacked Man. The only case reported in Australia is that in which an Alsatian dog attacked Miss Pennington a resident of Victoria.

(b) 'The dog has wolf blood in its veins'

No evidence is produced in support of this. Statements are made, 'the dog looks like a wolf', 'the dog has a strain of wolf in him', 'it is more than probable he is vicious'.

(c) 'The dog is a sheep killer'

The only evidence in support of this statement is -

(1) newspaper paragraphs from English papers;
(2) newspaper paragraph from Western Australia that sheep had been killed in the Toodyay district (It was later proved that the dog responsible was not an Alsatian but a Russian wolf-hound cross);
(3) two dogs in the Coleraine district in Victoria killed sheep and had to be destroyed.

(d) 'If crossed with the dingo it would prove a dangerous pest.'

No evidence in support of this statement can be produced, but it is suggested that the admitted intelligence of the Alsatian would be a dangerous factor to contend with if crossing took place.
THE CASE FOR THE ALSATIAN.

Associations of breeders and numerous individuals who are owners — many of them being pastoralists — supported by a petition of breeders and owners claim —

(a) the dog is not savage;
(b) it has no wolf blood in its veins;
(c) it is not a sheep killer;
(d) is more likely to kill dingoes than to mate with them, and even if crossed it would be no greater menace than crosses with other breeds.

With regard to —

(a) 'the dog is not savage'

numerous letters are submitted from owners who use the dog as a guard and playmate for children. The claim is made that many of the cases reported in England of attacks by Alsatians have been proved in the Court and also by statutory depositions to be press propaganda and not supported by facts, other dogs being responsible and the Alsatians being blamed.

Sir William McDowall reports over 4,000 were registered in England during the six months ended 30/6/26 exceeding the number of all other breeds, and it is claimed that with the number of representatives of the breed in England if vicious many cases would be reported. It is claimed that the dog is not as vicious as many other breeds. It is admitted that like any other breed of dog it will bite if it is provoked and like any other breed of dog, savage representatives may be found.

(b) 'It has wolf blood in its veins'

It is submitted that efforts have been made to cross the Alsatian with the wolf but the progeny have always been sterile. For the last 39 years breeding the dog has always been controlled by a stud book which would preclude wolf blood being present in its veins for that period.

It is further claimed that the dog has no more wolf blood than any other breed, and that all dogs descend from the wild dog or the wolf.

(c) 'It is not a sheep killer'

It is submitted that for 300 years the dog has been used as a sheep dog in Germany. In the early days it was used as a wolf killer. It has for many years now been used only as a shepherd dog. It is claimed that it is not naturally a sheep killer. If neglected it may, like any other breed, adopt the vice.

Evidence is submitted that the dog will play with lambs, mix with sheep, fowls and ducks without attempting to kill. The claim is supported by the Consul-General for Belgium and several letters from pastoralists in Australia where it is shown that the dog is a splendid worker and never attempts to kill.

(a) 'If crossed with the dingo it would prove a dangerous pest'

It is claimed that such a cross, if it occurred, would be no more serious than the crosses which now take place between the dingo and other breeds, and that crossing with the Alsatian is less likely than with any other breed for the reason that it is a dog which does not wander.