Submission No 11

PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS AMENDMENT (VIRTUAL STOCK FENCING) BILL 2024

Name: Mr Raymond Hall

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Background

We are principally a cattle breading operation, based in the Southern Tablelands of NSW, running on average 1,000 cows on 2,500 hectares. The property is totally pasture improved and we rotationally graze, moving cattle, on average, weekly.

We envisage many benefits from the adoption of the virtual fencing technology. I would like to elaborate on the benefits relating to animal welfare and animal health relative to the current situation.

Fencing

We currently have three types of fencing:

1. Approximately 160 kilometres of conventional fencing, incorporating 4 barbed wires and 3 plain wires, attached to steel posts that are 3.5 meters apart and 1.3 metres high. The vast majority of this fence relates to the property boundaries.
2. Approximately 40 kilometres of electric fencing, incorporating a single plain wire, attached to steel posts that are 10 metres apart, 0.8 metres high and a voltage of 10,000 to 13,000. This fencing type is substantially cheaper and it has allowed us to reduce the size of our paddocks and better manage the grazing of our pastures.
3. Approximately 30 kilometres of fencing where we have modified our conventional fence (1.) by changing the bottom wire to an insulated electric wire with a voltage ranging between 10,000 and 13,000. We have done this to facilitate the better control of our 1,000 nanny goats.

I will attempt to highlight the issues regarding our current fencing infrastructure with regard to:

Animal welfare

- Both the conventional and electric fences rely on pain to be effective; the stock learn very quickly to stay clear of these barriers, but they have to experience being pricked, cut or severely shocked first, and most likely several times.
- The conventional fence is well known to be a calf trap, for two reasons; a percentage of calves are born against a fence line and a number ‘wriggle’ under the bottom wire and, a number, not knowing what a fence is, run into it and end up on the other side, separated from their mothers. They die within days. We check our fence lines every second day during calving and re-mother 10 to 20 calves per year.
- We lose about 10 goats a year when they attempt to push through, or under, a fence and fail and when they reverse their horns get caught, resulting in an awful, slow death.
- We had a serious outbreak of ‘Pinkeye’ this Spring, effecting about 10% of cows and calves in some mobs. The animal is totally blind for 2 to 6 weeks. You can probably appreciate the injuries and distress the animal experiences during this period when encountering fences.

Animal Health

- A conventional fence does not ‘separate’ livestock, there is still extensive contact through the fence. With virtual fencing the boundary between mobs of livestock could be many metres, effectively preventing mob to mob contact. The ability to do this would have a major impact on limiting the spread of infectious and contagious diseases, some examples being; Leptospirosis, Calf scours, Pinkeye, Pestivirus, Vibriosis and Bovine Respiratory Disease.
- A conventional fence does not separate animals from neighbouring properties.
- Using Pinkeye (bovine kerato-conjunctivitis) as an example. It is passed on from one animal to another therefore you would like to be able to isolate infected animals. Currently, your only option is to move the mob and leave the infected animals where they are. The problem is you rarely have enough other paddocks to facilitate this option. If you could create a quarantined area within the paddock with a virtual fence, effectively separating infected stock insitu, the spread of diseases could be handled far more effectively.