

**Submission
No 27**

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

Organisation: Regional Development Australia Southern NSW & ACT

Date Received: 9 May 2024



An Australian Government Initiative



9 May 2024

The Chair
Investment, Industry, and Regional Development Committee
NSW Parliament House
6 Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000
via: investmentindustry@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Re: Inquiry into the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment

This submission by Regional Development Australia Southern NSW & ACT (RDASNA) is to provide feedback on the inquiry into the [Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment \(Virtual Stock Fencing\) Bill 2024](#), in response to the invitation extended by the Committee on Investment, Industry and Regional Development Chair, Roy Butler MP via an email received on the 9th of April 2024.

RDASNA is represented by local leaders and staff who are passionate about the communities in the Southern New South Wales (NSW) and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), with a key focus on investing in people, places, services, local industry, and economies. Part of a national network of 50 Regional Development Australia (RDA) Boards across Australia, RDASNA's role is to support stakeholders from the ACT, and nine Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Southern NSW, including Bega Valley, Eurobodalla, Goulburn Mulwaree, Hilltops, Queanbeyan-Palerang, Snowy Monaro, Upper Lachlan, Wingecarribee and Yass Valley. RDASNA works with all levels of government, business, and community groups to promote economic and social development in these regions by facilitating regional projects, collaboration, communication, and advocacy.

We thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide feedback as part of this consultation process.

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment | Community Survey

[Regional Development Australia Southern NSW and ACT](#) (RDASNA) conducted an online survey to seek community feedback to help shape our submission into the inquiry into the [Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment \(Virtual Stock Fencing\) Bill 2024](#).

The survey provided background information and links to the inquiry webpage and supporting documentation. Community members were asked to answer a series of multiple-choice questions and were provided with the opportunity to contribute free text comments.

The following background information was provided as part of the survey.

Background Information

A proposed amendment to the [Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979](#), known as the [Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment \(Virtual Stock Fencing\) Bill 2024](#), introduced by Mr. Philip Donato, MP, aims to integrate modern technological advancements into livestock management practices by legally permitting the use of virtual stock fencing devices.

Overview of the Proposed Amendment

The [amendment](#) aims to exclude virtual stock fencing devices from the definition of prohibited electrical devices used on animals, thereby allowing their use for confining, tracking, and monitoring stock animals.

Areas for Consideration

The amendment introduces virtual stock fencing, a technology that uses GPS and wireless technologies to create invisible boundaries for livestock, eliminating the need for traditional fencing by controlling the movement and location of animals via audio cues and electrical stimuli.

This technology proposes several considerations:

- **Flexibility and Efficiency:** Allows for dynamic grazing management, optimising pasture usage with reduced labour and infrastructure costs associated with traditional fencing ([Lee et al., 2009](#)).
- **Animal Welfare:** Research indicates minimal stress responses to virtual fencing, suggesting an adaptation that is comparable to conventional methods, with potential to enhance overall welfare ([Lee et al., 2009](#); [Lee et al., 2008a](#)). In addition to this, virtual fencing may assist with reducing the risk of entanglement and injury to native animals, allowing wildlife to move freely and maintain natural migration, feeding, and breeding patterns.
- **Environmental Benefits:** The reduced need for physical fencing may contribute to less environmental impact and improved land management practices ([CSIRO Research](#)).
- **Adaptation Period:** The successful deployment of virtual fencing necessitates an initial period of adaptation and training for both livestock and handlers to ensure efficacy and minimise stress ([Lee et al., 2009](#)).
- **Ethical Considerations:** The ethical implications of utilising electrical stimuli for animal containment necessitate thorough consideration to ensure practices align with welfare standards ([Lee et al., 2009](#)).

As technology advances, it is essential to critically evaluate these considerations, balancing innovation with animal welfare and sustainable practices.

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment | Survey Participants

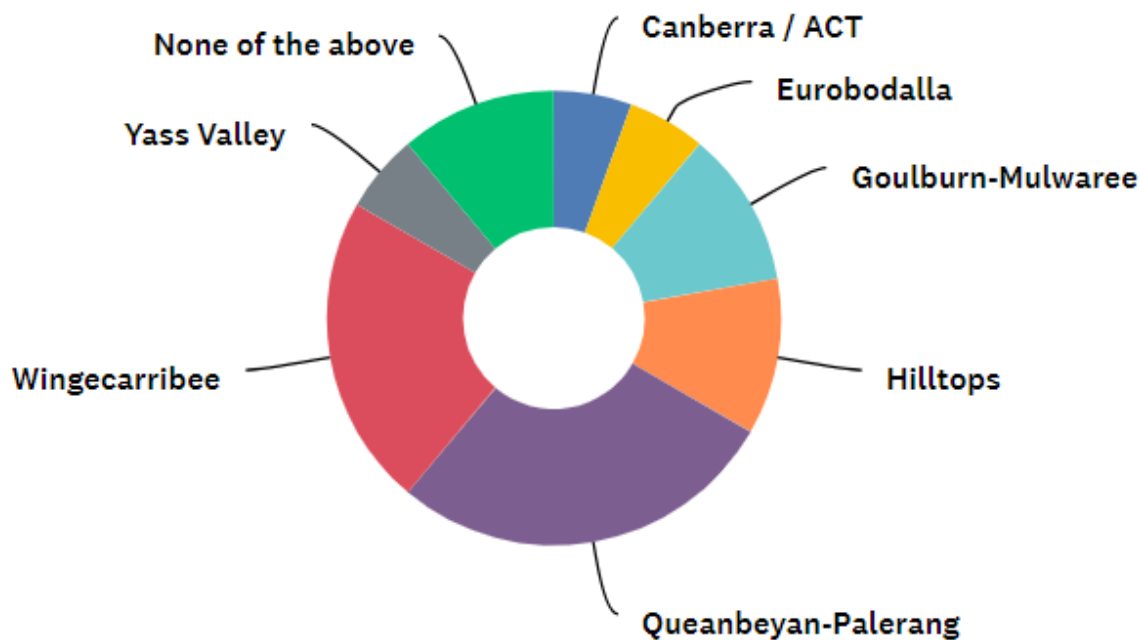
Demographics

Eighteen people started the survey, with two people disqualified due to being out of region. Nine people completed all survey questions.

The survey asked respondents to indicate their age group, with the following results:

- 65 year or older: 38.89%
- 55 - 64 years: 5.56%
- 45 - 54 years: 11.11%
- 35 - 44 years: 22.22%
- 25 - 34 years: 22.22%
- 18 - 24 years: 0%

The following chart presents the Local Government Area within the RDASNA network in which the respondent resides.



Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment | Community Feedback

The responses to the survey questions are presented below. Please note that some free text comments from participants have been modified to enhance clarity and correct spelling errors. All care has been taken to maintain meaning. Please also note that the views of participants presented in this submission may not reflect the views of Regional Development Australia Southern NSW & ACT.

Q. Please choose the options below that describe your role and / or experience. Tick all that apply.

Responses:

- Farmer or livestock owner – 33.33%
- Farmer - no livestock – 11.11%
- Member of an animal welfare organisation – 11.11%
- Member of an environmental group or organisation – 0%
- Agricultural technology provider – 0%
- Retailer of agriculture products – 0%
- Government or related regulatory body employee – 22.22%
- Research or academic institute employee or student – 0%
- Veterinarian or animal health professional – 11.11%
- None of the above – 22.22%
- Other – please specify.
 - Agricultural Consultant
 - Strong farming background with livestock
 - Student

Q. Have you read the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979? Click [here](#) to read the Act.

Responses:

- No – 22.22%
- Yes – 77.78%

Q. Have you read the provisions of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment (Virtual Stock Fencing) Bill 2024? Click [here to read the provisions](#).

Responses:

- No – 0%
- Yes – 100%

Q. Do you think that permitting virtual fencing under the proposed amendment may impact animal welfare?

Responses:

- No – 77.78%

- Yes – 22.22%

Please tell us how animal welfare may be impacted.

1. 'The abstract and study was based on a small sample with young animals. Not in a mob/feedlot where hundreds of animals can be confined prior to transport. Frightened or spooked animals behave differently. Virtual fencing, when utilised by staff to control a heard, could be utilised sadistically, possibly denying them food/water/ access to young. It's a thin edge of the wedge that additional tools could be integrated into the "electronic virtual fencing " enabling a person to shock or continue to shock/hurt a individual animal (s)A physical barrier helps define their space. Do you honestly believe that a few hundred/no thousand head of cattle are going to be kindly collared/trained/supervised by university farm staff prior to the fence being turned on? (as per Caroline Lee paper) The abuse of Electric prodders in the animal industry should just give you a clue as to how this system will be abused'.
2. 'Permitting virtual fencing under a proposed amendment could potentially impact animal welfare, and the extent of this impact would largely depend on various factors including the technology's effectiveness, implementation, and oversight. Here are some considerations:

Effectiveness of Virtual Fencing: Virtual fencing relies on technologies like GPS and electronic collars to create virtual boundaries for animals. The effectiveness of this technology in reliably containing animals within designated areas without causing undue stress or harm is crucial. If the virtual fencing system fails to work consistently or if animals frequently breach the boundaries due to technological issues, it could lead to welfare concerns such as animals getting lost or injured.

Animal Safety and Stress: The use of virtual fencing could potentially affect animal behaviour and stress levels. Animals might experience confusion, fear, or frustration if they encounter unexpected boundaries or if the technology causes discomfort (e.g., through electric stimuli from collars). It's essential to assess how animals respond to virtual fencing and whether it induces distress or compromises their natural behaviour.

Long-Term Health Impacts: Continuous exposure to virtual fencing systems could have long-term health implications for animals. For example, electronic collars used in virtual fencing might cause skin irritation or other physical discomfort over time. Assessing these potential health impacts on animals is crucial for determining the overall welfare implications.

Compliance and Enforcement: Ensuring proper compliance and enforcement of virtual fencing regulations is essential. If virtual fencing is used inappropriately or without adequate oversight, it could lead to misuse or abuse, resulting in negative consequences for animal welfare. **Alternatives and Considerations:** Before implementing virtual fencing, it's important to consider alternative methods of containment or management that might be more conducive to animal welfare. This could include traditional physical fencing or other non-invasive approaches that minimize stress and discomfort for animals.

In conclusion, while virtual fencing has the potential to offer certain benefits in terms of flexibility and cost-effectiveness, it's critical to evaluate its impact on animal welfare thoroughly. Careful consideration of technological limitations, animal responses, and regulatory frameworks is necessary to ensure that virtual fencing, if permitted, is implemented in a manner that prioritizes animal welfare and minimizes potential negative consequences'.

Q. Do you think that permitting virtual fencing under the proposed amendment may impact biosecurity?

Responses:

- No – 66.67%
- Yes – 33.33%

Please tell us how biosecurity may be impacted:

- ‘Accessing the use of virtual fencing allows boundary fencing in particular to be far more secure therefore limiting cross contamination between on-farm and travelling livestock and people. Boundary fences are mostly far from sight and sound, and therefore any discipline of movement will provide a source benefit to livestock health and enhance biosecurity’.
- ‘Stock yards contain animals physically. If the power goes off the animals, however well "trained or maimed in the process" will bolt through a virtual fence if driven/scared. Then what happens to these free running animals. Animals that haven't been educated by experienced stock people over the life of the animal’.
- ‘Permitting virtual fencing under a proposed amendment could indeed have implications for biosecurity, particularly depending on how it is implemented and managed. Biosecurity refers to measures aimed at preventing the introduction and spread of diseases or pests that could harm human, animal, or plant health, and virtual fencing could influence these efforts in several ways:

Control of Animal Movement: Virtual fencing can potentially aid in controlling the movement of animals within specified areas without the need for physical barriers. This controlled movement can help reduce the risk of disease spread by limiting contact between different animal populations or preventing animals from accessing sensitive areas where disease transmission might occur.

Monitoring and Surveillance: Virtual fencing systems often incorporate GPS tracking and monitoring capabilities. This technology can be utilized for real-time surveillance of animal movements, enabling early detection of any unauthorized incursions or irregular behaviour that might pose biosecurity risks. Prompt detection and response can help prevent potential disease outbreaks.

Quarantine and Isolation: In situations requiring quarantine or isolation of specific animal groups, virtual fencing can provide a practical means of confining animals without physical structures. This can be particularly useful during disease outbreaks to prevent further spread while maintaining necessary containment measures.

Integration with Disease Management Systems: Virtual fencing technology can potentially be integrated with broader disease management systems. For example, it could be linked to databases or alert systems that notify authorities of potential biosecurity breaches or disease-related patterns in animal movements.

However, it's important to consider potential challenges or limitations that could affect biosecurity:

Technological Reliability: The effectiveness and reliability of virtual fencing technology must be assured to prevent unexpected breaches or failures that could compromise biosecurity measures.

Regulatory Oversight: Proper regulation and oversight are essential to ensure that virtual fencing is used appropriately and in alignment with biosecurity objectives. Clear guidelines and protocols should be established to address biosecurity concerns.

Potential Interference or Malfunction: External factors such as environmental conditions or technological interference could affect the performance of virtual fencing systems. Contingency plans should be in place to address such scenarios.

In summary, while permitting virtual fencing under a proposed amendment could contribute positively to biosecurity efforts, careful consideration of technological capabilities, regulatory frameworks, and integration with broader disease management strategies is necessary to maximize its effectiveness and minimize potential risks’.

Q. Do you think that permitting virtual fencing under the proposed amendment may impact community safety?

Responses:

- No – 77.78%
- Yes – 22.22%

Please tell us how community safety may be impacted.

- ‘If the virtual fence is compromised through loss of power or cut. The animals are free to roam. If this happens prior to loading an animal onto trucks/ships (Lord help the poor creatures) they have not been trained to load positively. Handlers/stock men and woman safety could be compromised’.
- ‘Permitting virtual fencing under a proposed amendment could potentially impact community safety, although the extent of this impact would depend on various factors related to the implementation and effectiveness of the technology. Here are some considerations:

Containment of Livestock and Animals: Virtual fencing can be used to contain livestock and animals within specific areas without the need for physical barriers. This could have implications for community safety by reducing the risk of animals straying onto roads or neighbouring properties, thus minimizing potential hazards and accidents involving livestock.

Prevention of Animal-Related Incidents: Virtual fencing can help prevent animal-related incidents such as livestock wandering onto highways or urban areas, which could pose risks to drivers, pedestrians, and residents. By keeping animals within designated areas, virtual fencing could contribute to safer communities.

Effectiveness and Reliability of Technology: The impact on community safety would depend significantly on the effectiveness and reliability of the virtual fencing technology. It’s essential to ensure that the system accurately and consistently contains animals within desired boundaries to avoid unexpected breaches that could compromise safety.

Potential Limitations and Challenges: Virtual fencing technology may have limitations, such as susceptibility to environmental factors or technological malfunctions, which could impact its ability to ensure community safety. Adequate safeguards and contingency plans should be in place to address these challenges.

Public Awareness and Education: Implementation of virtual fencing would require public awareness and education efforts to ensure that community members understand the purpose and function of the technology. Clear communication about the boundaries and limitations of virtual fencing can

contribute to community safety by preventing misunderstandings or unintended interactions with contained animals.

Regulatory and Oversight Considerations: Proper regulation and oversight of virtual fencing systems are crucial to address potential safety concerns. Regulations should ensure that virtual fencing is implemented responsibly and in a manner that prioritizes community safety.

In conclusion, while virtual fencing has the potential to positively impact community safety by containing animals and reducing animal-related incidents, careful consideration of technological capabilities, regulatory frameworks, and public awareness is essential to maximize safety benefits and minimize potential risks associated with its implementation. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of virtual fencing systems would also be necessary to assess their effectiveness in contributing to community safety'.

Q. Do you think the proposed amendment may result in any benefits?

Responses:

- No – 0%
- Yes – 100%

Please tell us how what benefits may result from the proposed amendment.

- 'The general public do not understand nor are educated on Livestock production, and neither understand nor have any affinity with the costs involved to produce their foods. If the Australian public allow cost saving measures for farmers, then farming businesses will maintain sustainability and are able to incorporate more economically positive inputs into farming practices, which is favorable to those particular Australians. The Australian public cannot limit economic sustainability and ask for more resource inputs to control animal welfare and environmental positive practices. The answer could be for the Australian public to choose to import from overseas most foods which they have no control nor regulatory enforcement upon (though it is a case of 'out of sight and out of mind') or be smart and allow businesses to growth economically into their mind set. Life is about decision making :) Hopefully the right decisions'.
- 'Allows better management of extensive areas where fencing is too expensive'.
- 'Using modern technology will save costs and have no adverse impacts at all'.
- 'Save Money. Create efficient grazing options'.
- 'Allow for more targeted grazing of areas and reduced grazing of sensitive ecosystems'.
- 'Higher profits, due to lower costs. Costs of labour, fencing materials, no need to train or develop a bank of skilled workers, fencers, etc in the regional and country Australia. Bet the devices and ancillary products will come cheap from China. Conspiracy theory....the systems can be hacked'.
- 'Less harm to native animals as less barb wire. Better environmental outcomes as ability to manage livestock more effectively. Improves landscape look and ability to move around as no fences. Improving ability to manage fires as can strategically manage grazing also ease in fighting fires as no barriers. Can be used in national parks to manage feral animals e.g. virtual fence in guardian dogs to keep foxes and cats away from endangered species'.
- 'Yes, it will definitely'.

- 'Better land use management to allow for movement of stock across a broader area than physical fencing allows'.

Q. Do you think the proposed amendment may raise any issues or unintended consequences?

(Additional issues to any impacts described in previous questions).

Responses:

- No – 66.67%
- Yes – 33.33%

Please tell us what issues / unintended consequences may be raised from the proposed amendments, and what changes to the bill could be made to address these issues or consequences.

- 'Loss of employment for people in regional and country Australia. Mechanisation does this. The entire livestock cycle will be negatively affected by virtual fences. Skill loss. Loss of local business with staff number dwindling. Loss of humans to overseas for the care and management of animals'.

Q. Is there any other feedback you would like to provide?

Responses:

- No – 66.67%
- Yes – 33.33%

Please provide your feedback below.

- 'Is there any wording around 'intensive' or 'extensive' production restrictions that need to be avoided?'
- 'The live export trade system. The animal betting circuit exploiting (horse/greyhounds) for profit. The lack of any skilled training/compliance standards and numbers to police the system will be next to zero. It will become yet another low-cost commodity system for the export market. No wonder he put the bill represents the "shooters, fishers and farmers party", wants further political point scoring for the strong and vocal Farmers federation who only see animals as a commodity and not a living breathing creature that has a right to live and die decently. Victoria racing won't even ban the whip on horses. As usual the amendment is based on profits not on humane or ethical practices. Why not put one of these collars around your neck, give the controls to a stranger who has an agenda. See how it feels'.
- 'There are a high amount of environmental benefits that can be gained from using this technology. Exclusion fencing is expensive and stops all species moving with high risks in fires'.

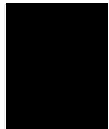
In Summary

Regional Development Southern NSW & ACT works across a region encompassing more than 56,000 square kilometres, including nine local government areas in the south-east of NSW, and the Australian Capital Territory, home to over 750,000 Australians. Our mission is to support the development of this part of Australia, acting as a conduit between residents, business owners and government agencies, providing a connection point for growth, prosperity, and liveability. We drive economic growth, innovation and entrepreneurship through collaboration, communication, advocacy, and the facilitation of projects. We strive to disseminate information and resources to our community members and provide unbiased support.

Our submission offers insights into the perceived impacts, both positive and negative, of the proposed [Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment \(Virtual Stock Fencing\) Bill 2024](#), from the perspective of community members. Through a regionally targeted survey, we collected feedback from individuals across a range of age groups, primarily over 35 years old, representing various regions within the RDASNA network. Respondents included farmers, agricultural consultants, animal welfare organisation members, government employees, and veterinarians / animal health professionals. While majority support the amendment, respondents emphasised the need to implement clear guidelines, ensure compliance, and address concerns around reliability and animal welfare to maximise the benefits of virtual stock fencing.

I thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback via this submission and contribute insights to the Committee's inquiry. The submission underscores the importance of community feedback in shaping an informed and balanced approach to the adoption of new technologies in the agriculture industry.

Kind regards,



Carisa Wells
CEO and Director of Regional Development