

**Submission
No 52**

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

Organisation: Dairy NSW Ltd

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13 May 2024

The Chair,
Investment, Industry and Regional Development Committee
Parliament House, Macquarie Street,
Sydney, NSW 2000

Dear Chair,

Re: Letter of Support for Virtual Fencing Inquiry Submission

Dairy NSW Ltd, in conjunction with Dairy Australia, is writing to support the submission of NSW Farmers to the Legislative Assembly Committee on Investment, Industry and Regional Development inquiry into the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment (Virtual Stock Fencing) Bill 2024*.

The NSW Farmers submission outlines in detail the various benefits of virtual fencing, across the following areas:

- Labour savings and associated economic benefits,
- Occupational health and safety,
- Cattle health and welfare,
- Emergency management,
- Wildlife welfare, and
- Environmental protection.

It is important to emphasise the labour-saving benefits of virtual fencing to the dairy industry. Australian Bureau of Statistics workforce data from January 2024 showed that the regional unemployment rate in regional NSW was 2.9%, well below the range of what is considered to be full employment. A similarly low unemployment rate is also present in other key dairying areas of Australia, making the recruitment of staff on farms difficult and expensive. Research reported in the National Farmer's Federation (**NFF**) Roadmap 2030, points to an immediate shortage across the agriculture sector in excess of 100,000 full-time equivalents, further supported by NFF survey data which reports that worker shortages were dairy respondents' 2nd highest priority.

Any technology which can save on-farm labour is critical to the ongoing functioning of a thriving dairy industry. These benefits are already being realised in some jurisdictions of Australia, and in countries which are our trading competitors.

Dairy Australia is participating in a Stakeholder Reference Group (**SRG**) as part of the DAFF Animal Welfare Task Group (**AWTG**) Subcommittee on Virtual Fencing. The AWTG is developing a mechanism to harmonise virtual fencing animal welfare regulations across jurisdictions. This is an important piece of work as the jurisdictions which currently do not allow virtual stock fencing (NSW, South Australia, and Victoria) are either updating, or about to update, their animal welfare

legislation, and will likely be utilising the guidance provided to assist in the development of regulations which allow for the appropriate use of virtual fencing.

The SRG has commenced its workplan and will be meeting several times in May and June, and it is hoped that this committee of inquiry will be able to utilise the outputs of the Virtual Fencing Subcommittee and SRG as part of its process. An independent literature review of contemporary animal welfare science regarding animals exposed to virtual fencing has been pivotal to the work of the AWTG Virtual Fencing Subcommittee. The NSW Farmers submission refers to this review in detail, and we would like to re-iterate the findings of the review: that virtual fencing, when used appropriately, can offer significant benefits in comparison with current fencing systems, with similar or better welfare outcomes.

Finally, we would like to draw the attention of the committee to two other expected submissions, from Dr. Megan Verdon (Senior Research Fellow and Animal Welfare and Production Lead, Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture) and Dr. John Hellstrom (former Chief Veterinary Officer of New Zealand, past chair of the New Zealand Biosecurity Council and the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee, and currently animal welfare advocate with Halter New Zealand).

Dr. Verdon has undertaken a significant body of research into virtual fencing technologies in Tasmanian dairy systems and is soon to publish research looking at the welfare and production outcomes of virtual fencing in comparison with contemporary fencing systems.

In his role as an independent advisor to Halter, Dr. Hellstrom has a deep understanding of the technology in a real-world environment, seen through the context of decades of experience in animal health and welfare.

We anticipate that these submissions will both be supportive of the benefits of appropriate use of virtual fencing, and should carry significant weight with the committee, given the authors' extensive experience with, and knowledge of, virtual fencing technologies.

We would like to thank the committee for considering these submissions. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions.

You can also contact [REDACTED], Sustainable Animal Care Manager at Dairy Australia, who is participating in the AWTG Virtual Fencing SRG ([REDACTED]; [REDACTED]).

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

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Chair, Dairy NSW Ltd

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