

**Submission
No 57**

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

Organisation: Beechwood Biological Solutions

Date Received: 8 September 2024

Please note: This submission contains images that some people may find disturbing.

Submission to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment (Virtual Stock Fencing) Bill 2024 Inquiry

Jeremy Bradley and Catherine Eggert

We would first like to thank the committee for accepting our submission at this late date.

Jeremy: Farmer, microbiologist, adjunct senior lecturer in regenerative agriculture and multi awarded innovator in sustainable agriculture.

Cathy: Farmer and ecologist with past employment in NPWS, Landcare and Farming for the Future.

Introduction: Our submission will highlight several issues of animal welfare, pertinent to virtual fencing, that are often overlooked. These may be looked on, in the context of the virtual fencing debate, as secondary animal welfare issues. We think, however, that they are vital for your consideration. They include the advantages to soil health, the adverse welfare impact of management with traditional wire fencing (including the fate of abandoned, rusted, burned and flood damaged material), and the ability to bring about better welfare outcomes through the employment of virtual fencing.

Landscape Repair: Grazing practices have had an adverse impact on the natural environment since the time of European settlement. Erosion by wind and water, accelerated by uncontrolled grazing, have been a major contributing factor in the extinction of native animals and plants and the degradation of riverine ecosystems across wide areas of our State. The reduction of landscape resilience, especially in the face of our changing climate, is also leading to adverse welfare impacts on native animals.

Conclusive research findings link groundcover to landscape repair and hydrological functionality. This is especially true of the biologically

active surface of the arid and semi-arid rangelands. This living skin is vitally important to the stability, and the fertility, of our fragile soils. The loss of soil health, through constant grazing pressure, leads to dust storms, erosion and participates in the riverine turbidity that results in eutrophication and fish kills. Wind and water erosion is a loss of the primary asset of the land. The ability to control grazing pressure is fundamental to addressing these issues.

Targeted Grazing: Virtual fencing can be used to increase or eliminate grazing pressure on specific areas of a landscape. This function can be used to protect endangered plant or animal communities, and/or areas that are prone to erosion. For example, a ground nesting quail, curlew or scrub hen population can be protected during nesting, but the same area could be grazed for fire-hazard reduction at other times. A meandering creek-bank that is causing soil loss and siltation of waterholes can be better protected by an eminently flexible virtual fence than a necessarily straight wire fence. Conversely, an erodible headwall can be advantageously moderated by increased pressure, and then excluded for recovery. Fire-prone grasslands can be targeted for suppression. All of these strategies have animal welfare benefits and can be facilitated more easily with the use of virtual fencing.

Carbon Farming: Climate change is currently the greatest threat to the welfare of all living things. It is an established principle of regenerative agriculture that strategic grazing increases soil carbon sequestration and reduces soil loss. This practice is known as time-controlled or holistic grazing. It relies on having multiple paddocks within the boundaries of the total grazed space. This is currently done using fixed or moveable fencing; both of which have disincentives due to material and labour costs, fallibility, animal welfare impacts and residual waste in the landscape. The widespread uptake of virtual fencing for internal paddock segmentation would assist with carbon farming.

Hazard reduction: Wire fences, and their residual waste, are an ever-present danger to a wide variety of native animals. Entanglement is common and leads to prolonged suffering and an agonising death (see

appendix) Waste from old or damaged fencing litters our landscape and its waterways. Pieces of rusty wire can injure native and domestic animals and stock handlers. Use of virtual fencing would reduce this impact.

Animal Welfare in Natural Disasters: Climate change is increasing the intensity and frequency of fires and floods. The welfare of stock is the major concern of landholders during these events. The use of virtual fencing, and the elimination of internal fencing, would give vastly increased options for safely moving stock in the advent of a natural disaster. It would also assist with confining the animals after an event when perimeter fencing may have been destroyed or breached. The human welfare, and mental health impacts on property owners, who are unable to save stock, or whose stock are unconfined due to damaged fencing, can't be overestimated.

Thank you again for your consideration of our submission.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Bradley and Cathy Eggert

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Appendix: Images of entanglement



Source: Southern Koala and Echidna Rescue



Personal photograph



Source: Fly by Night Bat Clinic, Vic.