

17 May 2024

Mr Roy Butler
Committee Chair
Committee on Investment, Industry and Regional Development
Parliament of New South Wales
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000 · Australia

Via [online portal](#)

Dear Mr Butler

RE: Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment (Virtual Stock Fencing) Bill 2024

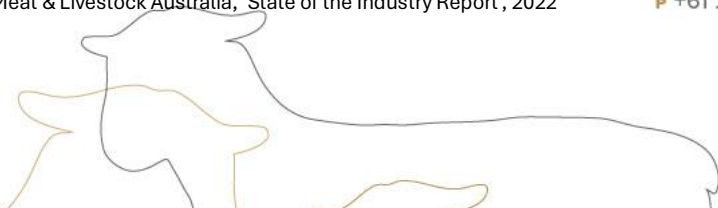
Sheep Producers Australia welcomes the opportunity to submit feedback on the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment (Virtual Stock Fencing) Bill 2024* (the Bill).

Sheep Producers Australia is the collective national voice on issues that affect Australian sheep production, representing close to 18,000 sheep farming businesses¹. As the successor entity to Sheepmeat Council of Australia which formed in 1978, Sheep Producers Australia is the peak industry organisation representing the sheepmeat sector. The Australian sheepmeat industry has a long history of producing safe, quality lamb for customers around the world. The industry continues to strive through strategic planning and collaboration to be the leading supplier of lamb and sheepmeat to global customers to meet growing demand for our premium product. Sheep production is an integral part of Australia's regional landscape and communities, with lamb and mutton production contributing 8% to the total farm value of \$66.6 billion estimated in 2019-2020¹.

Sheep Producers Australia works daily to enhance the industry's productivity, profitability, and sustainability by representing all producers to industry decision-makers and stakeholders. Sheep Producers Australia has substantial interest in supporting the virtual fencing of sheep and other livestock based on the potential of this technology to significantly improve grazing and pasture management in livestock production systems. It will enable improved management of grazing areas, including the ability to reduce overgrazing, better weed control, reduced fuel loads and protection of environmentally sensitive zones. Additionally, the widespread use of this technology would allow wildlife to move more freely across landscapes, reducing the risk of injury and providing greater connectivity and access to forage and water.

Sheep Producers Australia is at the forefront of continuous improvement of animal welfare in the Australian sheep industry and recognises the need to consider the ethical and animal welfare implications of virtual fencing. The use of deterrents to train and control the areas that grazing animals can and cannot access raises concerns about their well-being and Sheep Producers Australia notes the opposition for the use of virtual fences based on animal welfare con-

¹ Meat & Livestock Australia, 'State of the Industry Report', 2022



cerns. There is now however, a significant volume of research available that clearly demonstrates these concerns are unfounded and largely driven by ideology rather than sound scientific evidence.

Research results show that virtual fencing technology has minimal behavioural and welfare impacts on livestock, while effectively containing animals within a prescribed area. The use of avoidance learning whereby animals learn to respond to an audio cue to avoid receiving an aversive electrical stimulus warns the animal that it is approaching the boundary of a designated area.

These audio and electrical stimuli have been compared to other commonly encountered stimuli in normal sheep production systems. The physiological and behavioural responses of sheep indicated they were no more adversely impacted by virtual fencing stimuli than they were by other commonly encountered stimuli² and that research indicates that virtual fencing technology effectively contains animals in a prescribed area without substantial behavioural and welfare impacts.³

SPAs consultation with developers of this technology has identified that in training and managing livestock, these animals receive a limited number of electrical stimulation and not anywhere near the level where they would become highly stressed or reach a point of hopelessness. Similarly, research and development of this technology is bounded by animal ethics to which researchers and developers of this technology must comply.

Virtual fencing is in the early stages of commercialisation and state regulations allowing this technology is critical if its full potential is to be realised.

Should you wish to discuss this submission further please do not hesitate to contact me at ceo@sheepproducers.com.au.

Yours sincerely,



Bonnie Skinner
Chief Executive Officer
Sheep Producers Australia

² The Effect of Virtual Fencing Stimuli on Stress Responses and Behavior in Sheep

³ Campbell DLM, Lea JM, Keshavarzi H and Lee C (2019) Virtual Fencing Is Comparable to Electric Tape Fencing for Cattle Behavior and Welfare. Front. Vet. Sci. 6:445. doi: 10.3389/fvets.2019.00445