



Veterinarians for Animal Welfare Aotearoa

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Code of Ethical Conduct for Virtual Fencing Technology

1. The Code – who, why, what, when?
2. Process
3. Environmental scan
4. Key points and concerns



Who?

VAWA

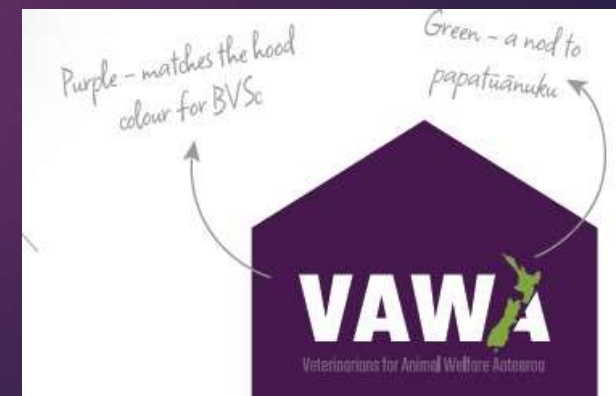
- Independent, animal welfare advocacy charity
- No vested interests
- One Health | One Welfare | Te Ao Māori lens

➤ Mandi McLeod: farmer; Nuffield Scholar; M. Phil candidate (low stress stock handling)

- Dairy cow animal welfare auditor and standards developer
- Dairy cattle welfare and behaviour consultant

➤ Helen Beattie: veterinarian; managing director, VAWA

- Special interest in animal welfare
- Law student
- Policy nerd



Why?

1. Animal welfare protection
2. Social licence to operate

Definition:

An SLO is an intangible, implicit agreement between the public and an industry/group.

3. Farmer protection
4. New Zealand's reputation

- *No specific regulation for use of VF nor electricity in devices*
- *Unsubstantiated claims – welfare and efficiencies*



Douglas J, Owers R, Campbell MLH. Social Licence to Operate: What Can Equestrian Sports Learn from Other Industries? *Animals*. 2022; 12(15):1987.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/ani12151987>
<https://www.mdpi.com/2076-2615/12/15/1987>

What?

1. Code with animal welfare safeguarding standards
2. Background information (dossier)
3. Basis for regulation
 - a) more prescriptive than Australian guidance
 - b) animal welfare focused; not electrical safety
4. Addendum to the International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC) Standard

When?

1. TBC – 6-12 months
2. Many contingencies / influence(r)s
 - a) Australian Federal guidance – end April?
 - b) NSW report to Minister – contingent on above?
 - c) SARDI research and paper to Gov't – end of June – using Vence
 - d) New research
 - i. MLA – ROI research – using eShepherd - 3 year project
 - ii. University of Tasmania – publication of recent Halter trials

Process for development | Part 1

Scene setting

1. COW – Dairy Cows | 2022
2. Published concerns | 2022
3. Engage with manufacturers and farmers | 2022 / 2023
 - a) Discover variation in AW knowledge, scientists and research
 - b) Understand implementation issues (eg V1 of eShepherd)
 - c) Discover NDAs
 - d) Learn about electricity and device regulation
 - e) Differentiate health from welfare (and claims made)

Process for development | Part 2

Code of Ethical Conduct | VFT

- | | |
|--|------------|
| 1. Approached by industry | 2023 |
| 2. Contract confirmed | end 2024 |
| 3. Fact finding; engagement; targeted consultation | start 2025 |
| 4. Drafting, consultation and review | mid 2025 |
| 5. Publish CoEC VFT | end 2025 |
| 6. Review | TBC |

Environment Scan | Products

Product	Country	Application	Other
eShepherd by Gallagher	New Zealand	Beef	Formerly Agersens
Halter	New Zealand	Dairy + beef	
Vence by MSD	USA	Beef	Not in NZ
Nofence©	Norway	Beef, sheep/goat	Small herds/flocks; not in NZ
Collie	Netherlands	Dairy	Co-Founder was Director of Animal Innovation at Halter
Monil	Norway	Beef	Founded in 2022
Corral	Nebraska	Nil	Defunct



Environment Scan | Regulation of Devices

1. International Electrotechnical Commission (IEC)
2. National Standards
 - Member countries adopt and publish these safety standards including any national deviations for use in their country.
3. Regulatory Compliance Mark (RCM) & Risk Classification System
 - AS/NZS 4417 – plays crucial role in regulating electrical appliances
 - Specifies the requirements for the Regulatory Compliance Mark (RCM) and its placement on electrical and electronic equipment
 - Establishes a framework risk classification

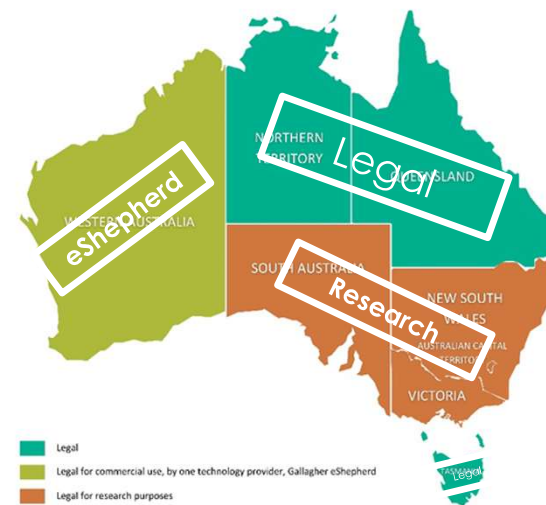
Environment Scan | Legality in Aus/NZ



Legal status of virtual stock fencing in Australia

1.3 States and territories in Australia have different approaches to virtual stock fencing. The following graph outlines its legal status across Australia.

Figure: Legal status of virtual stock fencing in Australia as of October 2024



Environment Scan | Legality in Aus/NZ

Australian Federal Guidance

- Will be issued by the AWTG - harmonisation project on VF
<https://www.agriculture.gov.au/agriculture-land/animal/welfare/awtg/virtual-fencing>
- Developed by subcommittee;
- Consultation with stakeholder reference group
- Not regulatable per se – can be used to help State Gov't develop regulation
- National AW reform



Environment Scan | Legality in Aus/NZ

Australia - State-side

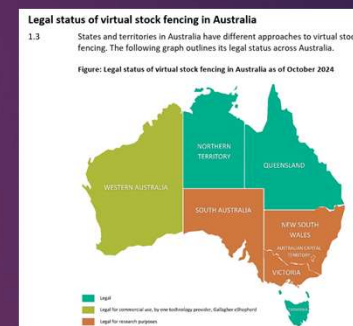
- eShepherd only in WA
- Legal in NT, Queensland and Tasmania
- Research in South Australia, Victoria and NSW

➤ NSW

- SC inquiry to a Member's Bill – SC report issued – awaiting officials' advice to Minister - end April? contingent on Federal guidance? POCTA?

➤ SA

- 27th February 2025 – Member's Bill to amend leg'n to legalise voted down 9:10



Key points and concerns

1. Research and knowledge gaps

a) Animal welfare

- i. Social node disruption
- ii. Long term and audio impacts
- iii. Physical impacts (fitting)
- iv. P&C

b) Farm systems

- i. Pasture efficiency
- ii. Improved production

c) Climate claims

- i. Local or global?
- ii. Independent LCA needed

'Whether or not this potential for improved welfare is achieved in practice, however, will depend on a number of external factors, in particular, whether the public and producers are satisfied that smart farming can really capture what they mean by 'good welfare' and whether the new technology actually does deliver on its promises and result in demonstrable improvements in animal welfare.'

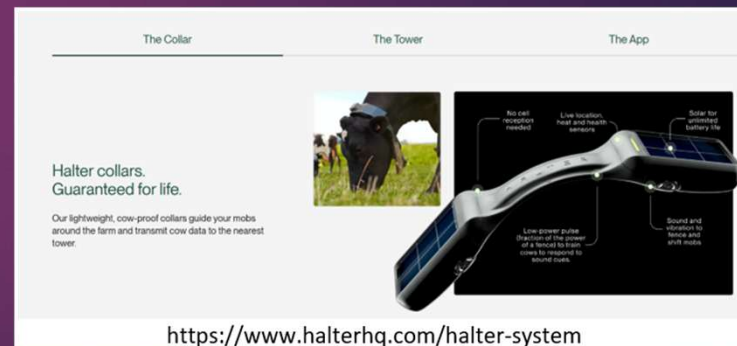
- Marian Stamp Dawkins (2025)

Key points and concerns

Note on fit and P&C

- Strip electrodes cf chains
 - eShepherd V1 cf V2
- Growth
- Weight gain
- Slippage
- Faults / entrapment

➤ Observation - how does this work in extensive rangeland situations?



Key points and concerns

2. Extension beyond researched application

- a) Research vs reality
- b) Dairy to beef (and vice versa)
- c) *Bos taurus* v *Bos indicus*
- d) Other species
- e) Intensive – extensive – rangeland

3. No regulation, nor limits on audio cues, vibration, nor shocks

- a) Risks re newcomers to the market
- b) Inappropriate use – drafting and change in ‘plans’
- c) Imported devices (think e-scooters)

Key points and concerns

4. Unsubstantiated claims

a) Improved animal welfare

i. Due to poor stockpersonship? Harried? Low skills?

ii. Due to health data capture? Separate claim to VFT

Claims need to differentiate any VFT AWW benefits from health data capture and/or poor stockpersonship

b) Green house gases, carbon – locally or globally?? – now used to support green loans and mortgages – can this be validated for international auditing? – where does this leave farmers?

ROI – research pending



Key points and concerns

5. Farmer to farmer training / quasi-consultancy
6. Use of NDAs
 - a) Prevent issues being identified, shared and resolved with least impact on cattle
 - b) SLO = trust and transparency
7. Other – it's been a learning curve!



Resources

1. UK's AWC Opinion on VFT
2. NSW SC Report
3. Cornish and Fisher literature review for NSW SC inquiry
4. Reports – pending (SARDI; NSW Govt Response)
5. Research – published and pending

QUESTIONS?

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