

### **NWT Statement on No-Fence Grazing**

The way that the No-Fence collar works is that a boundary is set for the area that requires grazing. This is set virtually so that there is nothing physical on the ground. As an animal wearing a collar approaches the line it gets an audio warning. If the animal continues to the line it receives an electric shock equivalent to that of an electric fence. The principle being that the animal quickly associates the audio warning with the boundary and turns back when this happens. Work with cattle at Ingleborough shows that shocks are overall very limited and virtually non-existent after about 2 weeks. It is well understood by livestock managers with cattle that the cattle will 'test' a physical electric fence and once they find it to be not working will cross that fence. The audio warning is enough to stop most animals from testing the boundary.

The advantages of the system over an electric fence are:

- There is an audio warning prior to reaching the line of the fence, this acts as effectively as a visual prompt of 'seeing' a fence and is in many cases clearer to an animal than an indistinct wire.
- If the animal does pass the boundary line it does not continue to get shocked and the advantage over a conventional fence is that it receives no shock returning to the grazing area
- As there is no physical boundary wildlife, and indeed other livestock, can pass the line without consequence.
- If an animal does cross the line the livestock manager is warned that this has happened and can take action promptly, particularly useful if the boundary is protecting an area that might pose a risk to the animal.
- The livestock manager can monitor the number of shocks being received by each animal and take appropriate action if required, something that is not possible with a conventional fence.

The negative response by the Australian SPCA was largely based on the concern that some animals may not be able to understand the system and would thus get a disproportionate number of shocks. This problem is easily mitigated by removing any animal that is unable to learn the system as it is not in our own interests or the interests of the animal for this to happen. In systems used in conservation grazing



this does not appear to have ever occurred and is most likely to occur in more commercial settings where food supply may be limited.

Electric fences have been used regularly in conservation grazing as they provide the necessary temporary boundaries to achieve the required grazing. Electric fences are prone to shorting out, failing and being knocked over by livestock. The perception that a physical fence is a clearer boundary is a human centric view because we tend to utilise sight as our main means of navigation. Animals are equally prompted by other sensory cues and this audio system appears to be an effective way of providing those.

We will only ever use the no-fence system within our own sites and we also train new animals on the system in as risk-free environment as possible. We will continue to use conventional fences against roads and our own ownership boundaries. It should also be noted that conventional, fixed, non-electric, fences are not without risk. Animals can get caught in wire fences and animals escaping a danger (loose dogs, etc) can collide with fences while trying to escape and can cause themselves considerable injury. Conventional fences also have environmental consequences from the materials that are used to the risk of bird collisions with them.

As with all systems, particularly new systems, we will continue to monitor their effectiveness and safety. Work so far seems to indicate that this is an effective and low risk system particularly in relation to livestock and their management.

