Abstract - Beattie

Virtual fencing – the good, the bad and the ugly

In 2024, VAWA commenced the development of a Code of Ethical Practice for Virtual Fencing Technology (VFT). This followed engagement with the industry and alignment in concerns about the lack of animal welfare regulation for VFT use in New Zealand, and other jurisdictions.

While VFT poses some potential benefits from an animal and environmental health perspective, there are also costs to both. Some aspects of VFT development and use are well regulated and transparent, such as the safety of electrical devices. Other aspects are highly variable and concealed, for example, the amount of electricity used on animals, the animal welfare expertise in development teams, and the use of devices for herding and drafting. There is also uncertainty on whether independent research sufficiently supports VFT deployment to alternate applications (e.g., dairy to beef), and how strong the evidence is for other statements commonly made about its benefits e.g., environmental claims.

As VFT is adopted more widely, ideally, manufacturers would abide by the voluntary Code of Ethical Practice, to ensure that animals are treated consistently by both established and emerging VFT products to the market, and farmers are clear about robustness of welfare and other claims.

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