

**Government Response
to the Petitions Committee Report on
the Petition of Rhodes Farming Partnership:
Undertake a parliamentary inquiry into virtual fencing**

Presented to the House of Representatives

In accordance with Standing Order 252

Government Response to the Petitions Committee Report on the Petition of Rhodes Farming Partnership: Undertake a parliamentary inquiry into virtual fencing

Introduction

1. The Government has considered the Petition Committee's (the Committee) report on the Petition of Rhodes Farming Partnership.
2. The Government responds to the report in accordance with Standing Order 256.
3. The Government welcomes the Committee's report and notes its recommendations that the Government includes guidance on the use of virtual fencing technologies in the update of the Code of Welfare: Dairy Cattle, which should also address use of the technology in proximity to milking sheds.

Background

4. A petition was presented to the House of Representatives (the House) on 10 April 2024, requesting that the House undertakes an inquiry into virtual fencing to review which components of the currently available virtual fencing technology for dairy cows are or are not acceptable to the public, milk consumers, and export markets for milk products.
5. The Committee met between 23 May 2024 and 10 April 2025 to consider the petition, and received written and oral submissions from the petitioner, the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) and other organisations including the New Zealand Veterinary Association (NZVA), the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA), and Halter. Federated Farmers New Zealand provided a written submission but did not provide an oral submission. MPI confirmed that the Code of Welfare: Dairy Cattle (the Code) is currently under review by the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC).
6. The report discusses current uses of virtual fencing in dairy cattle, impact on cow welfare, relevant legislation and calls for further research.
7. The Committee recommends that the Government includes guidance on the use of virtual fencing technologies in the update of the Code of Welfare: Dairy Cattle. This should also address use of the technology in proximity to milking sheds.

Government response to the Petitions Committee

Recommendation: *include guidance on the use of virtual fencing technologies in the update of the Code of Welfare: Dairy Cattle; this should also address use of the technology in proximity to milking sheds.*

8. The Government notes this recommendation.
9. Following recommendation of the Code of Welfare: Dairy Cattle (the Code) to the Minister in 2024, the Minister returned the Code to the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC) to reconsider key areas of the Code. Virtual fencing was not a key area for reconsideration. However, as the Code is still under active review, this presents an opportunity to review the standards relating to virtual fencing.
10. The evaluation report which accompanied the draft Code for public consultation contained a literature summary relating to virtual fencing, and NAWAC's proposal for a minimum standard requiring that any equipment or technologies used with animals are designed, constructed, maintained and used in a manner that minimises the likelihood of distress, pain or injury to the animals. Dairy cattle that do not adapt to a new technology (e.g., animals that do not learn to respond to the audio cue in virtual fencing systems thus not being able to avoid electric shocks) must be provided with alternative management.
11. Recommended best practices are included in the Code. NAWAC proposed a recommended best practice that aversive techniques for training animals to new technologies should not be used.
12. It is expected that NAWAC's further recommendations for the Code will include aspects relating to agricultural technologies including virtual fencing.

Conclusion

13. The Government work programme aims to ensure regulations are effective and do not unnecessarily burden New Zealand's primary sectors.
14. The Government appreciates the work of the Petitions Committee and has carefully considered the recommendations made. Work is underway by NAWAC to review the Code and provides the appropriate mechanism to address the recommendation of the Committee.