

Australia's first 'virtual fence' for dairy farms launches in Tasmania

04 August 2023 | News

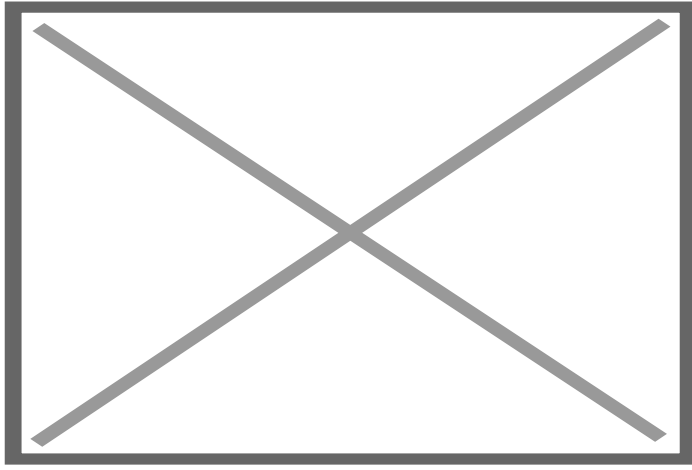
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New dairy technology allowing farmers to remotely herd cows has become commercially available in Australia but it is banned in three major states. The technology is currently approved by Tasmanian administration but is banned in New South Wales (NSW), Victoria, the ACT and South Australia states, where the use of electric shock collars are banned under their various animal welfare acts, which supposedly predate the technology.

The technology allows precisely control the areas his cows fed, spot medical issues early on and a stress free farming for the farmers. The technology is offered at a subscriptions starting at \$8.50 per month, per cow.



Virtual fencing is a system that uses smart collars to herd and monitor cattle. Each animal is given an electric collar that emits sound and vibration cues to tell them where to go, and then zaps them if they ignore the cue. Controlled by a smartphone app, it gives dairy farmers the ability to remotely move their cows to the milking shed, set up temporary paddocks and monitor cow health — all without setting a foot outside.

Tasmanian Institute of Agriculture senior researcher Dr Megan Verdon has been studying virtual fencing since 2016. She said the race to introduce the technology has been ticking since its initial conception in the 1980s, followed by a further boost in the early 2000s when the CSIRO commissioned research and development in the area.

New Zealand tech startup Halter has become the first company in the country to offer it commercially. The system was already widely used in New Zealand where, in the last year alone, collars were put on about 100,000 cows.

In Victoria and South Australia, electronic collars can only be used for the purpose of scientific research. In NSW, the collars cannot be used at all on livestock. Dairy Australia's principal scientist John Penry said the main issue was that each state had differing opinions regarding the impacts of the "pulse" delivered by the collars. Dairy Australia is looking forward to have harmonised legislation between the states.