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Submission on the Cattle Standards & Guidelines  
Electro-Immobilisation  
Discussion Paper

My name is Phill Seiler, I am the managing director of Curlybark Pty Ltd, Distributors of Stockstill electroimmobilizers for over 20 years. I have spent most of my working life as a cattle grazer and first used Stockstill during 1979.

I would like to thank the Writing Group for the opportunity to offer what I hope will be a useful point of view at a practical level from a person who has likely had more experience with the use of Stockstill than anyone else.

I am willing to make myself available, at the group's discretion, so that maximum opportunity is afforded in the understanding of the full implications to both industry and animal welfare as the matter is reviewed.

In this submission, I shall briefly outline our ongoing emphasis on animal welfare by means of an Introduction, then make comment on the four "main issues" observed in the Discussion Paper.

I trust the Group may find my observations helpful and repeat my offer to travel to a convenient place to discuss the subject.

## **INTRODUCTION to STOCKSTILL**

As Stockstill distributor for over 20 years, we provide:

- information on the use of Stockstill to all who seek it.
- sales of Stockstill equipment to those who choose to purchase, without any pressure.
- advice & training to all who purchase a unit or seek training having purchased a second hand unit elsewhere.
- a 1800 free call Australia wide "help" line for all operating questions, attended also out of hours.
- full money back guarantee if the client "is not happy for any reason."
- full servicing of and parts for all Stockstill units dating back to the first produced during the 1970s.
- free bench testing to check any Stockstill unit against specifications. This is offered so that there is no hesitation in making contact should the user have even a slight feeling that the unit is suspect. (PCB circuit problems are extremely rare with 30 year old units still behaving to specifications)
- trade in of any aged unit, working or not, to remove possible unserviceable units from

the field.

In short, we seek to provide information & products to cattlemen and follow that up comprehensively with easily accessed information & service. We believe we have done this with honesty & integrity for over 20 years.

### **Our fundamental view of Stockstill.**

When all things are considered, the correct use of Stockstill represents a significant welfare advantage to the animal. There are also numerous benefits for the operator and a considerable safety advantage.

### **Stockstill is arguably the single greatest invention ever for the cattle industry.**

There has been long running debate as to the welfare aspect of EI. Some historic trials have been shown to be flawed with operators simply ignoring the instructions.

Many trials have focussed on aversiveness of the Stockstill application in itself without considering the net benefit to the animal, all things considered.

Stockstill is in itself most likely an unpleasant experience for the animal. That this aversiveness is brought on by pain has been commonly assumed but not proven. When the unit is applied to the arm of a person, it is the unusual feeling of the current acting on muscles that is the concern, not pain as such. I have had children line up to experience the feeling and then keenly join the line again for another turn!

Translated into animal sensation, it is likely to be an unsettling feeling, something unfamiliar & therefore aversive in effect. Would that this effect could be removed but side effects are a well known down side to many modern procedures.

It is interesting to note the popularity of TENS machines sold unrestricted over the counter to the public. Many available TENS machines have been shown to be capable of delivering greater output energy than the Stockstill at full power.

### **1. Aversiveness.**

It would be rare that a cattleman would simply apply the Stockstill on its own without also combining it with some husbandry procedure. What is not commonly taken into consideration is the full balance of the aversiveness of the routine procedures. (Currently being performed anyway using only mechanical restraint where they can and do display normal responses.)

Here are a few of of the welfare benefits for the animal.

**(a)** The animal is significantly unaware of other procedures being performed. (Based on years of observation, feed back and an unusual case of a young man being full length immobilized. Whilst we do not condone such behaviour, it presented an unexpected opportunity to have the patient describe the experience.)

**(b)** A degree of pain blocking may be present, depending largely on the conditions of application. We have defended this statement unquestionably following numerous trials & experiments, some in the presence of independent Veterinarians, and years of observation. What we do not claim is that the pain blocking will be significant for every "in the yards" situation. Please bear in mind that the Stockstill has only ever been recommended for use during procedures that would not normally indicate the use of

anaesthetic and it is not a substitute for anaesthetics. We are advocating its use only for those routine procedures which are being performed anyway.

(c) The animal is far less likely to injure itself than when common mechanical restraint alone is used.

(d) The whole procedure is completed in less time and with greater precision. Given that option on the operating table, human patients would easily see the benefits.

(e) Open wounds are less likely to be infected with a much reduced level of excrement on the floor of the crush.

(f) The temperament of the operator remains quiet & calm. A fractious beast struggling against every effort will cause stress to the operator. A calm operator is an advantage to the welfare of the animal.

Over all, a higher level of precision, less time in the yards & a quieter less stressful atmosphere.

## **2. Effects on respiratory and cardiac systems.**

We openly explain to clients the muscular stress on the respiratory system and how to stay inside safe levels. Yes, at times it "loses" sales with people doubting their own abilities, but it has always been our prime safety consideration in every case.

Used in accordance with the instructions & training video, history has shown that problems are extremely rare, almost non existent. (Once again, compare this with the option without Stockstill. It is not at all unheard of that there is a serious injury to an animal, perhaps a broken leg & ensuing euthanasia is performed.)

With regard to effects on cardiac systems, we have been advised by veterinarians that virtually none of the small current correctly applied would travel near to the heart. Other than the body presenting a tight muscular situation, we are assured it is not a concern and history has supported this.

We point out the risks of using Stockstill on animals in sick or weakened condition.

## **3. Use for painful procedures without pain relief/anaesthesia.**

We have never advocated the Stockstill's substitution for pain relief or anaesthesia where either is indicated by accepted welfare guidelines or legal statute.

Stockstill has been used in conjunction with anaesthesia a number of times by veterinarians to reduce the risk to the animal. I understand that anaesthetics, particularly when used on cattle, present a risk of death, well known to veterinarians and the cattlemen who owned that occasional beast that did not survive.

We only encourage the use of Stockstill for those routine procedures that will be performed anyway, with or without Stockstill.

During the late 1990s, I surveyed a number of practising Veterinarians with the question "Do you have concerns that cattlemen will be tempted to perform operations outside the usual range of routine handling?"

A couple of responses are worth mentioning here and from vets.

"If anything, they don't use it enough. They could reduce stress for many animals but they tend to leave it (Stockstill) in the shed and only fetch it out for the really stirry ones."

“For the barbarians who do perform cruel procedures illegally, I just wish they would use a Stockstill to reduce the stress even a little.”

Stockstill strongly discourages such behaviour as do the vast majority of cattlemen.

Over the thirty plus years of involvement with Stockstill, I have not heard of any deliberate associated cruelty. On the contrary, people have found themselves growing more considerate of the animal's welfare.

#### **4. Operator ability to perform the required task and training in correct procedures.**

I would say that almost all cattlemen in Australia have learned and been shown common routine procedures from more experienced people around them. Cattlemen freely & proudly offer advice and younger people are keen to take it on board, often helping in the yards from a young age. I am sure this is also happening as children grow up in a yard that uses Stockstill.

We do, as stated, offer information, advice, training and a follow up help line. Our training has improved with time and experience to the current level. Practicalities of huge distances and pure economics prevent us from training everyone in person and also people coming to us for training. We will continue to do the best possible and are currently working on an online format in addition to the existing.

#### **In conclusion.**

This device has done and will continue to reduce the net stress placed on animals during routine handling procedures. Stockstill, we believe, should be rated up there with the greatest of Australian inventions but as with too many of our good ideas, it has run a troubled and unassisted career.

The whole Stockstill “exercise” has been funded by private enterprise. Where other industries have received Government assistance and encouragement, Stockstill has attracted none. Throughout the past almost 40 years, although business success has been a goal, it has eventuated that for little return, most work has been done by a few people who recognised Stockstill's real worth and have largely continued because it is simply too good to allow to slide.

Every angle possible has been criticised, often without any evidence, at times one suspects with personal gain the motive. It has been in and out of political debate with those relatively few supporters time and again being dismissed for reasons unknown. ....and yet, the one thing that makes it worthwhile. Thanks to Lance Lines (inventor, now deceased) there are in excess of 6000 Stockstills out there, across Australia and the World. They are being used routinely by welfare conscious operators to make their job safer, easier & at times, even possible. The net result for animal welfare must surely be considerable by any standard.

On our property, where the Stockstill was introduced during 1978, this piece of equipment remains an essential part of the team. This would be the view shared by thousands of cattlemen who would all appreciate it if their experienced observations & opinions could be heard over aged & at times poorly planned trials which in most cases have tended to focus on the ‘stress caused’ aspect whilst ignoring the ‘stress saved’

benefit.

Interestingly, it has been suggested to me many times over the years that "They should be made compulsory." I would not go this far simply because that would be asking perhaps 'electrophobic' and incompetent people to use it regardless.

At the present time, mankind as a whole accepts and depends on the raising & utilisation of animals for his well-being. The raising of animals often demands unavoidable procedures be performed. Over time, this situation has been slowly improved upon and no doubt that will continue. Meanwhile, there is a way of improving the net welfare of the animal by the use of Stockstill in conjunction with the various procedures. In time, other options will likely become available at a practical level and Stockstill will have outlived its benefits. That time is not yet here.

I thank the Writing Group for their time and trust that they arrive at recommendations that consider the net welfare benefit to cattle, all things considered, rather than focussing on the aspect that electroimmobilization in itself is not likely to be pleasurable.

Yours Sincerely,

Phill Sejer (managing director of Curlybark Pty Ltd)

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Phill Sejer', written over the typed name.