

Deer Farming in the Top End

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Deer Farming has been an established farming enterprise in Australia for many years, particularly in Tasmania, Victoria, NSW and QLD.

We now have producers in the Top End who are established and like other Primary Producers, are battling to stay with it.

The problems with any farm enterprise are known to most of us and we all proceed accordingly but with deer well. The deer producer faces costs a lot of other farmers don't. Fencing costs are initially very high when compared to sheep and cattle, but those costs will be discussed at another time, because yard design and handling facilities are where many prospective deer farmers hit trouble.



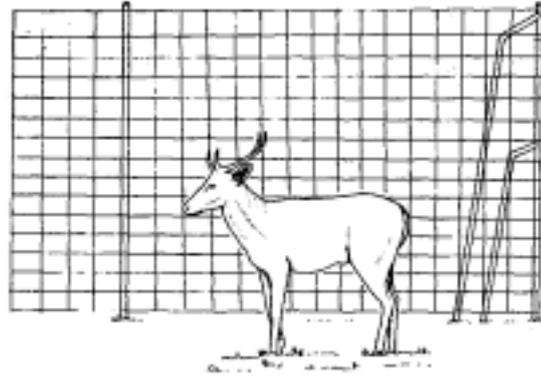
Good facilities should allow for movement of stock from paddocks for drenching, drafting, velvet removal etc, in an efficient, minimum stress operation for both man and beast. Sounds familiar to what most stockmen consider the normal run of events doesn't it! Well, add an animal that is timid, intelligent, fast, flighty, and lightly boned and they do not bounce off yard posts and steel gates like the average beast that is handled in the Territory. They break bones, creating additional problems for the farmer.

It seems to be accepted by many deer farmers that their stock need good laneways of around 30 m in width and centrally located yards. Basically the same standards for site selection are used as for a cattle operation. ie. power, water, road access, shade and topography.

A lot of discussion has taken place over the use of "Blind" races and yards. Semi darkness does seem to quieten deer down, but some people seem to think (quite logically) that it is the barrier effect rather than lighting that keeps the animals quiet. When one considers that deer will clear 2.5 m walls, I'm inclined to favour the barrier theory over the lighting. The fact is that to have a darkened handling area, one must have a roof and high walls. The combination of barriers and dim light conditions seems to be the key.

Another point to consider is operator safety. There have been several instances of handlers being attacked by deer and, small as they are in comparison to cattle, they can be quite dangerous.

Some States have standard fencing requirements for deer and, in the Territory, some basic guidelines on fencing have been established by DBIRD and Conservation Commission.



The initial consideration is height. Deer are fast and agile and, to accommodate their jumping ability, the fence height should be at least 2.25 metres. The fence also needs to be sufficiently "sprung" to allow deer that hit it to be thrown off the fence without hurting themselves or the fence.

Fences are constructed of wire mesh on steel posts and heavy end assemblies are used. The mesh itself should be of solid, non slip construction. Two of the more popular designs are "Tightlock" a New Zealand product, and "K Wire" made in Queensland. Both of these wire meshes are constructed so that no slippage of either vertical or horizontal wires is possible. Sheep and pig mesh has been tried and problems with wire slippage have occurred.

Fence posts need to be strong due to the weight of the mesh. Southern producers often use treated pine which does a reasonable job. Territory producers use steel, which I feel does a better job and lasts longer.

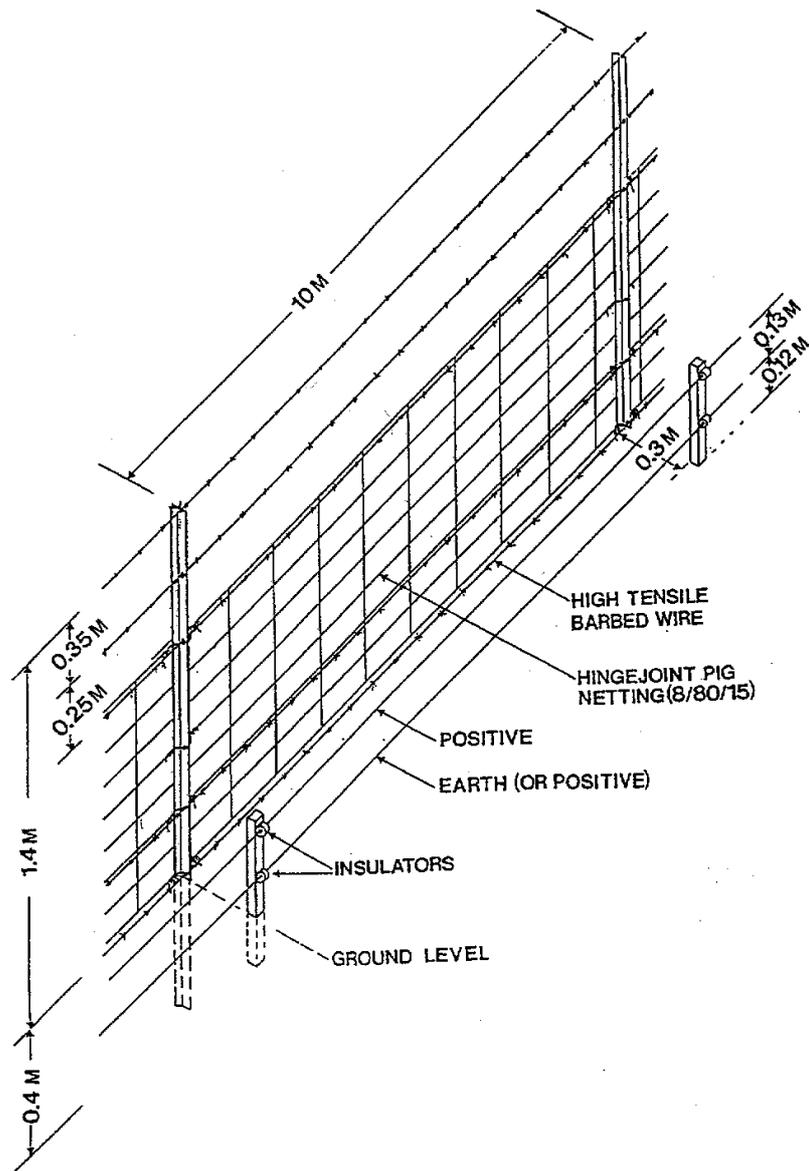
Fence posts also need to be closer together than in a cattle fence. Apart from weight considerations, close spacing restricts the possibility of a belly forming due to wires sagging. Boundary fence posts should be on the outside of the mesh.

Opinion is divided as to the effectiveness and safety of electric fencing. In sub divisional fencing, it can have some application, and it is extensively used in New Zealand.

The standard fence used in the Top End is:

Posts	50 mm O/D steel pipe
Spacing	5 metre centres (can go out to 8 metres)
Wire	Tightlock or K Wire, topped by two plain wires spaced 150 mm apart
Fence height	2.25 metres
Gates	3 metres

The mesh should be pegged to the ground between posts.



Fence construction (not to scale)

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