



## Livestock Theft

The excellent prices currently being received for cattle and sheep makes stock theft a very lucrative business. The New South Wales Farmers Association reports that over \$1.5 million worth of stock are reported stolen annually. Some producers have lost truckloads of animals while others are troubled with the persistent loss of one or two. New South Wales Police describe livestock theft as the most significant rural crime. Not only do producers incur significant financial losses; there is the loss of future breeding herds and bloodlines. Of particular concern is the increased risk of stolen stock with fraudulent health status papers entering the marketing and processing chain, which poses an unacceptable risk to Australia's domestic and international trade.

### What you can do

There are some things you can do to deter thieves.

- Regularly check your stock and the paddocks and fences where the stock are grazing - daily if possible - especially around sale days - to ensure that suspected losses are recognised and reported to police as soon as possible.
- Keep all paddock, shed and stockyard gates closed and locked. Use locking posts to obstruct large openings to yards etc
- Keep your fences and gates in good repair. Gate hinges should have capping hinges so they cannot be removed easily.

- Ditches form a natural barrier. Cattle grids should be removable and locked out of position when not in use.
- Go around your property and look at it through the eyes of a thief. Look for areas where thieves could easily operate. This particularly applies to paddocks that border a public road.
- Be visible on your property. Leave tyre tracks and evidence that you are frequently checking your paddocks.
- Have a plan of your property, indicating when and where things happen, and where stock and equipment are located.
- Be aware of strangers or unfamiliar vehicles in your area. Write down their registration number and all other relevant information and pass it onto your local Police. Also alert your neighbours.



- If you have two or more accesses to your property, ask neighbours to watch for strange vehicles.
- Liaise with your trusted neighbours; tell them when you are away from your property and where you can be contacted. Suggest they do the same.
- Locate stockyards or loading ramps away from public roads or main entrances to your property. Keep them locked when not in use. Ensure loading ramps are stored out of sight when not in use.
- Don't leave stock in holding paddocks adjacent to stockyards if the yards are not in sight of the homestead.



- Ask shooters who request access to your property for a reference from a farmer in the district, or use shooters from reputable Shooters Associations.
- If you have been a victim of livestock theft, you may consider an alarm linked to an electric fence with a sensor that activates a siren or bell in your house if the fence is cut or broken.
- Video surveillance cameras are another option, expensive but the costs could well outweigh the losses through theft. It is important not to use cheap videotape in a camera or replay it several times over. Too often when a theft occurs, all that is found on a security camera tape is snow.
- Consider using closed circuit TV so you can watch animals in sheds or yards from your home. This can be especially useful during busy times like the lambing or shearing season.

## Reporting a theft

**If livestock are stolen, it is important that you report the crime to police as soon as possible.** Many farmers fail to report thefts because they may be unsure of exactly how many stock are missing. Some believe it is a waste of time reporting crimes because a theft would be impossible to prove, or because of the amount of time between a theft's occurrence and its detection. Others believe it's a waste of time reporting because they believe there is little the police can do. Sometimes, the suspected offender is someone in the district and dobbing them in to police is not an option in a small community. However, the police insist that even if some time has passed since the event, and regardless of the number of stock missing, they would still like to hear about it. There may be a pattern of crimes in the district and with more information, they can begin to target a crime investigation.

If you are a victim of theft, ideally, the sooner it is reported, the better. Do not disturb anything in or around the area involved until the police arrive. Do not allow people or animals in or around the area or in areas where entry was possibly made. You will need to provide police with an accurate description of your stock including:

- the breed, age and sex of the animals,
- the type of identification used and the identification numbers,
- where the stock were located,
- when you last checked the stock, and
- any other relevant information.

Police emphasise the importance of stock identification and accurate farm records for tracing stolen stock. The Police Service is providing training for officers in rural areas to better equip them for investigating these types of crimes. However, when reporting a crime, it is in your best interest to ensure the officer understands all the information you provide.

**It is also very important to let the police know should you find your stock again.**

## Identification

**Livestock identification is absolutely essential** for proof of ownership and ultimately the return of stolen stock and the eventual conviction of offenders. There can be several witnesses to a stock theft but without proof of ownership, the thief will never be prosecuted. Livestock identification can be ear tags, earmarks, tattooing, branding or microchips.

- **Tattooing** is often the cheapest form of permanent identification and is suitable for all breeds of livestock. Tattooing is generally done in one or both ears, but can also be placed in the loose skin around the tail or head, or in the lip. One suggestion is to tattoo in the inside of the ear and also in some other unsuspecting area, such as the inside of the beast's toes.
- **Freeze branding, hot iron branding or electrical branding** is the most visible marking system.
- Take **photographs or videos** of valuable animals with the brand and/or ear tags clearly visible. Photographs of mobs of your stock will also aid police in an investigation. It is also a good idea to have some identifying aspect of your property in the background, such as your house or sheds.
- The use of **electronic identification** is strongly recommended. Many farmers and police believe that the introduction of the **National Livestock Identification Scheme** is ideal for the control of stock theft. This involves stock being identified by a micro chip in the ear or with a bolus which is inserted down the throat of the animal where it remains lodged in the rumen of the animal for its lifetime. These devices offer unalterable permanent identification. Some graziers have argued that the system is expensive; rumen boluses are around \$7.00 each but they can be recycled, or you can lease them for as little as \$2.00. The cost is cheap insurance for livestock particularly where losses from theft are considerable.

- **Maintain stock records.** Keep accurate records of all livestock bought and sold from your property. Record all births and deaths of livestock on your property. Record all details of stock with identification numbers.
- Make a copy of your ear mark, brands or other identification marks and give a copy to each of your neighbours so that any stock that may stray can be easily identified. Encourage your neighbours to do the same.
- Store tail tags in a safe location. You may be unaware of stock sold under your name with stolen tags.
- It is a good idea to notify your neighbours when you are mustering stock and selling stock and encourage them to do the same. That way, neighbours can be more suspicious if they see stock movements that they are not notified about.
- Most neighbours exchange stock that have strayed each time they muster. Some farmers have found that some neighbours keep stock that enter their property. Farmers say: *We have one-way fences on one side!* They suggest leading by example. Do the right thing yourself and you may encourage your neighbour to do the same.

### **Acknowledgment:**

These crime prevention strategies have been developed from the ideas and tried and true initiatives given to us by farmers across New South Wales. We sincerely thank them for their valued contribution. Additional material has been drawn from the South Australian Neighbourhood Watch Association.

URL: <http://www.nhwatch.asn.au/>

For more information, or if you wish to comment on the material in this leaflet, or if you have any other suggestions for crime prevention strategies on farm, please contact Elaine Barclay at:

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