

# LOW STRESS STOCK HANDLING

## *Information Sheet*

**Aim:** To work the stock with very little stress while at the same time taking existing stress away from them with the intention of reducing their flight zone without frightening them.

**Why:** Around the world scientists and cattlemen have identified links between lower mental stress in animals with increased production and reduced health problems.

From a WH&S point of view handlers who are confident and calm in the stockyards minimise stock stress and reduce the likelihood of an incident resulting from a stressed or frightened animal taking flight.

By handling quietly and calmly the job gets done more quickly, efficiently and with less cost than traditional methods.

From a personal relationships viewpoint, low stress stock handling is more enjoyable for all members of a family or team working livestock together and guarantees all parties will still be on speaking terms at the end of the day.

### **It's all in the attitude.**

Low stress stock handling involves a systematic approach to stock handling. The preconceptions you take with you will manifest itself (what you think is what you get). Your attitude affects the outcomes from your stock. You have to be calm, relaxed and positive, because the cattle will respond in the same way. You have to be able to turn your energy levels 'up' and 'down' to apply pressure and take it off.

*"If you change the way you look at things, the things you look at change." - Wayne Dyer*

Learning to 'read' and react to an animal's movement will help you guide an animal to where you want it to go. Bud Williams used to have a saying when he was working cattle: "Slow is fast and less is more." Studies have found that whatever the beliefs that people handling stock hold- those beliefs translate straight into their handling skills. These handling skills, in turn, determine whether animals will be stressed when the handler works with them. If animals are stressed then they reproduce at lower rates, grow slower and get sick more often.

### **Challenges for traditional cattlemen**

Traditional force and fear methods do not align with low stress stock handling principles. Observing the animals, reacting to their movements and understanding what you did to cause an individual animal to react the way it did is fundamental to developing low stress stock handling skills. You must be prepared to change your approach and not expect the animal to do things differently. Consider the animal's natural behaviour and modify yours accordingly. Yard work will be fluid.

## Angles and position

Continual movement in the cattleyards is necessary to maintain correct positioning.

Do not apply pressure from behind. You can walk behind and not cause stress as long as you are not applying pressure. The speed you move is important, but not as important as the angle you move in relation to the animal. The correct position you need to be in relation to the animal changes as it moves.

It takes practice but being in the proper position is enough pressure to move an animal in the direction you wish it to go.

## Pressure and release

If an animal feels excessive pressure they will react.

This includes loud noise directed to the animal. Excessive pressure, especially yelling, revving engines and running at stock is stressful to the animals. Pressure applied to move an animal must be released when they move. By stepping back, or the fact they move ahead takes some of the pressure off.

Do not release all pressure or you will lose contact with the animal. Remember excessive pressure, or constant pressure with no let up, is what causes panic.

## Your movements matter

Bud Williams explains movement best:

Moving back and forth while getting closer to the animals will tend to cause them to move away from you.

Moving parallel to livestock in the same direction the animals are going will tend to slow the animals down. This is true if you are at the front, the side or behind the herd. This is very helpful if you are trying to settle animals that have too much movement. It is very detrimental if you are driving a herd since you tend to kill the movement that you are trying to generate.

Moving parallel to livestock in the opposite direction (front to rear) will tend to speed them up. Animals want to continue in the direction they are headed. When they see you coming, they will try to hurry past you.