

# MANAGEMENT UPDATE: EFFECTIVE USE OF PERMANENT SPEAR TRAP GATES

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## *What are permanent 'spear' trap gates?*

Many managers may already be familiar with the prefabricated trapgates that have been put in place at various trayards on stations in the region. These trapgates are composed of entry and exit spears, usually located alongside each other, in a gate frame. The total structure can be easily inserted into a trayard fence, allowing stock to access water. The trapgates, illustrated in figure 1, were developed by the Total Grazing Management (TGM) project at AGWEST, Carnarvon, though the idea has been around for a number of years.



**Figure 1:** TGM trap gates, set at the operational width.



**Figure 2:** TGM cattle/sheep/goat trapgate – gravity operated spear design.

## *Grazing management*

These trapgates are a crucial component of grazing management on the station properties that use them. By controlling stock access to water, the manager is effectively controlling the animal. TGM trapgates allow self-mustering to occur, which achieves the following:

- Increases mustering efficiency – ie: more stock (sheep, goats, cattle) can be mustered when required. Self-mustering can attain mustering rates as high as 95%.
- Greatly reduces mustering costs. Once implemented, self-mustering traps reduce or eliminate the need for conventional paddock mustering with planes, motorbikes and the like.
- Allows for on site animal management like weaning, marking, mulesing etc. This means that animals do not need to be brought into a central place for these activities to occur.

## *Use of TGM trapgates*

Trapgates work on the basis that stock may be trained to constantly behave in certain ways. In order for all the above self-mustering benefits to be achieved, it essential that trapgates are placed at operational settings *at all times*. This is because the system relies on the animals' familiarity or degree of *training* with the trapgates. In other words, stock must be used to – or trained to – access water through the entry and exit spears all year round. This means that trapping the animals is effective because the exit spear can be simply shut and all animals trapped.

TGM trapgates are not at operational settings when they are left wide open, or when alternative access to water at the trapyard is available – for example, through a gate that is open while the spears are set. If set trapgates are not the only access that stock has to water, then stock will not be trained to use them. Instead, they will be trained to use open spears or open gates as is shown in Figure 3. This means that at trapping time, stock will not know how to use the trapgates, and will probably avoid them.



**Figure 3:** A TGM trapgate not at operational setting. The spears are set, but the adjacent gate is left open. Stock pads using the open gate and not the trapgates can be clearly seen.

There may be a view among some managers that trapgates that are set at all times pose a barrier to stock entering waterpoints. However, once animals are trained – which usually takes one to two weeks – they tend to use the system with no problems. As a compromise though, it is possible to set the trapgates at a slightly wider position when trapping is not occurring. When trapping, the trapgates can be set back to the narrower setting. Most trapgate designs have an inbuilt mechanism for these two widths of setting.

#### ***Managers choice***

Consequently, managers are faced with a choice: Should stock be trained to:

1. Use the trapgates and thus achieve the rewards of TGM, or;
2. Use other access methods, making self-mustering difficult or inefficient.

Option 1 is probably a better choice, to increase station income.

#### ***Summary: Management Message***

- ☐ **The more often station stock use trapgates, the more effective trapping will be.**
- ☐ **Permanently set entry and exit trapgates = improved mustering = improved grazing management = higher station income.**

#### ***About the Author***

My name is Cris Underwood and I am the new Development Officer with the Total Grazing Management project, based in Carnarvon. I work mainly to try and improve the range and quality of TGM trapgates and trapyards. Currently, work is being done on trapgates that can be used for cattle, sheep and goats, on methods for excluding kangaroos from trapyards, and on increasing the number of TGM yards in the Rangelands. I am also involved with the Aerial Goat Survey project. I finished studies in Environmental Science at Murdoch University in 1998 and I have had several years' experience working on Mt Gibson Station near Paynes Find. My phone number is (08) 9956 3346.