

Submission for Inquiry into animal activism in Victoria

A. The type and prevalence of unauthorised activity on Victorian farms and related industries, and the application of existing legislation;

Animal Rights (AR) Volunteers are doing nothing that is not already covered by existing laws. Trespass, break & enter and theft all come under our existing system of prosecution. Using our legal system to specifically target one group whilst protecting the interests of another is a very dangerous precedent to set and destined to misuse.

The disruption to farming practises by whistle blowers is insignificant compared with industry theft and the cattle rustling that take place but we never hear of these problems being reported so one could be forgiven for assuming that another agenda is at play with this proposed legislation.

B. The workplace health and safety and biosecurity risks, and potential impacts of animal activist activity on Victorian farms, to Victoria's economy and international reputation;

AR volunteers enter properties at their own risk. I am yet to see any evidence of them endangering the safety of farm workers within the activities that they undertake, in fact it seems the other way round, with farmers taking the law into their own hands to violently deal with AR volunteers rather than wait for the proper authorities to handle the situation as is their job.

Most video footage of AR volunteers shows them in hazmat overalls, and as they appear to keep their activities limited to a single location, their bio-security risks is beyond minimal, unlike the everyday practises of farming. I live in a farming community and know the movement between farms to be extensive. For example, people in the artificial insemination business visit numerous farms in one day. Do they have a complete chemical wash down between locations? No, so until general farming practises meet their own standards we can stop using this as an excuse to persecute those working for social justice causes.

As to protecting our economy and international reputation, I believe the best action we can take is to keep abreast of changing consumer awareness and lack of acceptance of many current farming practises. It would be far more pro-active to alter industry standards than continue the campaign of secrecy and suppression.

C. Animal activists' compliance with the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994, Livestock Management Act 2010, and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986;

The first point I need to stress here is: have those debating this piece of legislation actually read the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and then watched the documentary "Dominion"? It is absolutely not whistle blowers we need to be targeting if our goal is to abide by existing legislation. If the established guidelines were being met, I doubt we would be embroiled in this current debate. As to disease control and livestock management, have there been any reported incidences of outbreaks that can be attributed to Animal Justice activities, or are we scare mongering to serve a purpose?

D. The civil or criminal liability of individuals and organisations who promote or organise participation in unauthorised animal activism activities;

This point of this question is the one that has ramifications beyond animal activism, venturing into the domain of the democratic right to protest. If we allow this precedent to be set, this legislation will quickly be used to silence any voice that is raised against industry, corporations and government. Australia has a strong history of protest, much of which has been illegal. This legislation directly attacks all future social justice movements and should be of concern to everyone.

This is also a blatant example of attempting to use both our political and legal system to protect the gross misconduct of industry. The corrupt slippery slope that this legislation is establishing is not even subtle.

E. Analyse the incidences and responses of other jurisdictions in Australia and internationally;

On this point, I will actually agree, analysis of current actions needs to be undertaken, but let's broaden the scope and make it transparent/public. Not only does the immediate incidences need to come under scrutiny, but also any footage that has been obtained, what led a certain premises to be targeted, if a report to any welfare agencies had been made and if so, what action, if any, was taken to maintain reasonable welfare practices. As it is, current reporting and conversations have been very limited and one sided to the benefit of the farming industry. Balanced analysis would be most welcome.

F. Provide recommendations on how the Victorian Government and industry could improve protections for farmers' privacy, businesses, and the integrity of our biosecurity system and animal welfare outcomes, whether through law reform or other measures.

One of the biggest failings of how we deal with problems that exist within our society is to find convenient measures to fix it quickly, rather than ask the obvious question of why the problem exists in the first place. Lack of industry transparency and a total failing to meet basic animal welfare standards is the reason we find ourselves locked in this current battle. We don't need law reform, we need to ensure that current laws are met and maintained by industry. From all the footage I have viewed that has been obtained by whistle blowers, we are falling well short of that and we would do well to concentrate our efforts in this direction before attacking those that are exposing the farming industries gross short-comings.

In closing, I would like to point out that our current system of justice has never been a deterrent to prevent crime. Despite the threat of punishment, crime continues to plague our society. You can be sure this is doubly the case for those who fight for social justice causes and believe themselves to be acting morally.

Filling our prisons with people fighting to end animal cruelty is destined to backfire in a most extraordinary manner. I don't say this as threat, it is just putting historical precedence in to the context of today's battle.

Incarceration was not a deterrent for either the suffragette movement or civil rights activists, in fact it helped mobilise their cause. You can be sure that should you proceed with this current legislation that you are laying the groundwork for history to repeat itself.

I would also like to take this opportunity to address the apparent fear that many farming families are currently experiencing in regards to the Animal Rights movement. This is more due to the blatant bias of reporting in our media and political sphere. If there was any honesty being reported in regards to why certain locations are chosen to disrupt, anybody farming with the slightest integrity would know that they had nothing to fear from whistle blowers. Only those that have something to hide need protecting with these corrupt law changes.

With the pressure of animal agriculture on our climate/environment along with rapidly changing consumer awareness, it would be far more pro-active for both industry heads and governments to aid and assist farmers to transition to more sustainable plant based farming. This war on peoples purely asking for an end to unnecessary cruelty is doing a massive disservice to everyone involved and will only give opportunity to highlight the grim reality of animal farming and why animal activists exist in the first place.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

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