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1/11/2009

Dear ██████████

I am writing to express my concerns and frustrations with the way the Department of Primary Industry(DPI) have dealt with a case of severe and prolonged animal neglect. The case concerns cattle which are owned by // on their properties from Butchers Ridge all the way up to Wulgulmerang.

The situation has been a chronic one over the past twenty-five or more years, with the cattle always being run in borderline body condition, at huge stocking rates, and with little or no supplementary feed provided. Consequently when times become tougher many cattle die slow and horrible deaths as a result of starvation and malnutrition. Local farmers have reported the same owners to the DPI and the RSPCA many times in the past. These are farmers who believe they should mind their own business, who wait until there are a significant number of deaths and animals suffering, and who find it very difficult to take such action. These farmers have been let down by the two main welfare authorities so many times in the past that they have given up reporting what they see year after year. This year they turned to me to see if I could help to achieve anything positive. I have done nearly all I could and nothing happened to improve the situation.

I first spoke to Animal Health Officers(AHO`s) at DPI Bairnsdale in May this year. I tried then to impress upon them the type of situation they would be dealing with, its chronic nature, the large number of stock on very large properties, and an experienced and very "savvy" owner. I suggested they needed to plan, to spend time, to drive around the properties to see and document what they could, even to begin to gather evidence, without alerting the owners or their manager first. I knew that as soon as the owners knew that they had been reported they would shift and hide the worst stock and drag the dead ones away into the bush.

And that is what subsequently happened. The AHO`s stayed on the road and would not have seen a tenth of the stock. They cited bio security and the lack of a suitable vehicle as reasons for not going onto any of the properties. So the following weekend the cattle in the worst body condition were moved and the dead ones were dragged away. I believe most of the cattle moved should not have been allowed to travel except under DPI supervision and with knowledge of the destination and subsequent care, or lack of, the cattle would receive. I followed one of the truck loads down the mountain and at least two cattle were down at the back of the truck. I felt exasperated and let down, but for time being felt I couldn`t do much more and perhaps it might be enough to bring about some husbandry improvement for the cattle.

In June I felt that the cattle were rapidly losing what body condition they might have had. Many were now showing the 'bottle jaw', depressed attitude and uncoordinated way of walking. As neither of the AHO`s at Bairnsdale were available I rang ██████████ at the Maffra office to see where the case stood and to reiterate my concerns. I was hoping that a "Notice to Comply" might have been issued but was told that privacy laws prevented that information being given out.

In an effort to keep the remainder of this letter as brief as possible I will recount a few details which particularly concern me. These are as follows: that during the remainder of June, through July and August the cattle continued to decline in condition and health, with some to die; in my opinion, at no time did they receive sufficient feed; that I was asked to take photographic evidence and report any animals that I saw down so that DPI could come and destroy them which would help with the case; that when I subsequently rang about a down steer and another I believed would soon die, DPI simply rang the manager to deal with them; that I suspect that DPI never tried to gather any evidence and had no intention of trying; that visits by DPI to the properties were made by prior arrangement with the owners and at times with the owner as their guide. So is it any wonder that before a visit cattle continued to be moved, dead ones to be dragged out of site, and that the cattle

had been fed on the days of the DPI visits. To be told that thirty or so deaths, and that is the ones we know about, out of one thousand plus cattle is tolerable, especially when virtually all the cattle were being starved with most in body condition score 0-1.5, is morally wrong. Then to be told that no dead stock piles had been seen was nearly laughable. It might be appropriate to start off with a new case in a friendly and advisory manner when it is a first report, but not when dealing with experienced knowledgeable owners who have a chronic history of animal neglect.

To me the owners have failed to farm as per the Code of Accepted Farming for the Welfare of Cattle to such an extent that they have breached the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. As I see it the DPI has allowed this cruelty to continue for future years by failing in the method of its investigation. There was a real opportunity here to do something positive for these unfortunate and long suffering animals, but it has been missed.

I hope this letter prompts the DPI to assess the processes it has in place to deal with cases such as this in an effort to bring about better outcomes for starving animals at the mercy of recalcitrant owners.

Yours sincerely,

Nicola Fanning.

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