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The Secretary
Legislative Council, Economy and Infrastructure Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
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This letter is a submission to the Inquiry into the Impact of Animal Rights Activism to examine the "effectiveness of legislation and other measures to prevent and deter activities of unauthorised persons on agricultural and associated industries".

The balance of commerce and idealism is always a fraught issue, however recent activity by pressure groups and so called 'change agents' has heightened the need for curtailing the behaviours of these people and protecting the lives and livelihood of farmers lawfully operating.

Recent examples such as the Gippy Goat Café case demonstrate how effectively the actions of a few can ruin an otherwise thriving business. The degeneration into threats to the welfare of and leaking of private information about, those involved demonstrates the wider implications of ideological radicalism that poses a genuine risk to impressionable people encouraged to join in protests of this nature.

Government funded entity's such as the ABC and its 4 Corners program also face the ethical questions about the right to broadcast against the damage caused. As demonstrated by the demise of the live export trade as a result of the Government's response to a program about cruelty to cows in Indonesian slaughterhouses. While QLDs needles in the strawberries demonstrated how acute the threat to public health can be, due to the actions of disgruntled individuals.

As a farming business who do not make a living from the raising of livestock our interest is more from the view of protecting the wider industry from undue influence of activist groups who seek to impact agricultural businesses on any number of issues including water use; land use; indigenous claims; sustainability; social equity – even down to the type of crops which should or shouldn't be grown.

The level of hysteria has reached unimaginable levels and even as stone fruit growers we have been accosted by protestors for selling fruit which is allegedly contaminated by 'poisons' such as chlorine and fluoride in the water used in the post-harvest process. Most recently we have heard feedback from bee-keepers who have received abuse for 'stealing honey'!

There appears to be a trend at the moment for the self-appointed arbiters of all things righteous, to attempt to dictate how the agriculture sector will operate. Be it under the guise of sustainability, climate change, the UN's Agenda 21 or any other packaging our livelihoods are being threatened by noisy minorities whose social media self-promotion and "cause of the week" trumps the rights of farmers to go about the business of making a living. After 4 Corners recent program about water use in the Riverina, are we to expect activists to take it upon themselves to damage infrastructure such as pipelines, channels and dams?

And so far, it seems to be having an impact. As government at every level scramble to appease or pander to the populist movements they've only served to encourage and embolden them, their 'demands' dominating the headlines and talk back shows. Policy around this issue needs to transcend populism and carry forward far beyond the next election cycle. If you need an example of how an industry has been crushed under the weight of activism, government indifference, commercial exploitation and consumer apathy you only need to look at the demise of the Victorian Dairy sector.

Our industries are being crippled by any number of problems such as the massive increases in the price of water; doubling of electricity for pumping and processing; increased costs of fuel and fertiliser; labour shortages and market pressures. We cannot be expected to tolerate trespass; breaches of biosecurity which could impact on the sale of produce; destructive sabotage and the vilification of our industry which has been a keystone of our economy and earned an enviable reputation for quality internationally.

Much harsher penalties, strongly enforced and well publicised - for both the perpetrators and those that incite such action is the only way to reign in the influence and damage being done by these over indulged individuals.

Yours Sincerely

Alan Payne & Louise Ackland