

PAYNTER FARMS ELLINBANK
Dairy, Training, Industry, Community



ABN 57 115 343 794



25 July 2019

The Secretary
Legislative Council, Economy and Infrastructure Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE, VIC 3002

Submission Re: **Inquiry into the Impact of Animal Rights Activism**

Dear Sir/Madam

Paynter Farms Ellinbank has until recently been a dairy-farming business located south of Warragul in the West Gippsland district. It operates opposite the State Government research facility at Ellinbank which is less than two hours travel time from Melbourne. It is a widely known property, having hosted thousands of visitors over the last twenty five years ranging from local primary school students to international trade delegations and even the occasional vegan seeking information.

This has been done to engage with the broader community and tell the story of milk and meat production on our property. I am perplexed that activists continue to demand 'transparency' when information and engagement is available. Social media has fuelled conspiracy rhetoric, fed misinformation and eroded trust in our food production system. Farming families who care for their livestock and strive to produce high quality wholesome food are indignant and somewhat dumbfounded when they see their hard work for limited financial return portrayed by the activist PR machine as rapacious factory farming.

Activists have justified criminal trespass in the name of 'gathering evidence' and 'revealing the truth'. Our farm system is audited annually for adherence to food safety, O H & S, environmental and animal welfare compliance. Government agencies have the legislative power to enter and enforce compliance with a wide range of legislated and community endorsed production requirements. The farmers I engage with routinely are striving for 'best-practice' as dictated by our consumers and the community across all their farming operations. It is in our interest to do this to maintain profitability in an industry with tight margins and strong international competition. Where we have become aware of poor practice in our farming community, we have quickly highlighted the issue with the relevant authority for follow up. This is in stark contrast to vigilante activists who seem to hold onto illegally gathered images rather than quickly passing them on to the correct authorities. Release of their 'evidence' appears to be less about animal welfare and more about fuelling a skewed portrayal of animal production that fits their agenda of global veganism and anthropomorphic narrative of animal rights.

Farm businesses feel let down by the judiciary as a result of the magistrate's ruling with regard to the 'Gippy Goat' invasion and thefts. While the actions of Victorian Police, both on the day and during the subsequent investigation are to be commended, the penalty imposed on a few of the offenders has had business owners questioning where the punishment or deterrence message was in the fines imposed. Businesses have felt unsupported and exposed by the minimal penalties, and activists have been emboldened. Diminished faith in the will or desire of the government to protect farmers has been evident at local and state farmer meetings.



Our business has tightened security protocols and devoted some time to seeking information on what to do if invaded. We have considered a number of scenarios and worked through a mental plan to ensure staff and livestock safety, seek police assistance and gather evidence.



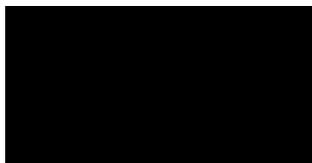
While dairy farms in our local area have not been the focus of activist attention, there has been an impact on perceptions of personal security. This is heightened by the fact that ‘where we work is where we live’, and that much of a farmer’s identity is often tied up in what he or she does. A threat to the farm business is also a threat to the security people should enjoy in their home, and an attack on their ‘being’. To be confronted by self-righteous and ill-informed activists where you live is not something farmers have been prepared for or had to deal with in the past. It isn’t surprising that, given the amount of financial and environmental pressure on the dairy industry at present, some farmer’s reactions to activists have been less than text-book.

We have invested heavily, along with our industry, to develop and operate rigorous quality assurance programs. These ensure that traceable and high quality product is available to the dairy and meat processors. In turn, the processors QA systems guarantee that Australian and International consumers receive premium product to enjoy with the assurance that it is safe, clean and wholesome. A major concern would be criminal trespass to attack the integrity of our food production system via contamination of product or introduction of a livestock pathogen. There is precedence with the feedlot contamination using pig meat at Portland impacting Halal customers. Economic damage to individual businesses and the national economy would be enormous. Information about the scale of economic cost could easily be sought by the committee from agencies that have modelled these impacts, and I would encourage you to familiarise yourselves with this information.

Penalties and sanctions need to reflect the economic and human cost of activist actions. Imposing more realistic sanctions may not cause the true-believers and ideologues to curtail their activities, but it will give their followers reason to consider their actions.

People have the right to choose the type of food they consume. Our society predominantly consumes animal product as part of a balanced and nutritious diet, and farmers produce this in line with societal expectations. Changes to diets should come about via rational argument based on sound scientific evidence; not illegal acts of terrorism and harassment directed at those involved in food production.

Thank-you for your consideration of this submission.



Ron Paynter B Agr Sc, FARLF
Managing Partner
Paynter Farms Ellinbank

