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From: Bill Baxter [REDACTED]

Sent: Thursday, 13 June 2019 11:11 AM

To: CSO <CSO@parliament.vic.gov.au>

Subject: Submission to Economic & Infrastructure Committee Inquiry into the Impact of Animal Rights Activism on Victorian Agriculture

I am a member of a family farming business operating in Northern Victoria. The farm comprises some 3000 ha in several non-contiguous parcels. It was established by my grand-father in 1905 and is currently worked by third and fourth generation members with the fifth generation in the wings. We produce wool, meat, cereal grains, oil seeds, pulses, hay and straw.

We are deeply concerned with the relatively recent and sudden outbreak of lawless behaviour by persons claiming to be acting in the best interest of animal welfare. Sadly, their actions betray a misunderstanding of animal behaviour, animal welfare, farmers care and concern for their livestock, biosecurity considerations, family privacy and respect for the law.

#### UNWANTED AND UNNECESSARY STRESS IMPOSED ON FARMING FAMILIES

It is self evident that most farm workplaces are also the places of residence for families often with young children. The fear that the property could be invaded at any time but most likely in the dead of night or early morning by large numbers of uninvited persons with little or no understanding of animal behaviour or the laws of trespass is imposing great strain and stress on many farming families. It is a circumstance they do not deserve and it is clear that greater deterrents are required to put a stop to this gross anti-social behaviour.

The publication on social media of maps disclosing farm addresses, especially with the inference that animal welfare laws are being breached therein, is a grossly offensive invasion of privacy and adds immensely to stress levels of farmers already dealing with the vagaries of agriculture, drought, low commodity prices, labour shortages and so on. The fact that these maps are published by an organisation masquerading as a charity and enjoying the taxation advantages attached thereto simply aggravates the angst experienced.

## BIO SECURITY CONSIDERATIONS

In the last couple of decades Australian farmers have been become much more attuned to bio security risks. Our farm has bio security warning signs at the main entrance discouraging uninvited entry. We have all observed the ravages of serious outbreaks of animal diseases such as foot and mouth in Europe and swine fever in Asia. As an island nation, Australia has some natural protection from such diseases but with the propensity of Australians to travel abroad, that geographic protection is very much at risk of being breached. To have urban dwellers, largely ignorant of animal diseases, trespassing on farming properties imposes a bio security risk which Australians at large should simply not tolerate. The standard of living and the prosperity of every Australian, whether they know it or not, is underpinned by the export income generated by agriculture. The standard of living of every Australian cannot be allowed to be put in jeopardy by the actions of the irresponsible few who either have no understanding of bio security risks or choose to thumb their noses at those risks. It is curious and alarming that so called animal activists fail to comprehend that their activities could well result in the compulsory slaughter of millions of the very animals they profess to care about.

## FARMER ATTITUDES TO ANIMAL WELFARE

Almost 100% of livestock farmers are only too aware that a happy animal is a productive animal. Hungry, ill-treated or diseased animals don't bloom and the owner pays the price through reduced or nil income.

Farmers go out of their way to ensure that their animals do not go wanting. That is one of the main reasons why family farms often financially out perform corporate operations. Family members are on hand 24 hour a day, including weekends, to tend to livestock whether through the provision of water and feed, treatment for fly strike etc, returning escaped animals from dangerous road sides to the paddock or protecting them in the time of bushfires or floods. Often they are out in atrocious weather at all hours rendering assistance to calving cows or lambing ewes. They do it out of genuine compassion for their animals more than any financial reason.

Moreover, farmers call out those few recalcitrants who do the wrong thing.

## APPLICATION OF THE LAW

The court proceedings which ensued following the theft of animals from the Gippy Goat Cafe sent shock waves through all fair minded citizens. How could it be that a defendant found guilty of stealing a nanny goat in an organised and premeditated early morning raid could be fined only one dollar.

For starters, what about the welfare of the stolen goat which was alleged to be the prime motive of the perpetrator. Goats are herd animals. To be separated from the herd would have been extraordinarily stressful for the goat.

I was not present at the Court hearing so I did not hear the evidence and it difficult therefore to comment on the verdict. However, I did see the defendant interviewed on ABC Landline on 3 June 2019. She was unrepentant and made it clear that she is likely to transgress again. She exhibited no respect whatsoever for the Gippy Goat Cafe proprietors or their eight employees and made allegations about the financial affairs of a legitimate business upon she could have no knowledge. It is clear from that interview that the one dollar fine had no deterrent value

whatsoever and was not in keeping with the intent and spirit of the law. If the magistracy is not prepared to apply the law as Parliament surely intended, then Parliament needs to act.

#### HYPOCRISY OF SO CALLED ANIMAL ACTIVISTS

The ABC Landline program referred to above included footage of a “vegan picnic” and interviews with some of the attendees. There was discussion of animal rights and a dog on a leash was present. How does tethering a dog sit with the activists claimed aim of allowing animals to roam free? Moreover, if the dog, a carnivorous animal, is being fed vegan food then surely that is animal cruelty. If, on the other hand, the dog is being fed a meat product diet, then again hypocrisy knows no bounds.

#### AN OBSERVATION

A couple of years ago I served as a director of a large state owned entity. One of my fellow directors regularly lectured me on the alleged inappropriateness of being a meat eater. On one occasion. I asked her if she would prefer that millions of calves and lambs never be born and have no chance at life whatsoever. She looked at me quizzically. I explained that if farmers could not market their livestock, then they would not breed them in the first place. She was gobsmacked. This incontrovertible piece of logic had obviously never occurred to her. Regrettably, such lop sided thinking is endemic among persons who become obsessed with a particular subject.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS THE COMMITTEE SHOULD CONSIDER

I am not a lawyer. However, on my reading, neither the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994 or the Livestock Management Act 2010 lend themselves to conveniently addressing the current issue. Both Acts are more concerned with regulating persons who are actively engaged in agriculture; not those who wish to interfere with legitimate practice. I therefore prefer the following.

1 Recommending to the Federal Government that charitable status for organisations which impinge upon the privacy of individuals or businesses be revoked.

2 Amend section 3 of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 to define the seizure or theft of animals from farms by unauthorised persons to be an act of cruelty and insert in the relevant section of that Act penalties to deal with such cruelty including an appropriate minimum so that the farce of one dollar fines cannot be repeated.

3 Amend the Crimes Act 1958 to provide penalties for unauthorised acts on or near farming operations which put at risk bio security regimes.

Bill Baxter AM



10 June 2019