

Chairman and Members  
Economy and Infrastructure Committee  
Inquiry into the Impact of Animal Rights Activism on Victorian Agriculture

I would like to present an alternative viewpoint to that of the activists who claim that humans, in farming domestic animals, are exploiting them. This belief appears to arise because animals are killed.

Every animal which is born will inevitably die. There is a scientific term for a species in which animals no longer die: extinct. All species of animals have survival strategies. The most common is the ability to produce greater numbers of offspring than are required for reproduction. Take for example baitfish. Many thousands of embryos are produced with the certainty that almost all will be killed before reaching maturity. Where excessive numbers of offspring reach reproductive age the species will reach plague numbers, followed by population crashes as food resources are exhausted. Mice and rabbit plagues, and currently feral deer fit this model. Many other wild species are threatened, either by loss of habitat, competition or predation by introduced species, or over-harvesting .

In contrast to the unregulated or endangered wild animals, farmers do their utmost to ensure that breeding populations of their livestock are maintained, that animal numbers are managed to match available feed, and that stock are healthy. In times of drought this can involve considerable cost in purchasing feed. There is a clear economic incentive to the farmer to keep stock contented, as they are more productive and easier to handle. Is this not clearly also in the interests of the animal?

So both humans and the domestic animals benefit from the relationship. Humans gain an important source of food, and in particular high quality protein. In return the animals have food and water provided, and their breeding populations are supported. It is the species of animals which have entered into this partnership with humans which are thriving. If humans were to give up eating domestic animals or their produce, there would be no rationale for keeping breeding stock, many of which have long and contented lives. Those seeking to prevent animals from dying would prevent them from ever living.

It is clearly incumbent on the livestock industries to ensure that animals are treated humanely. This is mutually beneficial, as the meat or other produce from unstressed animals is superior to that from mistreated animals. Regrettably, instances do occur where systems fail, but overall the vast majority of domestic animals are treated well and killed as humanely as possible. Some perceptions of cruelty are in the eye of the beholder. The video of cute day old chicks on a conveyor belt falling to their instant death in a macerator is distressing to viewers; the chicks themselves are clearly oblivious to their fate.

Many animal activists, by their actions, reveal that they have little understanding of animal psychology. Domestic animals are creatures of routine, and disruption by invaders is likely to be highly stressful both to them and their owners, even if the activists have convinced themselves that their actions are helping the animals.

Activists also claim that their trespasses are necessary to expose concealed cruelty by animals. However, their actions at the Gippy Goat café, where owners were transparently seeking to educate the public into farming practices, give the lie to this. The goats which were stolen were obviously well fed and extremely tame. There was no evidence of animal cruelty, yet this publicity stunt by activists has severely impacted this business, resulting in the closure of the café.

I am a beef producer. As such I am obliged to comply with the requirements of the Livestock Production Assurance program.

The seven requirements of this program fall under the following headings:

1. Property risk assessments
2. Safe and responsible animal treatments
3. Stock foods, fodder crops, grain and pasture treatments
4. Preparation for dispatch of livestock
5. Livestock transactions and movements
6. Biosecurity
7. Animal Welfare

These are designed to assure consumers that animals are well treated during their lives, that their movements can be traced, and that producers are able to minimise the risk of disease.

Unauthorised entry, or removal of stock clearly poses a risk to biosecurity, particularly if trespassers have previously been on other farms, and may also impact on other aspects of the program. Most farms are also the home of the farmer. The Gippy Goat invasion was clearly aggravated burglary, and should have been treated as such.

Activists are clearly entitled to their beliefs, even though I believe these to be misguided. They are free to try to dissuade others from eating meat, although as I have explained above, this is not in the interests of the species involved. However, they should not be free to interfere with businesses which are both legal and ethical.

Aussie Farms is clearly not a charity The Aussie Farms Map is described is a comprehensive, interactive map of factory farms, slaughterhouses and other animal exploitation facilities. Although Aussie farms claims not to condone or encourage the use of the map for illegal purposes, the whole tone of the website is designed to threaten animal industries. I am unsure whether it would be practical to remove this website, but the charitable status of Aussie Farms should be revoked. Taxpayer's money should not be used to support an extremist organisation.

I support the introduction of penalties which provide a real disincentive for activists to interfere with legal farming and related industries.

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