

## **Submission for the inquiry into the impact of animal rights activists on Victorian agriculture.**

Sadly there are ever more concerning episodes of cruelty to farmed animals which result in whistle-blowers being galvanized to reveal this mistreatment to the public and ultimately to politicians who have the power to prevent it.

Unfortunately, existing legislation does little to protect a farmed animal (which is obvious when cruel practices are exposed and little if any punishment is forthcoming).

My son worked in a piggery in Corowa, NSW for approximately 8 years (until 2013), during that time he was privy to the horrors of pig farming. He sustained a serious injury when he worked there due to negligence at management level and ineffective OH&S policies. The company in their desire for increased productivity deliberately ignored their own OH&S procedures with the consequences being my son requiring an amputation. His injury resulted in litigation against the company and we had numerous meetings with union representatives, my son, company management and myself (as support person for my son).

I dreaded those meetings as the administration building where the meetings were held was in very close proximity to the sheds where the pigs were housed. The stench was horrific and the sound of the pigs crying out will stay with me forever.

Through my son's experience there I learned a great deal about the raising of animals in an intensive farming environment. The idea that an activist could be considered a biosecurity risk in a place that is rife with feces, blood, urine, mud, deceased (and decaying) animals and countless other pathogenic exposures is ludicrous.

It was thanks to a brave whistle-blowing employee (known by my son) who took footage and exposed images showing and detailing routine shocking cruelty. He reported terrified pigs on the kill line having an electric probe inserted into their ear or anus causing them to scream and writhe in agony. Thankfully the footage forced the company to launch an investigation into staff treatment of animals. The investigation revealed systemic brutal treatment by some staff members that had been going on for an indefinite period of time.

Had this whistle-blower been at risk of incurring legal proceedings against him for recording the abuse, I believe it's highly unlikely that he would have come forward.

This is but one instance that illustrates the absolute importance of whistle-blowers being able to feel that they are safe to present their information without fear of threats, bullying, harassment or legal action against them.

Another point to consider: whistle-blowers exist because the animal agriculture industry insists on such secrecy in their business practices (not to mention their deception of the public with slick marketing adverts depicting happy animals joyfully frolicking in lush green paddocks, happily giving up their lives for our dinner plates)

Honest transparency in how animals are grown for human consumption should be mandatory. CCTV cameras should be installed at every stage of the animals' journey from birth through to their premature

death. These cameras should be a legal requirement in farms that raise animals and harsh penalties should apply to any business not compliant.

Throughout history whistle-blowers have been instrumental in shining a light on injustice and forcing change that has resulted in better conditions for all concerned and consequently, creating a better world for everyone to live in.

The welfare of animals has long been relegated to the 'too hard basket', leaving it languishing in archaic policies from a time when it was thought that animals don't feel pain nor experience emotions. We now know unequivocally that this outdated notion is completely wrong. We know that animals feel pain (as we do) they experience a wide range of emotions (as we do) they recognize one another and other species (as we do) they are connected and protective of their young (as we are).

It is time that acknowledgement of animal sentience be reflected in laws that protect them from harm, all harm – Including animal farming not just companion animals!

Animal welfare and the impact of intensive factory farming both on the animal and on the planet is one of the most important issues of our time and deserving of well-considered and united policies that protect animals by minimising the suffering they endure at all times.

There should also be well considered policies that protect whistle-blowers and direct punishment towards the perpetrator of the crime – “don't shoot the messenger” so to speak. Harsh penalties should apply to all businesses who fail to adhere to animal welfare policies. Perpetrators of cruelty to animals should be given mandatory jail time.

It doesn't take a rocket scientist to realise our world has changed dramatically in the last 30+ years! Today's leaders must lead with compassion and vision for a better future for all living creatures and not be locked into the “Economic Growth” mindset. Thinking and behaving as though we can continue to grow economically and exponentially is myopic and sounding the death knell for all residents on our beautiful planet.

Governments can help farmers transition to plant based agriculture, planting crops that are suitable for each of Australia's different climatic conditions (growing rice in the Mallee is a classic example of what not to do by the way!) But we can shift our vision away from farming animals to farming plants and therein lies incredible opportunities for economic growth and salvation for farmers who are watching their animals die in paddocks with no feed or water. With a focus on sustainability and compassion we have the potential to enter an economically sustainable and vibrant future.

Whistle-blowers have given us the information necessary to highlight the urgent need for us to evolve and create a different vision and for that I applaud them.

With hope

Lisa Brand

