

**TO The Victorian Legislative Council's Economy and Infrastructure Committee**

**SUBMISSION TO INQUIRY INTO IMPACT OF ANIMAL RIGHTS ACTIVISM ON VICTORIAN AGRICULTURE**

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The Victorian Parliament must review the State's legal protection for farmers and agricultural enterprises against animal rights activists who are trespassing and illegally entering private property, intimidating and overwhelming property owners, stealing livestock, causing malicious damage and cruelty to animals

Below is a list of some of the illegal activities undertaken recently by these activists.

1. Protestors blocked the intersection of Flinders and Swanston streets in the CBD, blocking traffic and affecting 11 tram lines.
2. Protestors blocked the entrances and exits of 3 Victorian abattoirs, MC Hird in Geelong, Westside Meats in Bacchus Marsh and O'Connors in Pakenham, by driving trucks across the entrances and exits and then letting the tyres down.
3. Activists blocked the entrance to the Australian Food Group's pig abattoirs at Laverton.
4. Nine Activists locked themselves into an abattoir in Goulburn, NSW.
5. Activists entered the Pakenham Saleyards, holding up the selling process.
6. Theft of animals from the Gippy Goat Café owners and aggressive, confronting behaviour from protestors forcing CLOSURE of their enterprise.
7. Two invasions of private property on a free range poultry farm causing significant property damage and their activity causing the smothering death of approximately 300 chickens.

The above list shows there is a constant, relentless policy of attack on food producers by these activists who have no fear of the current legislation.

They affect not only the private property of hard-working farmers but all associated enterprises, such as livestock saleyards, abattoirs, the livestock trucking industry, food manufacturing and processing, our nation's bio-security and export future and the nation's reputation for clean, green produce.

Ironically, these activists who say they are protesting to save animals from cruel treatment by farmers are actually causing them immense stress. The action of these protestors, as shown on TV, manhandling animals and shoving them in the boot of a car cannot be condoned and shows that they have little understanding of animal welfare.

Victoria's legislation must be substantially upgraded to include very significant fines and jail terms not only for those present at a protest but also those people organising and inciting animal activist protests.

These fines must reflect the financial loss of income, loss of any enterprise/farm caused as a result of animal activism, cost of damages caused by protestors, cost of injury to humans and injury or death of livestock.

If animal activists protest at saleyards, delaying or stopping the auction process, there is a domino or roll-on effect, not only to the vendors and purchasers, but the whole supply chain from the freight industry and truck drivers to the abattoirs, processors and manufacturing plants.

At major sales, such as the feature weaner sales at Yea, that are held annually in January, in excess of 8,100 head of cattle are sold within a week, with total average sales of \$9 million plus. For many producers this sale provides virtually their total annual income.

These cattle by start of sale, will have been drafted, weighed and scanned under the compulsory National Livestock Identification System (NLIS) for lifetime traceability, incurring a cost for both vendors and purchasers.

If activists open pen gates boxing cattle, or cause the yards to be locked down in order to safeguard livestock and humans, thus forcing the sale to be cancelled, it would be impossible to feed cattle even overnight as the yards would be fully occupied, with no room to spread and feed hay.

Cancellation of the sale would mean that livestock would have to be returned to their owners' properties at enormous cost to owners, stock agents and all concerned.

There must be a very severe deterrent both in fines and extended prison sentence for all individuals, organisations and those who have promoted or organised any activist protest that causes disruption of livestock auctions or sales.

Such a threat to our industry are these activists, that I would suggest prison sentences should be a minimum of 1 year to 5 years, with fines equivalent to the loss of total sales day income.

Punishment must be severe to protect our livestock industry from bio-security threats and protect our saleyard and agricultural workforce.

The Victorian Police Force must be given the power to immediately remove activists from farm properties and from saleyards so that the welfare and safety of both livestock and humans is the utmost priority.

Our global agricultural reputation and the protection of our nation's bio-security must be a priority for our State and Federal Governments and consequently the welfare of livestock and farmers who provide 3 meals a day for each and every Australian and also feed 60 million of the world's population.

It is a gross invasion of privacy when an animal activist organisation posts on social media a map showing hundreds of farm addresses, inferring without any evidence, that these farmers are producing livestock using cruel animal practices.

This social media practice cannot be tolerated and governments must force this type of media to be taken down immediately.

The footage of animal activists swarming onto farms, in a very threatening and intimidating manner, manhandling and thieving animals is extremely stressful for both livestock and farmers and cannot be condoned with the only retribution being a slap on the wrist and a one dollar fine as has previously happened.

Unless severe punishment is legislated as a deterrent, it is only a matter of time before a farmer, in the heat of the moment, takes the matter into his own hands with what could be life threatening consequences. The Victorian Government must act as quickly as possible to protect our farmers and agricultural industries from these terrorist- like animal activist protest events.

The Victorian agriculture sector is vitally important to the state's economy, with the dairying beef and sheep livestock industries providing 43% of the total value of agricultural production in Victoria and therefore demands legal protection from these terrorist type animal activist activities.

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