

Submission to the Victorian Inquiry on Animal Rights Activism

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The type and prevalence of unauthorised activity on Victorian farms and related industries, and the application of existing legislation

I believe that the prevalence of unauthorised activity on Victorian farms is far less than what the recent media and political hype would have us believe. It would be interesting to see the police records on this, however I am confident they would reveal that only a very small proportion of Victorian farms have been affected by whistleblowers, certainly significantly fewer than what we have been led to believe in the media of late.

There are already Trespass laws in place that deal with the unauthorised entry of persons (including whistleblowers and others) onto private property. I think it would be unnecessary, inappropriate and discriminatory to introduce special laws and penalties for certain groups of people.

I believe that the proposal to introduce increased penalties for whistleblowers in the agricultural industry is in fact an attempt to further silence those who attempt to reveal animal cruelties – cruelties that the public deserve to know about, but the industry is so intent on keeping hidden.

The workplace health and safety and biosecurity risks, and potential impacts of animal activist activity on Victorian farms, to Victoria's economy and international reputation

In relation to workplace health and safety, I don't believe that whistleblowers attempting to expose animal cruelties would pose much of a threat at all, and I should imagine this issue would be of little or no concern to workers. Of much greater concern I think, would be the strain on workers' mental health being exposed to animal cruelty on a daily basis, and the physical challenges and risks of the job, such as knife use, working on hard and/or slippery floors, exposure to noise and/or chemicals, risk of infection, etc.

Further, I don't believe whistleblowers would pose a real risk to the safety of farmers, their families or their homes. In fact, in order to capture footage of animal cruelty, they would need to remain undetected, so it is not likely they would go anywhere near a farmer's private residence. It is my understanding that no houses have ever been entered by whistleblowers, nor have there been any instances of whistleblowers physically harming farmers.

I am not an expert in the area of biosecurity, however I understand that there are no instances of whistleblowers in the animal agriculture industry ever having caused biosecurity problems in Australia. I suspect that the biosecurity issue is being used as a scare tactic. I would be very concerned though, about the risks associated with some of the conditions found in factory farms, particularly overcrowding and hygiene issues.

In relation to our international reputation, if the activities of whistleblowers pose a risk to Victoria's international reputation, then it follows that the animal agriculture industry has something to hide - otherwise whistleblowers would pose no threat at all. If we need to ensure that the activities of our factory farms are kept hidden behind closed doors to protect our international reputation, then it is clear to me that we need to take urgent action to improve animal welfare. We need to introduce laws to protect animals in farming from cruelty and we need to enforce them. I do not believe that introducing tougher penalties for those seeking to expose legalised animal cruelty is an appropriate response.

The civil or criminal liability of individuals and organisations who promote or organise participation in unauthorised animal activism activities

In the past, whistleblowers have been seen as brave and important instigators of much needed changes in a range of areas. I see the activities of whistleblowers in the animal agriculture industry as no different.

There are already Trespass laws in place to deal with those who enter another person's premises without authority. I do not believe it is necessary or appropriate to increase penalties for whistleblowers or the organisers of these activities in the animal agriculture industry (or in any other industry for that matter). To do so, would further strengthen the industry's ability to hide animal cruelty, when in fact what we really need is more transparency.

There are currently no laws to protect farm animals from cruelty. They are exempt from the laws which protect our pet dogs and cats. The current Codes of Practice are only voluntary (not mandatory) and there is no requirement for CCTV cameras to be installed in factory farms or slaughterhouses.

So in the absence of adequate legislation or monitoring, the only protection that farms animals currently have is from whistleblowers who put their own safety on the line to obtain footage. To increase penalties to these individuals and organisations would be to push animal cruelty further into the darkness.

Some of the cruelties we have been made aware of thanks to the activities of whistleblowers include:

- The use of battery cages and the maceration of day old male chicks in the egg industry
- The killing of male calves at just 5 days old in the dairy industry, sometimes by sledgehammer
- The cruelties of sow stalls
- The realities of the live export trade, including sheep being cooked alive on live export ships
- The painful and terrifying suffocation of pigs in gas chambers

All of these are legal and routine farming practices taking place every day in Victoria.

I strongly believe that consumers have a right to know how their food is produced. With all of the attempts made through advertising to paint an entirely different and glorified picture, the only way consumers can really learn the truth in the current system is through the activities of whistleblowers. If the penalties to these individuals and organisations were increased, it would become increasingly difficult for consumers to access the information needed to make informed choices.

Provide recommendations on how the Victorian Government and industry could improve protections for farmers' privacy, businesses, and the integrity of our biosecurity system and animal welfare outcomes, whether through law reform or other measures

I strongly believe that we need to make significant improvements to animal welfare in the agricultural industry. If appropriate reforms were made in animal agriculture, if laws were put in place to protect animals and if these laws were enforced, then there would be no need for whistleblowers trespassing on farms.

Consumers want and deserve to know the truth about how their food is produced. A 2018 report titled [Australia's Shifting Mindset on Farm Animal Welfare](#) commissioned by the Federal Department of Agriculture and Water Resources suggests that the majority of Australians care about animal welfare. The report found 95% of respondents viewed farm animal welfare with concern and 91% wanted reform to address it.

Some of the ways that I believe improvements could be made to animal welfare include:

- Installing CCTV cameras in factory farms and slaughterhouses
- Making Codes of Practice in animal agriculture mandatory (not voluntary)
- Including farm animals in the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act
- Recognising the sentience of all animals including farm animals

In addition, as suggested in a 2016 [Productivity Commission Report](#), I agree that a statutory agency should be created to develop national farm animal welfare standards using rigorous science and evidence of community values in the area of farm animal welfare.

I strongly believe that we should be focusing on making improvements to animal welfare, rather than attempting to silence those seeking to expose animal cruelty.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this inquiry. I hope it leads to improvements to animal welfare in farming and to a greater level of transparency in the animal agriculture industry, so that whistleblowers are no longer needed.