

Submission for the Inquiry into the impact of animal rights activism on Victorian agriculture.

Much change has been created in history by the public being alerted to issues they had not considered before.

Speaking for myself and many others I know, I had no idea of the many common practices in the agriculture industry going back 5 years ago. I had heard of animal cruelty, but I was not sure what kind of things went on in that industry.

Fast forward 5 years and I sometimes wish I still didn't know as I am often sick to my stomach at the knowledge and degree of cruelty in these industries. However it sickens me more to know that these things were happening, various politicians and people of power knew about these things including farmers and employees within the industry and yet the media portrayed happy cows, sheep and pigs frolicking in lush paddocks having the time of their lives.....

The truth was hidden from me. I am the consumer, the person who pays for these "products", just one of many many people in the public, who want to be told and shown the truth. Who deserve to know the truth and see how our animals are treated, how they are processed from paddock to plate, so that I can make an informed decision on whether I want to participate in this industry. Would I want to be a consumer of these products if I knew exactly how these animals are treated, processed and far too often abused. No I would not and that is exactly what the industry relies on.....secrecy, being hidden from the public and false media advertising conditioning people to believe in a world of happy animals living an amazing life before sacrificing themselves so that we may eat a "product" that we do not need, that is one of the biggest culprits in climate change and destroying our planet and a multitude of things that I won't mention here being that it's not the main focus of this submission.

The work of many animal rescue groups allows me to see the truth and make informed choices. I'm astounded that we even need animal rescuers and whistle-blowers from within to be shown the truth.

I was absolutely appalled to learn of legal routine practices such as the following:

- Pregnant sows are confined to a gestation crate, a metal enclosure that is scarcely wider or longer than the sow itself for the duration of their pregnancy.
- Piglets can have their tails sliced off and teeth cut without pain relief.
- Hens spend their entire lives in battery cages where they can not even spread their wings.
- Day old male chickens are ground up alive just for being born male with no production ability.
- Bobby calf's can be "dispatched" by being hit on the head with a blunt object or have their chest cavity crushed to stop their heart, also because they are born male and are therefore judged as having no production ability.

I could go on and on with the list above but have just touched on a few that give me nightmares.

If CCTV was installed into these facilities, then animal rescuers would have no need to attend. Why don't we have CCTV? Why is the industry threatened by it, if there is nothing to hide?

If our pet animals, our beloved cats or dogs were treated in this way be would be horrified....in fact the culprit would be charged with an offence as these animals are given protection.... Farm animals who are sentient beings feel the same pain yet they are not protected in any way as the above shows.....WHY ?

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

The vast majority of protests directed at farms or processing plants etc is peaceful. These protests or activities are held to bring awareness of the truth to the public due to the lack of transparency from the industry.

The majority of animal rescuers are compassionate, loving, kind people who only wish to show the public exactly what goes on, as in the legal but incredibly cruel practices mentioned above. They hold signs and posters or pictures that depict the cruel practices taking place.

A huge amount of these activities are silent protests as these people show compassion for all living beings and understand that the majority of the public are unaware of the cruelty inflicted every day on farmed animals.

These pictures often come from within the industry from whistle-blowers and rescuers who attend these premises to take photos of the truth. They do not cause any wilful damage to property or equipment. They do not enter the private dwellings of farmers or approach any of their families. They do not threaten or assault farmers or their families.

These accusations have been sensationalised by the media and have portrayed animal rescuers in a bad light to take the heat off the farming industry and once again distract people from the truth of what is happening.

They do hide cameras, take photos or footage and in general gather evidence of the cruel legal and often illegal activities taking place.

There are already existing laws that are more than adequate to deal with any person that offends and the focus should be on providing laws to protect those who currently have none and no voice to speak out.....the animals.

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.

I am married to an ex sheep farmer who is honest enough to say that he and his family and the neighbouring farmers around the district never once wore protective clothing when it came to their livestock. They had no procedures along these lines and gave it very little thought. They had no proper disposal of injections, did not use gloves or masks and drench and dip containers were just thrown in a pile when finished and so on....

In all the footage I have seen from whistle blowers on the news, in the papers and social media, I have never seen the farmers or workers wearing protective clothing. However, in contrast to that, in most of the footage displayed on the news, in papers and on social media of animal rescuers attending processing plants they have been wearing all of the required protective wear.

If factory farmed animals such as chickens and sheep to name a few, are transported in open trucks, exposed to the elements and the public then how can there be a bio security risk?

Animal Activists' Compliance with the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994, Livestock Management Act 2010, and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986;

I am not going to lie, its not who I am. I am being completely honest when I say that I have tried to read all 3 acts listed above but found them completely confusing and extremely hard to understand so I can only reply to the above question with what I dont know and understand.

Livestock disease control – as mentioned earlier, my husband was a sheep farmer for over 18 years. He has never heard of the Live stock Disease Control act and therefore had no procedures in place and no idea of what it required. However he was a very successful farmer. In his opinion the neighbouring farmers would have been in much the same boat so they obviously felt disease control was not of much importance and therefore people coming onto the property didn't cause any risk in the his eyes as a farmer. He didn't wear protective clothing, nor did the other farmers in the area and so they would not expect others to wear them either, however whenever footage of animal rescuers entering farms are abattoirs are shown, they are the only ones wearing protective clothing.

Prevention of cruelty to animal's act – I understand that they set the standards for dealing with commercial livestock. However, I find it hard to understand that domestic animals and livestock animals are treated differently when they can all feel the same pain and have similar intelligence levels.....in fact some live stock are way more intelligent than dogs yet do not get the same protection.

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

I find the above reference extremely confusing and slightly bias. It dose not show that the so called " unauthorised animal activism activities " are in fact committed to seek the truth and not to commit a wrongful act.

Slavery was once legal whilst being gay was illegal. Change for both of these came through protests and people having the courage to stand up for what is right, not necessarily legal or illegal. As mentioned earlier the majority of these "activities" are peaceful and often silent. I wonder if it encroaches on a persons or organisations right to freedom of speech to pass such judgment on those who are only seeking to protect and obtain a truth that is deliberately hidden from us. Civil Liability implies that someone is injured, when no such thing has happened so how does that apply here?

Analysis of incidences and responses of other jurisdictions in Australia and internationally.

I have no knowledge of any other incidences or responses of other jurisdictions.

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

The current laws provide more than adequate protection for farmers. They cover their business and privacy needs. There is little to no evidence of any risk to any farmers or their families, workers etc from any animal rescuers, protestors or organisations. These risks have been sensationalised by the media and there is no evidence to back this up.

There is however a need for transparency in the industry.

In regard to the bio security, as mentioned previously, the standards are not being met by the farmers themselves. My own husband who farmed sheep for 18 years freely admits that and there is plenty of visual evidence to back that up.

The laws that need to be reviewed and strengthened are the laws to protect our farmed animals. To protect them from the cruelty that has been exposed time and again and is documented in movies such as dominion. There are so many examples now available that one only needs to look to see the cruelty shown by reputable organisations, whistle-blowers and workers themselves who can no longer be a part of such abhorrent acts.

CCTV cameras must be mandatory in all processing plants, transportation and facility's around farm animals. They must always be protected and heavy penalties must be given to those who do not comply with installing cameras and those who abuse animals in any way, shape or form.

Conclusion

There are so many negative things associated with farming animals that have not been mentioned here.

From the green house gas emissions caused by farm animals to one third of the worlds crops being used to feed livestock whilst people go hungry and so much inbetween. Livestock production is killing our planet but it doesn't have to be this way when most animal products can be replaced by plant products.

I may not understand how parliament works or understand the law 100% but I do know how loving and caring a sheep, or a goat or a pig can be. I do not attend animal protests but I do care for a small amount of these amazing animals that live a horrific life of fear and pain and ultimately death.

I have felt a sheep nuzzle me just as my cat does. I have had a goat sit right beside me and share the sun on our faces, just as my dog does. I have had a pig follow me around the paddock, wondering what I am doing and constantly investigating everything along side me. I have watched them bond with their babies, frolic with their friends, show joy and interest and learn from games we have played. I have seen them protect not only their own kind but other beings, myself included from things they thought were threats. I have watched my dog, a rottwhieler play with them and sit with them and eat with them and i wonder how a dog can be so accepting when we humans cannot.

I have seen the fear a sheep shows when he has been surrendered from a slaughterhouse

because his condition was so bad, he wasn't worth killing. And the fear and terror in the eyes of the cows I see everyday in the paddocks around me, that I cannot even comfort as they are terrified of all humans.....and who can blame them.

Animals, particularly farm animals show more compassion, honesty, and forgiveness than many humans. They mean us no harm, but we inflict it on them again and again. Yet the rescued farm animals that I am blessed to care for and share my life with show me nothing, but love and happiness and they teach me what it truly means to love unconditionally.

These are the beings that need our protection, these are the voiceless that are exploited every day. We only ask.....i only ask....that you create laws to protect these voiceless beings just as there are laws to protect the farmers. That you protect both sides from cruelty, not just one and that you make this industry as transparent as all other industry's should be. Please, please protect those who cannot protect themselves. If these laws were available then the issues above would not be issues.

Thank You,

Tracy Layton

