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Rowena Sheppard

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Thank you for the opportunity to make comment with regard to the impact of animal activism on Victorian animal agriculture.

I would first assert that the need for these whistle-blowers and rescuers only exists because of cruelty towards animals and because animals experience physical and psychological pain and pleasure, in similar ways to humans and by essentially the same physical and chemical processes. Currently animal activism in the form of rescuers and whistle-blowers is the only mechanism which provides for community expectations and needs to expose systemic agricultural animal cruelty.

Most reasonable people consider animal cruelty to be morally wrong and even criminal. This is evident in that we have animal cruelty laws. Unfortunately many of the laws which apply to most Victorians and their animals do not apply, or are extremely weak for people who operate within animal agriculture, and the animals they own. Time and time again we have seen horrendous brutality as a part of everyday farming practices including castration, tail docking & mulesing without so much as a local anaesthetic. Common practices like intensive farming and the grinding up of day old cheeks and removing newborn calves from their mothers to be slaughtered, have been exposed to the general population. This of course has resulted in many people questioning whether they are willing to continue to support this by consuming animal products. It is not surprising that attitudes to animal welfare are increasingly trending towards recognition of sentience and belief that there is no such thing as higher welfare in the farming sector. Quote "In 2018, vegetarianism and veganism emerge as the fastest growing lifestyles world-wide" p.24 (<https://www.sheepcentral.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/190129-Commodity-or-Sentient-Being-Australias-Shifting-Mindset-on-Farm-Animal-Welfare-v.-7.0.pdf>). The answer to this, is not to criminalise exposing the wrong-doers, but in strengthening animal welfare and cruelty legislation to weed out unscrupulous operators. CCTV which is scrutinised would go a long way to improving the system.

Many submissions by farmers claim to be fearful of violence from those who are exposing animal cruelty. Despite numerous documented instances of rescuers clashing with farmers there has not been one instance of an activist threatening or harming a farmer, their employees or animals. On the contrary, every instance of threats of violence has involved abuse by farmers or their employees or people on their behalf and always towards the people trying to expose cruelty (https://andymeddick.com.au/2019/06/18/inquiry-into-animal-activism/?fbclid=IwAR00BuXF3_9Shw1Th9_zE3HCU0fbLyTL8KIGw267DkU8Xsv3PAdZ7T-TUio). Though, no doubt, farmers have experienced some upset at activism, it seems most likely that exposure of cruel and callous behaviour is the cause of this upset. Farmers also submit that they are law abiding people who wish to go about their business without interference. Unfortunately all too often we have seen animals are being abused with such flippancy that the perpetrators clearly do not fear repercussions, and the victims (animals) cannot report it. Every instance of animal cruelty, from live export, greyhound baiting, injured sheep and goats and it even the most recent horrific treatment of chickens by employees at Bridgewater Poultry has come to light because all of whistle-blowers. Without these people ensuring this information was made public these very disturbed people would continue to torture animals at any number of jobs as they probably had in the past without fear of exposure or punishment. Either no one was supervising or they did not care. It is no doubt distressing to be identified as a person who participates in or is responsible for such acts. Indeed, one can be sure that it is embarrassing and may result in significant vitriol from ordinary law abiding people, reduced employability and perhaps (although unlikely) prosecution.

(<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6222248/secret-footage-reveals-cruelty-at-egg-farm/?cs=14264>). For those involved in farming and animal agriculture to expect to simply be allowed to do as they wish is unreasonable and does not meet community expectations of accountability that apply to other industries. The private property argument farmers put forward is not reasonable when they are responsible for large scale animal welfare and the public interest must supersede this. It is to be noted that whistle-blowers have ever entered the homes of people on farm properties as falsely claimed.

Some have suggested that animal rescuers and whistle-blowers may pose a bio security risk to farms and their animals, and thus the community. To date there have been no recorded instances of bio security issues resulting from animal rescuers or whistle-blowers on property. These people are there for protection of the animals and do take necessary care of this. Bio-security is impacted by numerous factors including pests, native species, the location and size of the environment, and in particular intensive farming practices & organic standards which prevent antibiotic treatment for sick animals. In the case of the previously mentioned chickens who were brutalized prior to being slaughtered due to a salmonella outbreak, this was most likely due to unsanitary intensive farming practices with no link whatsoever to rescuers or whistle-blowers. There was no such concern for Bio-security recently in Victoria having dozens of people including children around livestock. There seemed to be no concern whatsoever about spreading disease from one property to the next as many locals from other properties attended (https://www.facebook.com/9NewsMelbourne/videos/509571136250130/?comment_id=2331148217148826¬if_id=1564287941027017¬if_t=feedback_reaction_generic). Similarly the recommendations and best practice do not seem to be applied in sale yards either. As the video in the link shows a blatant disregard for the basic physical and psychological needs of the ewe who has given birth on a concrete floor of a sale yard, where, according to best practice, she should not even be. Rescuers & whistle-blowers are not the risk here but there was very real risk of spreading Q Fever, via airborne droplets from birthing fluids (<https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/infectious-diseases/disease-information-advice/q-fever>).

Animal activism, animal rescuers and whistle-blowers are currently providing an essential function for informing public interest and debate around accountability within the animal agriculture industry.

We need animal agriculture to be accountable and the wrongdoers to be removed from the industry.