

Submission to the Victorian Parliament Economy and Infrastructure Committee

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The Secretary,

I provide to you my submission to the Victorian Parliaments Inquiry reference "Impact of Animal Rights Activism on Victoria Agriculture" and examining the "effectiveness of legislation and other measures to prevent and deter activities of unauthorised persons on agricultural "

I provide this submission to you as a person who has extensive knowledge in the Agricultural Industry both in food production, processing and retail ,but also representing Agriculture as President of the Victorian Farmers Federation Livestock President, Victorian Farmers Federation President, National Farmers Federation Director, CRF Foods Pty Ltd Director, Animal Health Australia and Australian Animal Health Laboratory Consultative Committees, former State Member for Western Victoria and Shadow Assistant Minister for Agriculture.

In previous work life experiences I have been a stockman on Live Sheep Export carriers and through the above roles understand the importance of livestock producers adhering to the Animal Welfare Standards that are enshrined in Industry and regulated codes such as the Livestock Disease Control Act 1994, Livestock Management Act 2010, and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986.

Livestock Producers in the main understand the need for such legislation to protect not only their livestock but also their business. Animal Welfare Standards and Bio Security protections are critical for the viability and profitability of their businesses as well as the consumers demand for high animal welfare standards for food production as well as the safety of food.

My experience is that the Industry is continually improving animal welfare standards within its Industry Codes and Governments continue to amend regulations to meet the consumers demand for strengthening those standards.

The Livestock Industry has been under attack for decades by animal activists and in my own experience I remember well as President of the VFF Livestock Group, having to protect the lawful business of shipping live sheep from Portland to the Middle East, when animal activists in 2003 trespassed onto a private feedlot at Cape Nelson and contaminated sheep feed which prevented the sheep being exported. The actions of these men cost the export business over \$1.4m and Mr Hahnhaeuser was charged with causing economic loss by contaminating goods and entering a private place without lawful excuse. The Activists concerned hid behind bankruptcy provisions despite the National Farmers Federation spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to seek justice for the business impacted.

Animal Activists and Animal Rights protesters continue to disrupt and trespass onto law abiding businesses to protest but are rarely held to account for their actions by the judiciary.

Only recently we saw animal activists invade a goat property in Gippsland and because of their illegal entry and trespass and ongoing harassment of the business, the owners had to close the retail part of the business. Loss of trade ran into thousands of dollars, but the fines imposed on those vegan

activists who broke the law were miniscule (\$1) and placed no deterrent for protesters to continue to break the law.

A recommendation the Committee may consider is minimum sentencing penalties of \$5000

Protection of Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) are another group that continually flout the law in respect to their protests of animal production techniques. They are well funded and have no respect for the law of the land, and as the Wool Industry have found, are extremely successful in denigrating an Industry that has difficulty in defending itself in respect to its treatment of animal hygiene.

Livestock producers have their home as their workplace, and they should be able to live with their family in safety. They should not have to live in fear of their home and family being put at risk, or their businesses being put at risk, the biosecurity of their business put at risk, workplace health and safety put at risk and the welfare of their animals put at risk by those who seek to use the cover of animal welfare protests to ultimately stop animal food production.

Farmers have an important role in growing food sustainably and Australian farmers are recognized worldwide for their ability to produce high quality, clean, safe, nutritious food without the aid of taxpayer subsidies that their global competitors enjoy.

We have the luxury of being as Island in Australia which places us in a good position to buffer ourselves against emergency animal diseases, but the actions of animal activists that trespass onto farming and processing businesses compromise the bio-security of those businesses and as we have seen in other countries where Foot and Mouth and Mad Cow diseases outbreaks occur, the cost to the Treasury is in the billions of dollars.

Most Intensive Livestock Industries and some broad acre livestock businesses have an Industry Bio Security Plan that could be used to trigger a notice or fine if there was a breach in the bio security of the business by animal activists.

The Committee might consider a recommendation that allows law enforcers to issue on the spot fines to activists who trespass onto private property and breach the bio security plan of the business.

Other jurisdictions are looking at this response to covert trespass.

The Federal Government has recently passed legislation to increase both fines and imprisonment for animal activists that break the law pending if the charges are civil or criminal, but it is in this Enquiry to ascertain what the current Victorian laws are in respect to animal activism, are they being applied by the judiciary, are they effective and if further legislation is required to increase the penalties.

The Committee considers a recommendation that increases the charge of trespass to a more serious charge of aggravated trespass and regulates penalties of up to \$ 50,000 for an individual and \$200.000 for an organisation.

The Committee considers a law that invokes criminal proceedings whereby actions of an individual or organisation that causes economic loss to a business because of unlawful protest, trespass, harassment, breaches of bio security, contamination, and hindering the sale of goods.

To put the current issue in perspective Victoria has 29000 farming businesses which employ over 90,000 workers. The food industry in Victoria generates over \$14.02 billion dollars of agricultural product annually and that Industry is being put at risk by vegan activists who number less than 1 per

cent of food consumers nationally , who will continue to self-promote and break the law and put our livestock producers and the bio security of Australia at risk in their quest to have food consumers move from animal food to plant based foods.

The current Victorian Laws and the way they are executed by the Courts are not sufficient to deter these plant based philosophical charged mini terrorists, and this Committee could do well to take the lead of the Commonwealth and recommend introduction of heavier penalties in a range of laws that the animal activists continue to break and flout, without any fear of punishment so they can be seen and heard.

I am happy to present to the Committee during the Hearing stage and can provide more detailed recommendations for the Committee to consider.

Simon Ramsay

