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Inquiry Name: Inquiry into the Impact of Animal Rights Activism on Victorian Agriculture

Ms Robyn Pike

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SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the effectiveness of legislation and measures to prevent and deter unauthorised activities on agricultural and associated activities. As a livestock consultant and cattle producer, I have a particular interest in this area.

The livestock industries are of great economic importance, contributing around \$8B to the Victorian and Australian economies annually. They are also very important to the many rural communities throughout the state. However, these industries are being put at risk through the illegal actions of some animal activists.

One of the main risks is through the disregard trespassers have for farm biosecurity.

Biosecurity protection is of vital importance in preventing the entry and spread of disease among herds / flocks and between farms. New diseases can be introduced if people move between farms with different animal health status without taking the appropriate precautions. However, they can also be introduced by people who keep or interact with animals of a lower health status and then enter a farm without authorisation. When activists steal animals from farms and transport them illegally, they introduce additional risks. A breakdown in biosecurity on a farm can be extremely detrimental to the health and performance of the livestock and expensive for the farmers. In some cases, it is necessary to depopulate the farm, disinfect the housing and start with a new herd. If the disease spreads to other farms the ramifications multiply. If an exotic disease were introduced, the consequences could be immense.

The types of protest actions we are starting to see also raise concerns around the immediate impacts to animal welfare. In some cases, large numbers of people are entering farms, behaving aggressively, seizing animals and taking them from the farm in unsuitable vehicles. There have also been reports of livestock being released from housing, only to be killed by predators. None of this is welfare-friendly. In fact, it is cruel; the poor animals must be terrified.

Finally, I have real concerns around the very real and potentially tragic impacts of activist behaviour on the mental health and safety of our farmers through the threat of farm invasion but also bullying campaigns. An on-farm protest action would be a very stressful, intimidating and, quite simply, unfair experience for someone to have to endure. I feel very sorry for anyone who has had to suffer such an incident. However, the threat of a farm

invasion is now an uneasy possibility that all livestock farmers have to live with. It has also been reported that harassment has also occurred, to the point where some farmers have moved out of their businesses. How is this acceptable in this day and age?

Australian farmers should be able to operate their legal and animal welfare-friendly businesses without the fear of being invaded by unlawful activists. The vast majority of farmers love animals and work hard to optimise animal welfare. It is in their interests to do so if they wish to have productive farms. However, there are agencies in place to detect and prosecute the few who do breach standards. This is not the role or responsibility of vigilante groups.

I implore the government to substantially increase minimum penalties, including on-the-spot fines, for those who trespass on Victorian farms and associated businesses.

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File1:

File2:

File3: