

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

I note that the Economy and Infrastructure Committee will inquire into, consider and report on the effectiveness of legislation **and other measures** (*my emphasis*) to prevent and deter activities by unauthorised persons on agricultural and associated industries and in particular, the Committee should —

- f) 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** (*my emphasis*), whether through law reform or other measures.

While I accept that farmers are upset about unexpected visitations from “activists”, I strongly believe that you need to look at the cause. I have never been involved in such activities, but I am very concerned and disappointed at the lack of safeguards and transparency regarding animal welfare in agriculture.

Governments – state and federal – and industry bodies (like Meat and Livestock Australia) have sat on their hands while the public have seen repeated scandals.

- Live export atrocities have gone on for decades; the official reports are on the federal Dept of Agriculture website.
- Scenes of battery hens (rebadged by industry as hens that produce “caged eggs”) are appalling. Our grandson took part in a display of primary-school projects where one team (not his) found out how much space a caged chicken gets to live in, and demonstrated this by comparing it to familiar objects.
- When I eat out, I always ask the café or restaurant whether their eggs are free range. If they are not, then I don't buy the egg sandwich/dish because the thought of that poor hen makes me lose my appetite.
- Even if animals are raised free range, they are slaughtered in the end. **There is no CCTV in abattoirs – what are you hiding?** I have seen how chickens are killed on production lines and I no longer eat chicken as a result.
- Most of my friends have reduced their meat consumption, partly for health reasons, partly because of global warming, and partly because they are worried about the animal welfare issues of meat production.
- Under [Victoria's regulations](#), baby calves (bobby calves) only 5 days old can be trucked to slaughter in the Australian heat (or cold) over journeys up to 12 hours in duration. They can be deprived of food/drink for more than 18 hours prior to slaughter because **(according to SB 4.5) the permissible starvation time prior to slaughter is “TBA”**. The public would be outraged if this became widely known.
- The slaughter of pigs is done by gassing, and the poor creatures writhe and squeal in distress as they suffer a slow death.
- Halal and kosher killing doesn't even allow for “stunning” prior to slaughter.

The longer governments and industry bodies refuse to act, the more “unexpected visitations” farmers are likely to have from whistle-blowers. Even Coles and Woolworths have realised that the community dislikes cruel methods of farming, and some steps have been taken to phase out sow stalls and caged eggs. They are selling more and more vegetarian products.

The thrust of your inquiry seems to be to punish the whistle-blowers. Elsewhere in society, there is growing support for protecting whistle-blowers. So again, you are out of step with community sentiment.

Farmers who are farming just like their dads and grand-dads did, may not see anything wrong with their industries. So it’s up to governments and industry bodies to educate them to the growing community concern about animal welfare. Most Australians dislike cruelty when they see it. Modern media and social media are very effective at spreading images and messages about animal abuse. You won’t get anywhere by **covering up the animal abuse and just punishing the whistle-blowers.**

[The Catholic Church tried to conceal its child abuse and punish the whistle-blowers; this went on for decades– destroying many lives – but it all finally exploded in a Royal Commission. How well would the agriculture industry survive a Royal Commission?]

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ADDENDUM- to my Submission to the Inquiry into the Impact of Animal Rights Activism on Victorian Agriculture:

- A. In case you missed the link to the bobby calf transport standards (it was embedded in my submission) it is: <http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/animal-health-and-welfare/animal-welfare/animal-welfare-legislation/livestock-management-legislation-and-regulations/bobby-calf-transport-standards-and-guidelines>
- B. Many Victorians believe the RSPCA will keep an eye on animal welfare. However, it is my understanding that agriculture is largely exempt from the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 (POCTA)*. So we have little, if any, enforcement of welfare standards.
- C. RSPCA Victoria, unlike its national and state counterparts, has opted to cease campaigning against “legal” activities – eg caged chickens, factory farming, greyhound racing, jumps racing, recreational hunting etc. Some of your Committee was in fact part of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee that conducted the 2017 Parliamentary Inquiry into RSPCA Victoria that helped to cement this dubious outcome. *[Curiously, that particular Committee contained MPs with personal involvement in greyhound racing, horse racing and hunting. In my opinion, that Committee was not representative of the Victorian community, and the exercise was a scandalous waste of taxpayers’ money for partisan purposes.]*
- D. A new front is emerging in relation to animal welfare in agriculture: the impact of **climate change**. This has had relatively little attention to date, but will grow. There is some acceptance that climate change is making life harder for farmers. But what are hotter temperatures doing for the chickens in battery hen farms, or the animals in paddocks with no shelter? European farmers have traditionally provided shelter for their animals during the harsh winters. In Australia, climate change is delivering increasingly harsh summers and more intense weather events (freak storms, winds, cold snaps, torrential rain, floods etc) that affect farmed animals. Who is doing any research into the suffering of farm animals as climate change continues to bite? Are farmers being alerted to the need to change some “traditional” practices in the light of climate change? For example, the bushfire season is lengthening and becoming more dangerous. Are farmers being urged to take more precautions regarding emergency removal of stock from dangerous areas, or do their unfortunate animals continue to get barbecued alive? There is so much that needs to be done to protect animal welfare in agriculture, but your focus (sadly) is merely to target the whistle-blowers.

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