

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

Thank you for taking submissions for this important issue.

Many social justice movements in history have been successful by drawing the public's attention to issues that they may not ever have considered before. One of today's biggest social justice issues is our systematic cruelty to livestock. Animal rights activists seek to right this injustice by showing the public what the animal agriculture industries do not want consumers to know, but surely as consumers, they absolutely have the right to know.

Public concern can be a driving force to change current production methods. Consumers have the power to raise the standards of farm animal welfare by accurately translating their preferences and concerns into accurate market drivers and market signals. In turn, farmers may be motivated to change their practice to meet consumer expectations. In addition, highlighting the performance and productivity benefits of better animal welfare can further encourage farmers to improve current production methods.

The animal agriculture industry needs to transition from defensiveness to engagement and a willingness to treat public discourses as a communication exercise rather than either simply dismissing public concerns as reflections of a lack of community knowledge or understanding, or as we have seen most recently, try to shut down avenues where animal welfare issues can be reported and highlighted.

For the animal agriculture industry to get in step with community expectations will involve the industry in having a greater emphasis on engagement and transparency and less on a public relations/marketing approach.

Public concerns about livestock animal welfare been an on-going interest in Australia (e.g., Parbery and Wilkinson, 2012; Coleman et al., 2015, 2017), and we have seen that animal welfare regulations aren't meeting community expectations about the humane treatment of farm animals. See list of additional references at end of this submission.

There is a wide awareness in the livestock industry of animal welfare as a high priority issue and an awareness that changing community values need to be addressed – but penalising animal activities and whistle blowers is not the way forward.

I can understand the need for some politicians, such as Melina Bath, Roma Britnell and Bev McArthur, to feel they need to combat the activities of animal rights activists in order to represent their constituents, many of whom are beneficiaries of this industry. I would argue that they are in fact hindering their constituents by taking a short-term view and lulling them into a false sense of security; these industries may not be sustainable, and to tackle this issue they need to start looking for future alternatives and a transition plan to provide income for those who have been dependant on this industry.

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

Without activism there can be no social progress. An example: The "Save Babe" campaign is an example where community pressure, exerted by an animal rights organisation, triggered industry changes. In 2006, Animals Australia, a federation of animal welfare groups

in Australia, launched the “Save Babe” campaign to raise public awareness about the containment of sows in farrowing crates (Animals Australia, 2016). This campaign and the community pressure that followed, led directly to the pork industry making a proactive response whereby the revised Australian Code of Practice for pigs has included changes to the duration that gestating sows can be housed in stalls. Not only this but the pork industry voluntarily decided to phase out sow stalls entirely by 2017. Further to this, Coles, a major chain of supermarkets in Australia, subsequently announced that Coles Brand fresh pork products will come from sow stall-free farms. This practice was subsequently extended to all pork products including bacon and ham (Coles, 2016). The example just cited have several consequences. On the one hand, producers are faced with the need to expend capital on changing their facilities and this impacts farm profitability or pricing of pork or both. On the other hand, public perceptions of pork production may become more favourable because of the perceived greater welfare friendliness of pork production.

The cost of animal rights activist activity to Victorian farmers is not large, but cost is something that will need to be considered as the transition away from animal agriculture to alternative agriculture is moved towards.

The excessive use of water in the dairy industry, for example, is something that is not sustainable at a time where extreme weather conditions are becoming more prevalent. It is known through studies, such as Meyer, W., 1998, ('Water for food: the continuing debate', Cooperative Research Centre for Irrigation Futures, http://www.clw.csiro.au/issues/water/water_for_food.html) the growth of crops is far more sustainable overall; so although there is a small negative financial impact of animal rights activism on animal farmers, this is a cost that would be best negated, and far more beneficial for the farmers, to transition to plant-based agriculture.

What must also be kept in mind, is the actual number of agricultural farms that have actually had animal rights activists on-site versus the media and political hype suggesting that every farm has an invasion by animal rights activists on regular occasions. This is not the case, and those with access to police records would be able to confirm this. We need to recognise media hype when we see it.

To see a sustainable future for our animal agriculture farmers is a better future for us all, humans and animals, and this is what animal rights activists seek to do.

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

When addressing the civil and criminal liability of organisations who promote or organise participation in un-authorized animal activist activity, we need to remember the outrage at the lawful acts of the Australian Federal Police as they raided and searched the ABC and journalist Annika Smethurst recently. Yes, these raids were lawful, but were they morally and socially ethical? These are organisations who are there to inform the public on issues that they need informing on. No, often not pretty and not what some organisations would like revealed to the public, but in a free and democratic society, surely things that we all have every right to know.

Therefore, organisations who are involved in the coordination of animal rights activists should not be able to be punished any more than trespass and hindering laws already allow, as the right of the public to know is above that of living in a society where we are fed marketing

propaganda of 'happy farms' and cows 'giving' their milk. I was previously an ignorant and naïve consumer who didn't know, until my 40s, that certain breeds of cow didn't just suddenly start producing milk, but that they are forcibly impregnated, and have their babies taken away so that humans can drink their milk. I had a right to know that the marketing propaganda I was fed by these industries was not true. I am angry that I was fed this lie my whole life, and that I was a contributor to such cruelty for so long. Where is my right for recompense from the industry who so successfully kept this truth hidden from me as they so successfully fed me their marketing lies of 'happy cows'?

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.

When addressing the privacy, business and bio-security of animal farmers, an organisation such as the Aussie Farms map of these businesses do not publish or highlight any information that is not already available through a quick Google search. This map and the information that it holds has been completely blown out of all proportion. If I wanted to know the site of an egg farm, for example, I can find this information easily, as anyone can (e.g. I entered the words 'egg farm near me' into Google and this is what came up:

(https://www.google.com/search?rlz=1C1CHWA_enAU593AU595&sxsrf=qwu&ei=wOMKXfqNMMuA9QO3xZTwCA&q=egg+farm+near+me&oq=egg+far%2C&gs_l=psy-ab.1.2.0j0i22i30i9.2984894.2987499..2990521...0.0..0.578.2755.2-4j2j0j2.....0....1..qws-wiz.....0i131j0i131i67j0i67. Xtsd56hFo0).

It is within the interest of any business, animal farmers included, to make this information easily available to successfully supply their customers. So, the argument of Aussie Farms map being negative to these businesses and making them a target is ludicrous and a beat-up for political gain, to appear to be actually doing something. Aussie Farms do very worthy work to further the cause of animals, who need a voice. To take away their charity status would be an act of censorship for the gain of a few, whom, as already pointed out above, need to be transparent and honest in their activities and the detriment this has on the animals they use.

Compliance with disease control and the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (POCTA).

If a professional organisation like Aussie Farms were to be punished in some way, this would only promote the rise of un-organised and un-professional groups that give some animal rights organisations a bad name. I know that Aussie Farms are professional in their organisation and execution of any actions they are involved in. Of course, in any organisation or business there is scope for improvement. More information on guidelines of actions that animal rights organisations need to consider before gathering footage from animal agriculture industries is a more effective way for both sides to ensure bio-security, and also the best handling of animals. These are concerns that animal rights activists also have, given the incidents of more 'rogue' and un-educated animal rights activists.

Another point to also consider, is the fact that what exactly do these animal producing facilities have for bio-security control themselves? The video 1000 eyes

(<https://www.facebook.com/sharer/sharer.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2Fanimalactivistsaustralia%2Fvideos%2F2059021774383653%2F&display=popup&ref=plugin&src=video>) shows the attire of the workers at these establishments, not to mention animal

body parts were strewn about and buckets of dead animals in various locations around the pig farming establishment. One video was taken by an animal rights activists at a pig farm in Qld also shows a cat roaming across a feeding sow in a sow stall with the cat also feeding on the body parts of pigs on the floor of the pig farm, further making claims of animal rights activists being a bio-security risk an absolute farce. How is this any more of a bio-security control over what the activists seen pictured below, and how most actions are carried out by activists entering a facility where they will be directly interacting with the animals:



Animal rights activists inside a slaughterhouse in Qld, April 8, 2019, vs how the police are dressed. Biosecurity risk null and void surely? The police present more of a bio-security risk in their attire as does the farmer pictured below. Animal Rights Activists are all dressed to avoid any bio-security risks.



Here is another more recent video from Victoria:

<https://www.facebook.com/AndyMeddickMP/videos/2349349915143930/>

As far as costs to reputation go, the saying 'if there is nothing to hide, then there is nothing to hide' comes to mind. The cost to animal farmers in both reputation and economical will only be detrimentally impacted if the activists are able to reveal the systematic cruelty occurring on those particular premises. It is once again in an animal farmer's best interests to transition away from animal farming to plant farming to get on the front foot and establish themselves in a sustainable plant farm.

I do realise that this is not something that can happen overnight but is definitely something that climate change scientists and organisations are telling us needs to happen in order to sustain our species on this planet, so it is a transition that needs to begin yesterday, let alone today!

Types and prevalence of un-authorised activity and application of existing legislation.

'The higher courts of Victoria heard 54 cases of Entering a Place without authority or lawful excuse from 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2016. The majority had resulted in imprisonment (57.4%) which were all sentenced to a prison term of 0 < 1 year.

Sentencing in the Magistrates' Courts

The Magistrates' Courts of Victoria heard a total of 2,269 cases (2,626 charges) of Entering a Place Without Authority or Lawful Excuse from 1 July 2013 to 30 June 2016. These cases resulted in a variety of sentencing options with the majority receiving imprisonment as a penalty (28.0%). Other sentences were: Community Correction Order (23.7%), fine (22.2%), adjourned undertaking/discharge/dismissal (19.4%), wholly suspended sentence (4.1%), partially suspended sentence (1.4%), Youth Justice Centre Order (0.6%), and other sentencing options (0.6%).

The longest prison term imposed was 36+ months but this was given to only 0.6% of those who received imprisonment as a sentence. The majority was given less than 3 months (35.0%) of gaol term.

Of those who received a financial penalty, 2.3% (aggregate) received the highest amount imposed which was in the \$5,000 < \$10,000 category. The majority, however, was sentenced to a fine in the \$500 < \$1,000 category (31.2% for aggregate and 9.1% for non-aggregate).

Please note that suspended sentences were abolished in Victoria for all offences committed on or after 1 September 2014.'

<https://www.criminal-lawyers.com.au/offences/unlawfully-on-premises> accessed 7 July 2019.

*note, these are trespass figures of all incidents of trespass, not only animal rights activists related.

There is not a sudden rush of trespass as the above data clearly shows. There is already the availability of judges and magistrates to inflict adequate penalties that are fitting of each case they are presented with at any time. I urge you to not fall victim to sensationalist beat ups by media, or by those who seek to gain politically from exaggerating.

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

I know people who were in London when the organisation Extinction Rebellion had shut down four major intersections of London. The response of the government of the United Kingdom was not to declare the protestors "Un-English", 'Green collar terrorists' or any other such ridiculous slurs and insults as our own politicians felt the need to after the actions of 8 April 2019 along with the eastern states of Australia.

According to a report on BBC.com (<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-48051776> accessed 7 July 2019), 1130 activists were arrested with 69 being charged.

At a time of climate emergency, the reaction of a government accused, like most governments worldwide, of not taking appropriate action to protect the people of our planet, this underwhelming reaction of the British government when compared to the Australian government's reaction to the April 8 action here seems appropriate.

A decision in the United States state of Iowa, in 2012 to introduce the crime of “agricultural production facility fraud,” Iowa Code § 717A.3A, in 2012, on the heels of several industrial farm investigations that brought attention to Iowa’s agricultural industry (courthouse news as referenced below). This law was repealed in January 2019 as it was successfully argued that it impermissibly restricts free speech under the First Amendment (<https://www.courthousenews.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/IowaAgGagRuling.pdf> accessed 7 July 2019).

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.

Knowledge has been shown to play a fundamental role in influencing and underpinning concern for animal welfare. The literature suggests that self-reported knowledge of farm animal welfare issues and exposure to farm animals, for example through direct agricultural experience, were linked with heightened levels of concern for animal welfare and more welfare-friendly behaviours. Today, modern consumers face the issue of food production often being removed from consumption. As a result, people have poor knowledge and understanding of animal welfare issues in animal production, particularly, modern intensive food production. However, animal welfare outcomes are not as simple as a consideration of extensive versus intensive systems. Many modern extensive systems can result in lower welfare. Thus, there is a greater need than ever before for public education and consciousness raising regarding the environmental, social, human health and animal welfare impacts of all animal production systems. By improving public knowledge, awareness and understanding of animal welfare in food production, we can elevate knowledge to align with current societal concerns, thus redefining socially acceptable methods of food production and improving the lives of the billions of animals farmed for food annually.

I propose that there is no need for change relating to protection for farmer’s privacy, businesses or bio-security, for all the reasons outlined above. There is no real threat to any of these; it is all a media and political beat up and over-reaction to an effective animal rights activist event that took place on April 8 2019, after the animal rights movement has been ignored for so long. **This over-reaction needs putting into perspective, as there are no actual situations in Victoria of vandalism by animal rights activists, invasion of farmer’s homes or anything of the like as sensationally claimed, un-substantiated, by many.**

The broad range of potential welfare risks to livestock that the Australian context entails means that there needs to be on-going scrutiny of the industries by the general public as well as by governments.

I do however have a recommendation of the government to lead the way in the support of animal farmers to transition to farming plants for the ever-growing plant-based protein companies, that at present, Australia imports a lot of. What a wonderful opportunity for Victoria to lead the charge that climate change science says we, as a species, need to make to ensure our survival on this planet.

For the dairy farmers struggling financially and mentally as they struggle to cope with the debts incurred retrospectively through no fault of their own, for the sheep and cattle farmers struggling with the drought, to be able to move to a more sustainable industry as plant

farming has been scientifically proven to be. To support all of our farmers to have a sustainable future is beneficial to us all, and something that we can all get together to support as a species that can look forward to a future that is kind to all kinds, regardless of their species.

Conclusion

I appreciate your task in having to decide on this subject. **I ask that you please consider the evidence put before you, not just unsupported claims by farmers and unsubstantiated and emotive allegations seen in the media.**

I urge you not to be swayed by the over-reaction of some minor members of the Victorian Parliament and the over-reaction of the Morrison federal government to the April 8 action of animal rights activists and to leave penalties as they currently stand for all protestors.

To justify the change for some social change crusaders over others is un-just in a free and democratic society.

I urge you to treat those who speak for our animals the same as all the other social justice movements in our society. If the animal farmers have nothing they want to be hidden from their consumers, then they should not feel threatened. Let the animal rights activists plant hidden cameras and make documentaries, as there surely is nothing they do that they do not want the public to see, and if there is, then the consumers, the public, your constituents, have every right to know, so they can make their choices accordingly.

I urge you all, for education on this issue's sake, to watch the documentary Dominion. You cannot make any informed decisions on this important issue if you have not at least watched what you claim to be against <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/dominionfilm> .

Thank you.

Additional reading

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