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

Lee McKay
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SUBMISSION CONTENT:

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I make this submission as a member of the general public who is greatly concerned about the treatment of farmed animals in this country. In this age of social media, the public are being informed as never before about the systemic cruelty and animal abuse that goes on under the guise of “normal farm practice”. Animal agriculture industries do not want the public to know what goes on behind closed farm gates but the consumers of their products have a right to know how their food is produced. If there is nothing to hide, why do so many farmers fear exposure of their “normal” farming practices?

Exposure by animal activists may have a small, negative financial impact on animal farmers, however everyone I’ve spoken to about this issue believes that such a financial impact would be richly deserved, considering the cruelty exposed. Afterall, we have seen that some farmers value their profit margin far above the welfare of their animals. Live animal export being a case in point. Perhaps a financial penalty will spur them to make the changes necessary to improve the well-being of the animals in their care.

What must also be noted is the number of farms that have actually had animal rights activists on-site versus the sensationalist propaganda the media and some politicians like to spout. Implying that every farm is in imminent danger of invasion at every hour of the day is simply not true and a gross exaggeration of the facts.

Take for example, the outrage at the publication of a farm map by the organisation Aussie Farms. This map does not publish or highlight any information that is not readily available through a Google search. The information provided is legal and easily obtainable by anyone with a desire to find it, Aussie Farms have merely made it easier by collating it all in one place. Is it not in the interests of any ethical business, animal farmers included, to make this information easily available to their customers? Taking away the charity status of Aussie Farms would be an act of censorship designed to protect overly sensitive farmers who should be welcoming the transparency and the ease with which they can be contacted by their customers. Has there been a noticeable increase in farm invasions since this map was published? No, there has not.

As has been proven time and again, legal does not equal ethical and humane when it comes to animal agriculture. Again, if there is nothing to hide, there is nothing to fear and the public's right to know far outweighs the rights of farmers to keep cruel practices under wraps. Who in this day and age, for example, considers it humane to cut the skin from a sheep's backside without pain relief or anaesthetic? Yet the Victorian government has had to draft legislation to force some farmers to provide it. Then there's tail docking, tooth removal, castration, de-horning, de-beaking, and the list goes on. All done without anaesthetic or pain relief because it makes the 'product' they produce more financially viable. Have you ever seen inside a battery hen or broiler chicken farm? How that is legal is beyond my understanding. The cruelty involved is evident, the misery of those animals, heartbreaking. If any of the things outlined above was done to a domestic animal, such as dog or a cat, the result would be a charge of animal cruelty. Why are sheep, cows, pigs and chickens exempt from animal cruelty laws? Isn't that the real issue many people want addressed?

The apparent bio-security risk posed by animal rights activists trespassing on farms is often cited as a reason they should be severely punished for their actions, however the last thing animal activists want to do is harm the animals they seek to help, and they are often more cognizant of bio-security risks, and therefore more suitably attired, than the farm workers themselves. Incidents of farm workers breaching bio-security guidelines are extremely common, and on many farms, a daily occurrence. There is a wealth of photographic and video evidence available on-line and elsewhere that proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that adherence to "bio-security" measures in this country is haphazard at best. Has there ever been a PROVEN case of animal activists causing a bio-hazard in this state? Not to my knowledge.

Furthermore, there have been no incidents of violence, vandalism or invasion of farmers' homes by animal activists in Victoria and any claims made to the contrary have not been substantiated.

I strongly urge you to see past the over-reaction of farmers and state and federal members of parliament to recent protest activities and leave penalties as they currently stand for both protestors and whistle-blowers. A change of legislation/penalties for some social change crusaders but not others cannot be justified. And the question must again be asked: what do animal farmers in this country have to hide and why do they fight so hard to keep their animal husbandry practices from the view of their customers? What does it matter if your business premises are filmed or documentaries are made if you are proud of the work you do and how you do it? Those who purchase animal products have a right to know how that product was produced so they can make an informed choice. Surely that's our basic right as consumers. Instead, our government seeks to allow farmers to continue to hide the way their animals are treated and keep their customers in the dark. How is that moral, ethical or fair?

The public were once ignorant of the normalised cruelty and abuse inherent in animal agriculture in this country. Not anymore, and I applaud those brave people who care enough to risk so much for those who can't speak for themselves.

IF THERE IS NOTHING TO HIDE, THERE IS NOTHING TO FEAR.

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File1:

File2:

File3: