

The Secretary
Legislative Council, Economy and Infrastructure Committee
Parliament House, Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

**Inquiry into the Impact of Animal Rights Activism on Victorian Agriculture
Submission dated 2nd August 2019**

The voices of ordinary Australians need to be heard. Not everyone who takes the time to make a submission supporting the crucial role whistleblowers play in this industry is an 'animal activist' or 'latte-sipping inner-city bleeding heart leftie'. We are simply concerned Australians deeply disturbed by the sometimes horrific, at other times simply 'distasteful', realities of how food gets from farm to plate in this country. These stories would never see the light of day were it not for the valuable role whistleblowers play on behalf of what is 'just & right'. Indeed, unauthorised activity on Victorian farms and related industries ironically serves as a form of inadvertent 'law enforcement' for an industry that has no independent authority setting standards & ensuring these standards are upheld. Animal agriculture is an industry that *needs* to have a regulatory body given its 'product' are not inanimate objects, unlike most market stock; they are 'livestock' who can feel pain but do not have the gift of speech. While ever so-called 'farm animals' remain exempt from the more appropriate anti-cruelty laws we grant our household non-human companions, this country needs people out there who will give them a voice, stand up for them and do their best to protect them.

As for the bio-security argument in favour of shutting down animal activism and thereby the vital role they play in bringing 'unsavoury' stories to light, frequently exposing the underbelly of an industry which statistically employs a disproportionate number of disenfranchised & disempowered individuals who may (or may not) be tempted to inflict cruelty on others, particularly without the fear of recourse (namely upon those lower down the social hierarchy, including farm animals). It is with little doubt in my mind given the onslaught of exposes over the years (courtesy of the tireless work of organised & dedicated animal activists and subsequent media coverage), that workers on these properties – employers & employees alike – pose a much bigger threat to this country's biosecurity than activists do, or ever could for that matter (noting, for instance, that an owner-operator may well claim ignorance when confronted with evidence of workers' cruelty & horribly foul conduct, but the operation of an illegal slaughterhouse on-site is a lot harder to deny!). I believe, along with a good number of other Australians, that the main impetus behind this parliamentary motion to shutdown animal activism in Victorian Agriculture is an unethical attempt to put an end to the negative publicity it can at times create. Might I suggest however –

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and I know I am not the first, and I certainly will not be the last – that what needs to stop here is the not the actions of whistleblowers but the unacceptable animal welfare standards endured day-in-day-out by factory-farmed animals in this country and, sadly, the sometimes abhorrent treatment inflicted upon them.

So...CCTV please, not AgGag!! Based on findings of the 2019 report titled Australia's Shifting Mindset on Animal Welfare commissioned by the Federal Department of Agriculture and Water Resources, the majority of Australians genuinely care about animal welfare with 95% of respondents viewing farm animal welfare as cause for concern with 91% wanting reform to address it.

It is therefore with grave concern for the welfare of farm animals in this country – in this instance, the sentient beings used for meat & dairy farming in regional Victoria – that I make my submission; no less for the plight of ordinary citizens like myself who have serious reservations about how 'animal' and 'animal by-product' foods make their way from farm to table. Having said that, there is also an undeniable movement of concerned Australians swelling; so many 'thinking' people who fear for the future of democracy & the erosion of civil liberties in this country.

Indeed, and at the very least, this inquiry provides the opportunity for Australia to acknowledge the invaluable role of the 'whistleblower' generally, not least of all the overwhelmingly positive, 'force-for-good' service they offer the Victorian agricultural industry. In a global world economy with a notably growing social justice movement, the world is watching to see what Australia does next. How will Australia appear internationally? Will we be a world leader and set the standards for international animal welfare, not to mention the freedom of speech/to protest? Or will we take the unconscionable 'easy path' (ie. most profitable, non-regulated, serving the few not the many) by introducing hush-hush '*what happens behind closed doors stays behind closed doors*' so-called 'ag-gag' laws? The answer lay in this inquiry's hands – in your minds & hearts. Please proceed in good conscience and thank you in advance for your non-vested consideration of this critical matter.

Sincerely,

Karen Smith

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