

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

The animal agriculture industry has operated under a cloud of secrecy and has been shielded by politicians with vested interests for far too long. Animal rights activists seek to right this wrong by showing the public what these industries clearly do not want them to know, but as consumers and responsible members of the community, have the right to know.

Some politicians' feel they need to combat the activities of animal rights activists in order to represent their constituents, many of whom are beneficiaries of this current non-transparent system. I would argue that they are in fact hindering their constituents in the long term by lulling them into a false sense of security, that the industries they base their livelihoods on are not sustainable and harm the health of humans and animals alike.

The majority of animal rights activists are compassionate people who believe in kindness and justice for all living beings, including human and non-human animals. Therefore the government should focus on writing the wrongs of this industry from an animal welfare and human point of view as opposed to continuing to support the status quo. This can be best achieved by helping farmers transition to plant based agriculture and investing in more technology to do this in a profitable and environmentally sound fashion. It is well known that animal products are not only more environmentally destructive (ie water and land use, natural habitat destruction and climate change) they also impact on human health with the majority of epidemiological research pointing to animal based diets as the leading cause of diet related death and chronic diseases including cardiovascular disease and cancer.

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-authorised animal activist activity, we need to remember these are organisations exist to inform the public on issues that are of community priority and interest. Ideally we would want to live in a world that does not require such organisations to exist but unfortunately due to the lies and misleading information that is promoted through the media or the organisations themselves and the government's failure to enact protection laws for animals, they are a necessary part of a just and democratic society. Only then can we make a choice to support such behaviour and only then can these industries and businesses be held accountable.

Therefore, organisations who are involved in the coordination of animal rights activists should not be punished any more than trespass and hindering laws already allow, as the right of the public to see the truth for themselves without the illusions and propaganda of 'happy farms' that are fed to them. Ignorant consumerism is not in the best interest of our society. It is also unlawful to be misled and lie when lives are at stake, which these industries clearly do when they depict the animals as willing participants in their exploitation often involving hideously cruel procedures, violent deaths and unspeakable acts of egregious cruelty. They fail to acknowledge these animals as sentient beings with the capability to suffer, feel loss, grieve and pain as we humans do. When there is an alternative to not participating in this violence and harm and we have been lied and misled our whole lives by the animal ag industry, then we as consumers who have been betrayed should also have the

right to compensation from for the emotional impact of the callous and barbaric attitude these industries display towards innocent victims that we know can identify with.

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.

It is within the interest of any business, animal farmers included, to make this information easily available to successfully supply their customers. Everyone should have a right to know the biosecurity hazards that are inherent to these industries. The entry of animal activists into these areas serves to merely identify these issues and does not by any means contribute to it. To state that this is the case is an extreme facility and clearly a ploy to use this against the truth about how these operations function.

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

I would suggest that we can help animal activists and the governments who are obliged to protect the interests of animals and whom we have a duty of care to; by providing constructive guidelines for animal rights groups on gathering footage from animal agriculture industries in a more effective way for both sides to ensure bio-security, and also for the best handling of animals.

Health and Safety, costs to farms economy and reputation.

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 from a reputation and economy point of view will only be detrimentally impacted if laws to stop activists come into play. Clearly then it will become more apparent that these businesses have a lot to hide and this will add to the mounting knowledge of the systematic cruelty that occurs in the animal ag industry. It is once again in an animal farmer's best interests to transition away from animal farming to plant farming to move away from an inherently violent and unsustainable industry. This is a transitional strategy corresponds with what climate change scientists and world health organisations are telling us needs to happen now in order to sustain our species and to protect our health in the face of increasing chronic disease burden and on to mitigate worsening environmental issues.

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.

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, and it is all a media and political over-reaction to an effective animal rights strategy. This defensive action needs to be put 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.

I do however have a recommendation of the government to lead the way in the support of animal farmer's to transition to farming plants for the ever-growing plant-based protein

companies, that at present, Australia imports a significant amount of. This would be a progressive move and wonderful opportunity for Victoria to lead the charge for positive change. This will be the correct path for existing dairy farmers struggling financially and mentally and for the sheep and cattle farmers struggling with the drought. A major shift toward plant based resources and farming will impact significantly with respect to a number of critical problems we face today (including obesity, undernutrition and climate change) as outlined in the recent 2019 EAT-Lancet Commission report on Food, Planet and Health) https://eatforum.org/content/uploads/2019/07/EAT-Lancet_Commission_Summary_Report.pdf

Conclusion

I urge this committee 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 harshly penalise some social change activists over others is un-just in a free and democratic society. Although in a by-gone era, communities of women's' rights activists and LGBT communities may have been censored, abused, silenced and penalised and even jailed for fighting for their rights, it would not be even considered to be socially acceptable in today's world. I urge you to treat those who speak for our animals the same as all the other social justice movements. If the animal farmers have nothing they want to be hidden from their consumers, then they should not feel threatened and transparency should be encouraged so that consumers can make informed choices.

Educating the committee and individuals who are quick to jump to conclusions about how to respond to animal activists based on exaggerated media is necessary. You would have to understand the concerns that they are trying to get people to pay attention to. The animals have no voice and therefore are easy targets for those who want to exploit them for profit. Therefore, I would urge the whole committee attempting to make decisions of this kind be informed of the true nature of these industries by watching the following documentary and other footage that takes a mere glimpse at the day to day of animal ag in Australia. <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/dominionfilm> .

Regards,

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