

The Secretary

Legislative Council, Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Parliament House, Spring Street

EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

By email: aglawsinquiry@parliament.vic.gov.au

Thank you for the opportunity to lodge a submission in response to the Victorian Government's **Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee - Inquiry into the Impact of Animal Rights Activism on Victorian Agriculture.**

I understand my submission will be treated as a public document, will be protected by parliamentary privilege, and may be published on the committee's website and quoted in the committee's report to parliament. I do not require my submission to be treated as confidential and consent to my name being included with my submission in the event it is published.

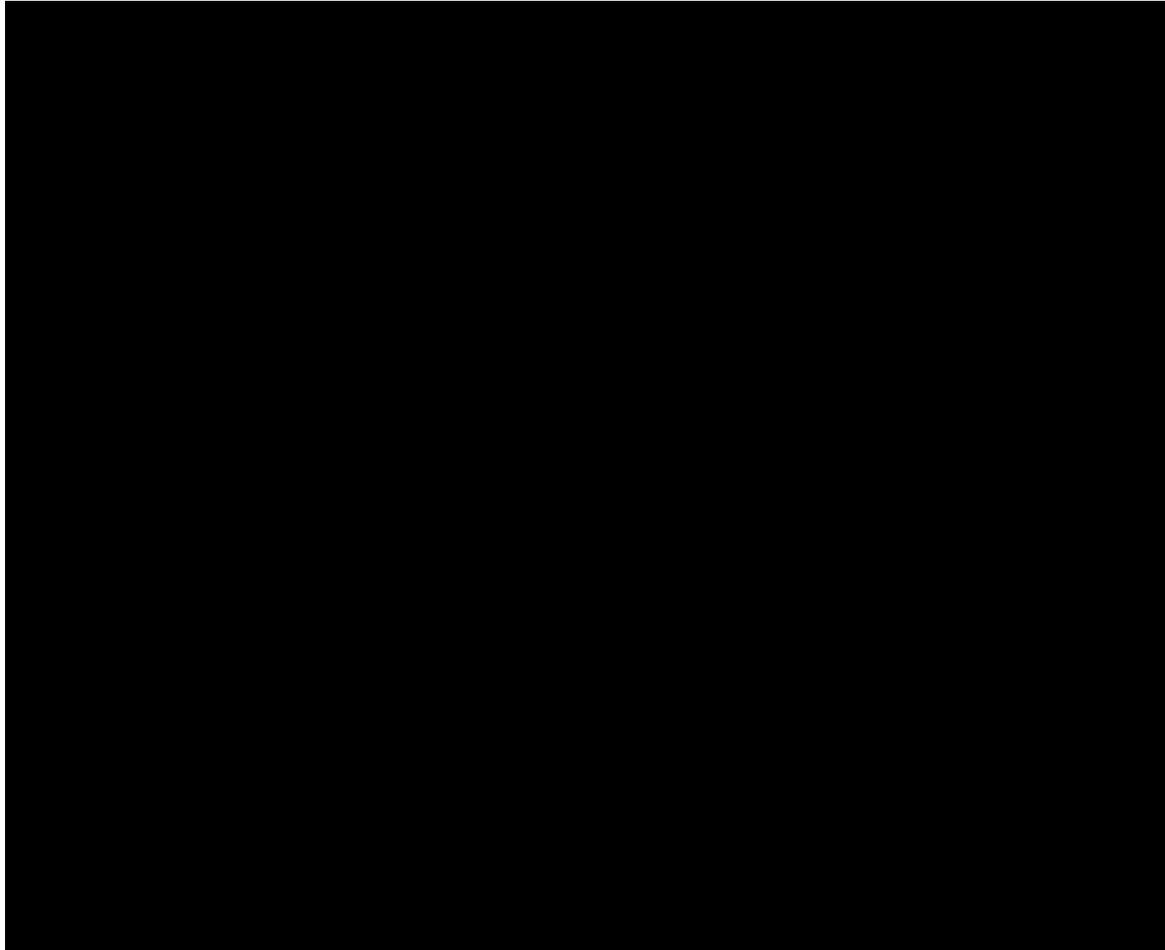
The 1 May 2019 Victorian Legislative Council motion requires the Economy and Infrastructure Committee to inquire into, **consider and report on the effectiveness of legislation and other measures to prevent and deter activities by unauthorised persons on agricultural and associated industries** and in particular, the Committee should consider a range of specific matters listed as a to f in the respective motion.

I note that it is the Economy and Infrastructure Committee charged with responsibility for this Inquiry and what appears to be a wishful pre-determined outcome involving 'economics', rather than the corresponding issues of heinous and systemic animal suffering and abuse, (much of which is legal), consumer rights and protection, freedom of speech and a number of other corresponding social justice considerations.

The language in this motion strongly suggests that this Inquiry was instigated to punish and curtail those who document animal abuse, including legal and illegal activities; rather than punish the abusers, and overhaul the laws to better protect animals, consumers and uphold transparency. It appears that this Inquiry has been instigated due to the now extreme embarrassment experienced by government, the regulating authorities and the industries, because it appears very evident that only the animal activists have a clear understanding of the extent of systemic abuse being inflicted on animals raised for food and by-products.

This Inquiry's motion reflects an angry and frustrated response by those grappling with their own impotence and ongoing and repeated failures.

Documenting animal cruelty is not the crime - the crime is the cruelty and abuse. The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act depicts the exact nature of animal cruelty and makes this abundantly clear. It is the underlying issues government must address rather than protecting the industries commercial interests. It is also the repeated and ongoing failures by government, the regulated 'welfare' authorities and the 'self-regulating' industries to respond in line with community expectations which are still yet to be addressed or even discussed.



Government at local, state and federal level can no longer say with any credibility that the ongoing exposures by animal activists are exposures of 'rogue' operators. These abusive operators and mass scale producers are widespread and the legalised abuse inflicted on millions of animals can no longer be hidden by government, the authorities or the industries.

Quite simply and factually, without animal activists, neither government, the regulated authorities, the industries and certainly not the consumers would have any evidenced based knowledge about of how these animals are raised, abused and slaughtered, nor the true extent of the ongoing abuses.

How many exposures will it take before government accepts this fact ?

How can government explain that while docking the tail of a dog is illegal, this practice and many others are still legal for pigs and worse still, are undertaken without any pain relief.

How can any government who wants to be taken seriously about animal welfare and protection and who wants to remain credible, explain the widespread government sanctioned animal abuse of some animal species and not others ?

How can any government credibly argue they do not discriminate against people on the basis of sex, skin colour or religion and yet **do discriminate between non-human animal species** in spite of the one animal protection overarching law in the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act and the global recognition of animal 'sentience' ? Our laws clearly state animal cruelty is illegal, and yet government exemptions allow and permit such cruelty towards millions of sentient beings.

These matters primarily involve animals and what has until recently been largely hidden from the public and consumers. However, these matters also involve environmental vandalism and public health, including the health of local rural communities where such facilities are normally situated, and the health of largely un-protected and vulnerable workers inside these facilities.

Government continues to espouse its concern for rural people. I am a rural resident and I am yet to see any government show any inclination to protect rural communities or workers from the dangers of animal agriculture across intensive production, saleyards, transport or slaughter houses covering the many physical, emotional and psychological risks and impacts including pollution and public health considerations. On the contrary, government continues to approve and rubber stamp these monstrous operations and offer no alternative employment opportunities for rural citizens as if they were second- and third-class citizens.

Our animal protection laws across Australia are a mishmash of outdated views which have not kept pace with evolving community expectations, global advancement and scientific evidence. The variance between state and territory laws, Codes of Practice and 'Standards' only further muddies the facts and the truth.

The current race by several state governments and the federal government to impose Ag Gag type punishments is a clear example of the failure by government at many levels to address these important issues in a manner expected by the voting public. The left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing, and as is always the case, public money is being wasted so government can be seen to be doing 'something' to appease the noisy minority who provide political donations.

I am confident that many specialists in the law will confirm that the laws that already exist covering trespass and other related matters are sufficient to provide adequate protections for all parties.

Introducing specific new laws to target animal activists is discriminatory and government needs to consider where this could and will end. Will journalists documenting these issues be prosecuted ? Will activists documenting pollution incidents or breaches of logging, water, and other EPA and environmental licences be prosecuted ? Will animal activists documenting and publishing details involving animal cruelty and abuse surrounding pet shops, Puppy Factories and non-compliant pounds and shelters be prosecuted ?

To the best of my knowledge there has not been a single incident of violence directed from an animal activist towards a producer or 'farmer'. There have however been examples of aggressive behaviour displayed by producers towards and against animal activists.

To the best of my knowledge there has not been a single biosecurity incident caused by animal activists who in the main have a far greater understanding and respect for biosecurity protocols than those in the industries. These industries are cesspits of misery and suffering, filth and abnormal volumes of effluent and disease. Every biosecurity incident has resulted from these cesspits themselves and in many instances the animals are 'culled' on mass as a clear failing by the industries, the welfare authorities and government.

The publication of animal agriculture production facilities into a single map was simply a compilation of what had already been publicly accessible information. A business is not a 'private' affair. While I accept in some instances an animal production facility may include a 'family' home, these are not generally in close proximity because of the risk of odour, noise and disease. Suggesting that any animal activists would engage in the harassment of a family or children only highlights the lack of understanding on the part of government and others in this regard.

To date while there have been a small number of human consumer impacts with illness including some hospitalisation, we are on the pointy end of serious human health issues with the consumption of these products, antibiotic resistance and global pandemics. Perhaps only when this occurs, will government take the urgent and necessary actions.

The extreme damage to Australia's reputation has been caused by the exposed animal abuse (ongoing) and government's attempt to gag those who speak out. Attempts by overseas governments to impose similar and various forms of Ag Gag have continued to meet strong opposition by people from all walks of life, including rural communities who are being dictated to by the large, wealthy and powerful animal agriculture industries who are swallowing up what were the small family 'farmers'. Of serious concern these mega producers are now taking action against rural communities who are launching campaigns against these industries under the 'Right To Harm' banner. I fully support these rural communities and their fight for justice.

I spent much of my adult life in Victoria and that included activities which would be considered to be 'animal activist' activities.

I understand better than most the personal price one pays for speaking up and exposing wrong doing against the vulnerable by those who profit out of animal suffering and exploitation. I view all non-human animal species as equal be they companion, farm, domestic or introduced species. They are ALL sentient and all entitled to equal rights and protections under the law.

I have run a number of successful campaigns for different animal species where in all instances better outcomes were achieved on a permanent basis. This was only possible by relying on factual and evidenced data and information.

The following are just two of many first hand experiences and examples, I had in Victoria.

I was a whistle-blower for around 200 dogs on the Strathbogie council puppy factory. I was a council employee at the time. On the day this vile establishment was finally raided, after many months of my advocacy and pleading for intervention, 17 dogs had to be euthanised because their condition was considered so poorly. Dead cats were found in cages with live cats. This was a legal and council approved puppy factory. In spite of my best efforts to go through the correct channels in a lawful manner, and in spite of there being ample evidence to prosecute under POCTA, neither council, RSPCA Vic nor the then Victorian DPI prosecuted. I on the other hand was sacked and lost my ability to support myself. My only support was Animal Liberation Victoria.

When I became aware of ongoing issues of serious concern with blatant breaches of animal welfare at the Geelong Animal Welfare Society (GAWS) involving the most senior staff including the then practicing Vet, I and others tried for many months to have Geelong council investigate the breaches. Council concluded we were 'imagining' the breaches. Finally, when anonymous footage was made available, I published this footage on the GAWS Exposed social media page, and instantly there was an investigation of some of the most heinous cruelty against companion animals. Again, no-one was ever prosecuted.

I support transparency and animal activists and I support strong laws which protect animals without compromise or fear or favour.

It is inappropriate for government to shut down the consumer's need for truth through the discriminatory targeting of animal activists which will become a slippery slope to a complete police state and does not fit the true meaning of the Australian ideals of free speech, democracy and transparency.

I urge this committee to examine all the evidence and the facts and speak with all parties. I also urge this committee to make decisions based on the greater good for all Victorians, not a minority who have commercial vested interests and a train wreck of history in their wake.

I would strongly urge this committee to undertake the following:

- Engage with the federal government and work towards the urgent establishment of a completely independent office of animal protection.
- Explore the merits of a specialist police unit dedicated to the investigation and prosecution of animal welfare and animal protection matters.
- Implement CCTV at all critical animal handing points - slaughter houses, saleyards, and all intensive animal agriculture facilities.

- Review and overhaul POCTA and all applicable Cop's and Standards.
- Engage with the Insurance council for the purpose of introducing benefits or penalties to producers who install CCTV and emergency sprinklers and have a clear record or otherwise with any exposures or mass culling from a biosecurity and disease outbreak.
- End all self-regulation for animal agriculture where sentient beings can be exploited.
- Introduce safe and meaningful incentives for whistle-blowers and others who wish to report wrong doing in respect to animal welfare, environmental and/or other abusers.

Thank you for reading and considering my submission points.

Lisa J Ryan

2 August 2019