

02 August 2019

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

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

Dear Secretary,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to this inquiry.

To clarify, the “activism” that we have seen recently is related to animal welfare. As in, how particular animals are treated by an organisation or industry.

This is evidenced by participants and supporters talking about “cruelty”, saying a practice is “inhumane”, demanding transparency, etc.

Genuine animal rights activism revolves around educating people about the belief that all animals, humans included, have at the very basic level, the moral right not to be commodified or treated as property.

This quote from Tom Regan gives an animal rights position in simple terms.<sup>1</sup>

The philosophy of animal rights demands only that logic be respected. For any argument that plausibly explains the independent value of human beings implies that other animals have this same value, and have it equally. And any argument that plausibly explains the right of humans to be treated with respect, also implies that these other animals have this same right, and have it equally, too.

That being said, it doesn't matter what someone calls themselves, it is what they are doing that indicates whether they are an *animal rights* or *animal welfare* activist.

As someone who has been advocating for, and blogging about animal rights related matters for over a decade<sup>2</sup> I have noticed that those who have participated in recent stunts have very little knowledge of the difference between “animal welfare” and “animal rights”.

They call themselves animal rights activists because that is what is more admirable within the *movement*.

For most of the participants, it seems to be more important to be seen to be doing something, regardless of what it is, than doing something that makes an actual difference.

Take April's Flinders and Swanston streets, and nation-wide protest as a perfect example.

The whole aim of them was to get media attention for a movie.

A movie that had an animal welfare and consumer awareness focused message.

When I originally went vegan, over 25 years ago, those who did some sort of *action*, kept things quiet, and without any fanfare. On many occasions even hiding their identity.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://regan.animalsvoice.com/animal-rights-101/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://veganpolice.com.au>

These days, in the age of social media, everyone wants to be famous.

The holy grail of social media fame is having a fully funded Patreon account. (Too many participants in animal welfare related stunts are seeking support on Patreon and similar platforms, in the hopes that they will have enough followers to have it provide them with a full time income).

Not being happy with only mainstream media attention, a majority of the participants in the various stunts take their mobile phones into the location to live stream onto social media what is happening.

This creates the situation where the attention is focused on the participants of the stunts, rather than those who the stunts are supposed to be for.

The animals.

Sadly, parliament needs to understand and accept that short of placing armed guards at every facility, there is very little that they can do to deter previous stunts from happening again.

Increasing fines and the possibility jail terms, won't prevent people who are angry or feeling ignored from participating in these stunts.

If fined or charged, the current trend is to launch a crowd funding campaign to pay fines, or legal costs. There are some who have even set up sites where people can make a regular monthly contribution, with the money going to legal costs.

In the event they do serve a prison term, all it will do is elevate their status with the *movement*, because they have gone to prison, *for the animals*.

Instead of putting up legal barriers and ignoring their demands, Parliament and the community, in general, may be better served if they, to a degree, gave them what they wanted.

The task is for Parliament to find a way to balance community expectations for the standard of food production, with the ability of those in animal agriculture to do what they do.

Instead of looking at the response of other jurisdictions to these stunts, which has been far too heavy handed. Victoria has the opportunity to set the standard that others will follow.

Shrouding everything in a veil of secrecy, which an individual isn't granted, gives the animal welfare and consumer awareness groups more opportunities to claim that the animal agricultural industry has something to hide.

Just because one part of an industry provides items that are consumed for food, it doesn't mean they have an all encompassing social licence to operate, with any standard they feel like.

One of the claims of the consumer awareness group, Aussie Farms, is that there is no transparency in what happens in animal agriculture, and that they want the consumer to be aware of what is happening within the industry.

Their claim of CCTV footage is deliberately an impossible target, as they know implementing it would be cost restrictive to the industry and individual farmers.

So, why not allow approved participants to enter farms to inspect the premises?

The Commonwealth's Fair Work Act allows permit holders to enter premises to inspect the records of an employer to ensure compliance with Modern Awards.

Creating a similar system for Victorian animal agricultural facilities would satisfy all concerned parties.

The farmers would be satisfied because they would no longer have to worry about a horde of 100 protestors jumping their fence or chaining themselves to machinery. (Bio security protocols would also be adhered to).

The animal agricultural industry would be satisfied because they would no longer be the target of mass protests.

The animal welfare advocates would be satisfied because the industry would be making improvements towards the way they use other animals.

Victorian consumers would be satisfied because they would know that the industry was being monitored by a genuine 3rd party.

Under this system, animal welfare organisations would apply to become a registered organisation, similar to registered organisations under Fair Work Act (cwth) legislation.

Once registered, the organisation would then train individuals on the proper way to enter and inspect an animal agricultural property.

This training would cover adhering to relevant biosecurity protocols, health and safety guidelines, animal handling/husbandry techniques, etc. (Biosecurity is poorly understood within the animal welfare community, and doing this would ensure that permit holders have a better understanding of it).

Once the training is satisfactorily completed, the organisation, and the individual would apply to, say Agriculture Victoria, for a permit.

Those applying for a permit would need to meet certain good character standards, prior to the issuing of a permit.

The process for entering an animal agricultural property would be similar to the process for a *right of entry* notification under the Fair Work Act (cwth)<sup>3</sup>.

The permit holder would notify the relevant person on the property that in a time frame of 24 hours to seven days, they will be entering the property for the purposes of inspecting the facilities. (While on the premises, permit holders will need to comply with health and safety procedures, and follow all lawful directions).

The responsible person of the property would then inform the permit holder of any local biosecurity notices, or applicable items. (Entry shouldn't be refused without a genuine reason. Civil penalties could apply).

Access without prior notification could be granted by a Magistrate (or similar body) in matters where contraventions of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986, or other applicable legislation is suspected.

The entry to the premises would be for the sole purpose of inspection, to ensure compliance with the relevant code of conduct or legislation. It wouldn't be for the purposes of interruption or self promotion.

If contraventions are found, they are to be reported to the relevant authority via a sworn statement, for further investigation.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2018C00512/Html/Volume\\_1#\\_Toc533165470](https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2018C00512/Html/Volume_1#_Toc533165470)

Entering an animal agricultural premises without a permit or adequate notification could lead to the person being charged with trespass, as per current laws. Or liable for civil prosecution by the business (similar to the Fair Work Act (cwth)).

While it isn't a perfect solution, it is one that finds some sort of middle ground.

This would help the industry by allowing the industry to show, via an "independent" 3rd party, that their practices are up to community expectations.

If animal welfare advocates are legally able to enter a property, it will take away their desire to do it illegally. Especially when doing it illegally will negate any claim they have of a moral high ground.

Having a permit and registration system in place would ensure that some level of accountability is placed on the animal welfare/consumer awareness group. It will also give these groups an incentive to work with the animal agriculture industry or individual farms to improve their standards.

In closing I would like to remind the committee that the Australian public now have an expectation of transparency or accountability in every aspect of their life.

We have chain of responsibility for the transport industry, Modern Slavery legislation for supply chain, and 3PL, HACCP guidelines for food production, and food traceability after the 2018 strawberry tampering incidents.

I can even track a parcel from the time it is picked up, until the time that it is delivered.

Why should animal agriculture be treated differently?

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide a submission, and if required, I would be more than willing to attend any public hearings to answer any questions.

Sincerely yours,

Cameron Blewett