

**To the Secretary  
Legislative Council, Economy and Infrastructure Committee  
Parliament House, Spring Street  
East Melbourne  
Vic  
3002**

**2/8/2019**

**I Submit to the -**

## ***Inquiry into the Impact of Animal Rights Activism on Victorian Agriculture***

Dear Sir or Madam,

I submit the following responses to each term of reference (TOR)

### ***TOR 1 - "Consider the type and prevalence of unauthorized activity on Victorian farms and related industries, and the application of existing legislation"***

I ask that the full spectrum of illegal activity on Victorian farms be the background upon which the crimes of animal activists are considered. This is the only context in which to assess the threat animal activists pose to the safety of farm managers and owners. This spectrum includes criminal actions of the following nature –

- a) Illegal hunting
- b) Theft of livestock
- c) Animal cruelty crimes perpetrated by employees of both meat/fibre producing farms and abattoirs
- d) Domestic violence incidents

The above four crime categories can entail victims (animal or human) experiencing significant injury, cruelty and suffering.

I ask the Inquiry to compare the frequency and level of threat posed by animal activists to the above four categories. I ask that you also compare the fines, sentences and penalties imposed on the law breakers in the afore mentioned categories of crime. I ask that the more severe penalties being proposed for animal activists (who have caused no person or animal physical harm) are scaled appropriately and are less severe than penalties already being applied to those who steal, cause pain, injury and death in the above four crime categories.

It is my understanding that animal activists do not carry weapons onto farms. It is also my understanding that the filming of the farm environment is for the sole purpose of helping to IMPROVE the conditions that animals are kept in.

In North East Victoria we do not have a pronounced problem with Animal activists invading farms but we certainly have an endemic problem in hunters invading private property with guns, vehicles and other weapons. We also have a problem with hunters shooting from the roadside across private land.

From the Victorian Game Management Authority website 30<sup>th</sup> April 2019

*“3 different groups of men have been interviewed, have had their firearms seized and will be further investigated for allegedly committing a number of illegal spotlighting. Firearm, driving and shooting protected wildlife related offences in North East Victoria on the weekend”*

and reported on the ABC Goulburn Murray on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2018

*“shots have been fired into the front yards of homes neighboring deer habitats in Victoria”*

I expect the justice system in Victoria to have a scale of sentencing applying to trespass incidents that reflects that those that carry no weapons and intend to alleviate the suffering of animals should receive a **significantly** lighter sentence than those that carry guns and fire shots into private property.

Furthermore those that steal cattle for resale are potentially carrying weapons, and many situations of domestic violence involve weapons or the threat of being injured. In my estimation domestic violence is the only widespread “terrorism” occurring towards human beings on Victorian farms.

Animal activists that assist animals should be given lighter sentences than violent employees of abattoirs and farms who are found guilty of deliberately inflicting unnecessary pain and distress on the animals they are handling in the course of their employment.

## **TOR 2 - “*Consider the workplace health and safety and bio-security risks, and potential impacts of animal activist activity, on Victorian farms, to Victoria’s economy and international reputation.*”**

A reputation for animal cruelty is a risk to the profits generated by any rural business. The proper response to this damage to reputation is to address the conditions in which animals are housed and the quality of the lives lived of animals in the farming system. Animal activists do not cause the cruelty and in effect are functioning like whistle-blowers. Victoria needs -

- 1) better protections for whistle-blowers that come from within the farming sector
- 2) Mandatory CCTV cameras in both factory farms & abattoirs (this would significantly diminish the motivation to trespass by animal advocates)

### ***Bio-security –***

The news reports I have watched on current affairs programs frequently depict those that protest on farms are wearing protective overalls and overshoe plastic barriers which impresses on me that though

trespass laws are being broken the protestors are making a conscious effort NOT to introduce a contamination risk to the property which would have the potential to not only cause disease to the animals but economic hardship to the farmer (should there be a disease outbreak.)

I ask that the committee of Inquiry examine whether other kinds of farm visitors, including employees that live off site, are taking the same protective measures as exhibited by the protesters.

A further point on the economic harm to the farming sector as a result of animal rights campaigns - A better way to look at the economic future of Victorian farming is consider how the Victorian farming sector can ride the wave of opportunity that is now occurring as the “plant based meals” sector expands.-

- *“Australia is the third fastest growing vegan market in the world”* reported the Sydney Morning Herald in June 4 -2016. The biggest markets are in this order are USA, Germany, Britain, and then expanding rapidly - Australia. Australia’s packaged vegan food market is projected to be \$215 million by 2020.

That so many consumers are turning towards healthy and humane options illustrates a higher level of interest in the manner that food products are being produced. The trespassing on farms by activists for the purposes of recording the conditions on farms is a symptom of a wider consciousness amongst consumers . many people are now seeking products that do NOT entail unnecessary animal suffering.

The economic risk to establishments that farm animals in an inhumane manner exists *regardless* of whether a trespassing incident occurs or does not occur. This economic risk exists because consumer preferences are rapidly evolving away from food products that entail cruelty or are unsustainable.

### ***TOR 3 – I have nothing to add to this point***

### ***TOR 4 - “Consider the civil or criminal liability of individuals and organizations who promote or organize participation in unauthorized animal activism activities”***

Recently in Australia the homes and working spaces of journalists have been raided by federal police officers. This is a great concern for citizens like myself who desire a fearless media industry capable of exposing corruption, the suffering of individuals and any systemic problems in industries.

In this context I believe it is a grave threat to the healthy functioning of an effective news media in Australia that any kind internet website be charged with displaying footage of animal cruelty. In my definition of “media” I include the websites of the legacy media along with new online enterprises. In this later category I would include the blogs, social media, the websites of non-profit groups operating independently of the big newspapers and television channels.

For example the non-profit organisation -“Oscars Law” has posted images online of the cruelty inflicted on dogs at “puppy farms” over recent years. The courageous work conducted by this organization has lead to the current Victorian government introducing significant new laws to protect the dogs who are producing puppies for the pet trade.

The initial media exposes in Victoria of the appalling conditions on “puppy farms” were reliant on the undercover work of animal activists who broke the law by trespassing on these premises. During these events animals were seized and film footage of the horrendous conditions was taken.

**TOR 5 - “Analyse the incidences and responses of other jurisdictions in Australia and internationally”**

I ask that included in this examination of other jurisdictions, you examine trespass and protest laws in the nations of the world that have the most stringent protections for farm animals.

If Victoria is truly to consider itself the “most progressive state in Australia” as the current Victorian government claims us to be, we should aim high and aim to have to most progressive protections for domesticated and farmed animals in Australia.

**TOR 6 -“Provide recommendations on how the Victorian Government and industry could improve protections for farmers’ privacy, businesses, and the integrity of our bio-security system and animal welfare outcomes, whether through law reform or other measures”**

The privacy of all citizens in Victoria is important to me. Likewise all citizens should be given recourse to protect themselves from verbal threats and online harassment. Animal activists have these same rights. We do not need specific laws to protect farmers from harassment we need laws that broadly protect all people from these pressures in the online environment in which we live.

In terms of bio-security. I suggest a full assessment of this matter be undertaken which considers all the visitations to farms in Victoria, This would include, feral animal hunters, transport workers, seasonal workers as well as employees.

For information about Law reform measures that will advance our state into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century please consult with the key advocates of animal welfare law reform in Victoria. At the very least this will include-

R.S.P.C.A

Animals Australia

*Thank you for inviting the citizens of Victoria to contribute to this Inquiry,*

*Cassandra Pollock*



