

Parliament of Victoria – Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Inquiry into the Impact of Animal Rights Activism on Victorian Agriculture

2 August 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute a submission to this Inquiry.

1. The first part of this submission responds to term of reference (d) which asks for consideration of
the civil or criminal liability of individuals and organisations who promote or organise participation in unauthorised animal activism activities.

It is submitted that both existing civil remedies and criminal and common law offences are already available for “unauthorised activities” (e.g. trespass) engaged in by anyone, including the specific class of people who engage in animal activism. There is arguably no need to introduce any further offences in this area.

Organisations who investigate and reveal incidences of systemic animal cruelty are performing a valuable service to the community. Consumers have a right to know how food is produced and to make choices about which food industries they wish to support. If an organisation simply reveals occurrences of animal cruelty this should not be construed as promoting or organising participation in unauthorised animal activism activities. Those individuals who decide to engage in “unauthorised animal activism activities” arguably are doing so because they have a deeply held conscientious objection to animal cruelty.

2. This part of the submission responds to one aspect of term of reference (f),
provide 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.

It is submitted that it is unacceptable and unfair to suggest animal activists are putting the integrity of biosecurity systems at risk. It is also unacceptable to accuse animal activists of putting animal welfare at risk. Those assumptions about animal activists are strongly rejected.

The rest of this submission will focus solely on how the Victorian Government should seek to improve the integrity of the biosecurity system and animal welfare outcomes in farming practices, whether through law reform or other measures.

The Government should be focusing on improving legislation to protect animals and enforcing true biosecurity on the intensive animal farming operations about which animal activists are concerned. Many aspects of animal agriculture involve legalised cruelty and there is a demonstrated lack of biosecurity on intensive animal farms where animals live in their own excrement and faeces in unnatural indoor environments. There is extensive evidence available regarding animal cruelty and failures in biosecurity that has been collected by animal activists.¹

It is of extreme concern that intensive animal agriculture and slaughtering facilities have become hidden from public scrutiny. Animal activists have uncovered many routine abuses that would never have come to light otherwise. There is a compelling need to radically improve legal protections for farmed animals. Animal activists are not the problem. Systemic animal abuse is the problem. It is hard to understand why governments are seeking to demonise and punish animal activists who are revealing the abuses that occur. Animal activists are simply concerned members of the community who expose the cruelty and should be supported rather than penalised.

¹ See the website <https://www.aussiefarms.org.au/>.

Examples of legalised cruelty that the community needs to be made aware of include:

- Newly hatched male chickens ground up alive as they are of no commercial value to the egg industry.
- Battery hen cages.
- Unwanted bobby calves being left out in fields to starve.
- Lambs born in winter freezing to death.
- Rapid growth of chickens causing metabolic and painful skeletal disorders.
- Surgical procedures on chickens and turkeys including debeaking and toe cutting without anaesthesia or pain relief resulting in chronic pain.
- Chickens and turkeys spending their short lives in crowded insanitary sheds living in their own waste with thousands of other birds.
- Sleeping and feeding patterns of chickens and turkeys kept in sheds distorted with artificial light used to maximise growth.
- No requirement for commercial duck farms to have water in which ducks can swim or bathe which causes extreme stress.
- Mother pigs confined in tiny concrete and metal spaces in farrowing crates and sow stalls.
- Cutting piglets teeth, ears and tails without anaesthesia or pain relief.
- Decaying and mutilated dead piglets lying next to their mothers confined in farrowing crates.
- Feed lots used for finishing intensively farmed livestock prior to slaughter where animals are crowded together in pens, without being able to range freely, so they put on weight more quickly, and there is no protection from extremes of temperature.
- Stress of transportation to abattoirs due to severe overcrowding and lack of food and water.
- Pigs being forced with an electric prodder into a gondola to be lowered 7 to 10 metres into a gas chamber and suffocated by CO₂ gas. They scream in agony as the gas hits their lungs and thrash around, sometimes even losing one of their feet as they desperately try to escape.
- Animals beaten to death in an abattoir if stunning has not rendered them unconscious.
- Animals drowning in scalding tanks if stunning and having their throats slashed or pierced has not killed them.

These are only a few of the many examples of animal cruelty and lack of biosecurity that can be found in factory farms and abattoirs. Such shockingly cruel practices and failures of biosecurity should be criminalised and penalised, not the animal activists who expose them.

Also appalling is the unethical scientific research that supports legalised cruelty to animals through discovering new ways to maximise and accelerate animal growth and increase profits with no regard to the welfare and rights of the animals. The Government should examine the ethics of such science that supports increasingly cruel practices in the race for higher profits. Finally, today there has been a news story about the revelation of animal cruelty and alleged food safety breaches at a Victorian abattoir.² This is one of the many breaches of legislation that have been revealed by animal activists. So why they are being targeted?

Thank you for considering my views.

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² Ben Knight, "Video footage reveals alleged cruelty at illegal slaughterhouse" ABC News 2 August 2019. Available at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-08-02/video-footage-reveals-alleged-cruelty-at-illegal-slaughterhouse/11375854> (accessed 2 August 2019).