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

Mr Robin Ramsay

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**SUBMISSION CONTENT:**

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To the Enquiry Into the Impact of Animal Rights Activism on Victorian Agriculture

Introduction: Animal rights activists seek to bring to the attention of the public the cruelty inflicted on farm animals on farms, including dairy farms, feedlots, battery cages and in slaughterhouses. The Agriculture Industry, with its finely honed public relations adjunct, seeks to keep the truth of this from the public. Indeed people are generally unaware of this cruelty, and animal rights activists, almost always working people with families, seek to bring awareness of this to the public.

“a) The type and prevalence of unauthorised activity on Victorian farms and related industries, and the application of existing legislation”.

‘Unauthorised activity on Victorian farms’, surely includes consistent and deliberate cruelty to animals by farmers and industry, as has been well documented in documentaries like ‘Dominion,’ and on social media. If this consistent and deliberate cruelty is indeed lawful for ‘farm animals’ I suggest it is that legislation that should change, not trespass laws. Unauthorised activity by animal activists and others, which has been minimal, and never directed at families in their homes, is surely covered sufficiently by current legislation.

“b) 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.”

I am the son of a dairy farmer. My personal research indicates that ‘workplace health and safety’ on the dairy farm, factory farm and in the slaughterhouse is often substandard and unpoliced, and the pressure to keep to prescribed slaughter rates is punishing to both workers and animals, which is not helpful to ‘Victoria’s economy’ or ‘international

reputation'. I would also like to mention the Aussie Farms map of animal agriculture farm businesses, which has been published online, as much has been made of this in the media. I note that the information on this map is available on a Google search, for any person to discover: the map has simply demonstrated how pervasive the animal slaughter/factory farm industry is. If the industry was seriously interested in the 'reputation' of the industry, as regards humane treatment of farmed animals, and employees, there would be CCTV cameras in all dairy farms, factory farms and slaughterhouses, and tours of these facilities would be arranged for the public. The fact that industry does its best to keep the appalling treatment of animals and its workers in these facilities secret, adds emphasis to the industry cover up. Videos available online show biosecurity being ignored while animals suffer horrid lives and confused (at best) and terrified (at worst) deaths. It is thanks only to animal activists these factory farms have been called on to improve their practises. I wonder where we would be without their persistent and courageous work. Further, the 'potential impacts of animal activist activity on Victorian farms', would be to bring public attention to the appalling treatment of animals on many Victorian farms/factory farms condoned and supported by the industry. This would possibly help improve our questionable reputation abroad, regarding animal welfare.

“c) Compliance with disease control and Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (POCTA)”

The award winning documentary film 'Dominion', which show standard lawful agricultural practices, and the recent expose on the ABC showing illegal home slaughter, all indicate how poorly the animal industry follows its own guidelines. Whether government sanctioned or not.

“d) The civil or criminal liability of individuals and organisations who promote or organise participation in unauthorised animal activism activities.”

Throughout history both lawful and unlawful activities have been challenged by individuals and organisations on the basis of higher moral and ethical social positions. Over the years courageous and compassionate activists have helped change laws that prevented women voting, trade unions forming, indigenous, civil and gay rights etc. Under the Nazi regime, the slaughter of Jews was lawful. To object to Nazi slaughter of Jews and other 'undesirables' was both unauthorised and against the law. Animal justice activists are also seeking to change unjust laws, based on morality and ethics. Laws are designed to uphold the values of our society. Chief Justice Allsop AO notes the values that underpin our laws, which lie at the heart of every individual, and at the heart of society. “a rejection of unfairness and an insistence on essential equality; respect for the integrity and dignity of the individual, and mercy.”

Surely the 'mercy' should include the 99.98% of living individuals in Australia who are other than human?

“e) Analysis of incidents and responses of other jurisdictions in Australia and internationally”

I have not undertaken research into this matter

“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.”

These matters seem to have become a 'political football' and a media beat up about a single animal activist event that happened in April 2018, and drew national attention to animal rights issues. Further, I think that government should recognise Aussie Farms for

the fine work they have done in a generally responsible and lawful way, to bring appalling industry practises to public attention in an organised way, and maturely address 'animal welfare outcomes'. Surely none of us wish to see passionate, if misguided activists, acting in a rogue way. Activists derive no personal benefit from gathering covert footage. Activists expose practices that may be either legal or illegal, but are nevertheless cruel and heinous, at significant personal risk. I would think these activists would be recognised as courageous leaders, rather than criminalised and marginalised. And let us remember that many activists come from farming families. Furthermore, we should give greater notability, regard, consideration and support to our arable farmers.

Regarding improving 'protections' for farmers 'businesses' I note that there is a growing demand for plant based foods, and especially organically grown foods: and a movement for improving trashed farmlands through 'regenerative farming', which has been so successful and profitable on properties like Connewarran near Mortlake, in my personal experience. In a state experiencing ever more big dries, I recommend that government should encourage animal farmers to move to dry lands grain cropping, and other plant based farming, looking both to a more humane and profitable future, and so a way to protect their businesses into the future. As well, research clearly shows that animal farming is hugely wasteful of water, compared to plant based farming.

END of SUBMISSION

Mr Robin Ramsay

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