

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

Dear Secretary,

I am writing to the Inquiry to make my concerns about the impacts of trespass and threats to farmers and rural communities from animal rights activism known, and to explain how this has affected me and my family.

In a broad sense, Australia is a tolerant society and farming communities generally reflect that. In rural communities, community service in the form of volunteering to meet the needs of the community for services and support makes them a strong cohort. They can be relied upon to support each other. Many of the community on my road survived Black Saturday. They are close.

My greatest fear is that in the absence of organised civil support, both legal in the form of laws and sentencing and operational in the form of police, that rural communities and farming communities in particular will feel they have to organise themselves to ensure support is available in the event of farm invasion or trespass. Whilst the statistical likelihood of farm invasion remains low, largely governed by the low number of people who believe they are outside the law, the fear of same in my community is disproportionate. This is not dissimilar to the problems experienced by white farmers in Africa. It is a low proportion, but the consequences of the fear of being attacked at the farm has led to organised responses like local "militia". This is because lawmakers there do not understand that fear will drive a disproportionate response. Or maybe they do and it suits their politics, and I hear echoes of the Greens views on our Victorian problem in this point. Either way it's a terrible thing.

We do not want to create a situation here where a call out for help will bring dozens of locals in support to a farm invasion, with the potential for violent confrontation with so called activists. We need trust in the rule of law, and have laws worthy of that trust. Farming is a legal activity. As activism can be also. We all appreciate that civil disobedience is occasionally a weapon of the activist, in pursuit of some great causes. But that is not the same as what has occurred on farms in Victoria recently. We need to put a stop to that kind of thing. Mobs in pursuit of their causes and descending upon and violating the peace and rights of individuals and families has a much less noble history, and is not to be tolerated.

I have been appalled by the judiciary in the approach that they have taken to sentencing in those cases that have made it to court. I guess that with round the clock police on call to protect them that judges rarely have their home invaded or their livelihood threatened. I estimate that all Victorians would generally be happier with all sentencing if it also seemed proportionate to the fear and distress and economic loss created by the convicted. With regard to these activists, judges seem to view them as touse haired do-gooders who are a little misguided; but they should not be treated like they are 5 year old children. It would be useful if the judiciary had some skin in the game here, as opposed to their aloof and so called liberal views. The judiciary have, through

their failure to provide sufficient deterrent in their sentencing, got us to where we are now; with ample precedent in violence and bail laws. Now the Government, more in touch with the community, is required to administer justice by proxy in setting minimum terms because the judiciary are unwilling to account for community expectations, instead substituting their own rarified privilege. Independence of the judiciary means not intimidated by the executive. It doesn't mean answerable to no one but yourself.

I work and reside on a farm on the outskirts of Melbourne, within commuter distance. As farms like mine become less viable due to scale, and the cost of land on the urban fringe often prohibits increasing scale, diversification into farm tourism is an option to sustain the farming enterprise; through people experiencing and learning about farming. This is worthwhile as fifty years ago most people had relatives on farms but today most people do not. However we have put our diversification plan on hold to see what happens with this review. Unlike those who forced the closure of Gippy Goat, I'd like to think if such an activist did ever turn up here in the future, that they are making a genuine choice to endure the stark legal consequences, and that there would be a swift police response and that the law would be properly upheld. Without that, there can be no confidence to invest.

And I hope that no-one ever has to resort to organising their neighbours as their best response.

Best of luck with your review.

[Redacted signature block]