

Inquiry into Animal Activism in Victoria

I would like to start my submission with the belief that if we had laws in Australia which protected ALL animals from cruel, corrupt and torturous practices there would be no need for animal activism and protests. If it wasn't for undercover activists exposing some of the horrific footage to the public we would not be aware and the needless suffering of animals would continue. If the industry had nothing to hide then we wouldn't need whistleblowers.

I also believe that not all farmers are unscrupulous and that many farmers believe they care for their animals and their welfare. However I am really concerned that this proposal is a form of ag gag law which only promotes cruelty and harm to animals with no repercussions or prosecutions for any farmers or workers who do flaunt animal welfare regulations. We have no true Office of Independent Animal Welfare and there has been not one prosecution to date against a farmer/worker for illegal activity when cruelty has been exposed. So how can the proposed legal suggestion to prosecute animal activists be possible. It is completely one-sided. If the government had proper laws and prosecution processes against the perpetrators of unnecessary animal cruelty within the farming industry the activists would not need to work undercover for concern over disgraceful practices.

There has been a history of oppression across Society for many years and throughout history it has been demonstrated time and time again that often the only voices speaking out against mankind's largest atrocities have been the voices of activists:-

- Aboriginal people being classed as lower in value than fauna and flora;
- Slavery in Africa and South America;
- Homosexual persons classed as unlawful

Laws which attempt to gag, restrain, or imprison activists set a dangerous precedent in our free democracy and we should lament any government taking steps to restrict the voice of its people. Many catch phrases have been used in order for Society to believe that animals are treated with humane practices:

'Humane Slaughter' 'Free range' 'Ethically euthanized', 'They just fall asleep with the gas'. The reality is some male calves just days old are starved of their mother's milk and killed with sledge hammers. Male chicks are masorated and put into blenders alive, pigs are gassed to death whilst thrashing around with their lungs seared. If it wasn't for undercover animal activists exposing actual footage the public would never know the truth behind closed doors.

Bev McArthur states that local farmers need protection from 'unlawful animal activist invaders in state law. Animal activists are not violent. They often risk their own safety and lives to expose the truth and bring public awareness to the actual treatment of farm animals. Cruelty on puppy farms exposing corruption has been banned in Victoria because of this exposure. I am aware of legal cases from animal activists that have been caught by farmers trespassing and those same farmers have used excessive force resulting in broken bones and significant physical injury. It is also known that many farmers have stated disgusting and violent statements on social media. Again I repeat that if nothing illegal was being undertaken then the farmers should have nothing to hide.

There is inadequate or non-existent animal protection in farming systems. Legal routine practices continue because farm animals are exempt from the laws that protect our domestic animals. Instead of looking at increasing penalties for whistleblowers it would be much more acceptable and appropriate if Australia's laws would increase animal protection for all animals.

(d) It appears the "animal activists" are being singled out from other demonstrators. Advocacy and activism are two separate causes and to link them together as many people and politicians seem to have done in the past few months is unfair and unjust. There are many people who participate in peaceful demonstrations to try to expose the truth about animal welfare issues, along with Organisations who also promote such exposure, education and transparency. Before Social Media most people were unaware of the truth behind many farm processes unless they were in the industry themselves. However now there is nowhere to hide and Government can take a reactive view by jailing or fining concerned advocates or take a proactive view and ensure laws protect the welfare of all animals. So many times we have seen actual footage of workers kicking, punching and killing animals with sledgehammers but these people are not fined or jailed.

(e) In the UK, and in anticipation of Brexit, an animal welfare bill is being considered. If approved, it will increase the maximum sentence for animal cruelty from six months to five years. However it has also been a fear that if the UK leaves the European Union animal welfare standards may diminish.

Animal sentience is recognised in New Zealand's Animal Welfare Act and also in the draft ACT Animal Welfare Act here in Australia. New Zealand recognises ALL animals as sentient beings as reported by Sophie McAdam June 3 2015. This was included in the Animal Welfare Amendment Bill making it easier to prosecute people in animal cruelty cases. Sentient means ALL animals can experience both positive and negative emotions including pain and distress according to Dr. Virginia Williams, Chair of the National Animal Advisory Committee.

Sentience is currently enshrined in European Union law but not into UK law, yet. Norway is looking at Disaster Management for animals and forming a Disaster Risk Reduction plan. They have also brought Animal Welfare education into the school system so children are learning from an early how to respect and treat animals. Sweden brought out a new Animal Welfare law in April this year to replace the old law written in 1988. Article 13 (title II) of the Lisbon Treaty sees animals as 'sentient beings' and observes that the suffering or distress of animals should be diminished as much as possible.

(f) CCTV needs to be placed in all slaughterhouses to provide absolute transparency, there needs to be factory mandatory codes, farm animals need to be protected by Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act recognising them as sentient beings.

A recent report commissioned by the federal Department of Agriculture and Water Resources suggests it's the majority of Australians who care about animal welfare.

The report – [Australia's Shifting Mindset on Farm Animal Welfare](#) by consultancy firm Futureye – also says the department "currently has very limited powers over farm animal welfare", raising the potential for "outrage" if the community sees the government as not responding to concerns and expectations. Most respondents in the survey saw the government as chiefly responsible for ensuring animal welfare standards, and 40% see the need for "significant reform". They suggested various actions for improvement, such as:

- a minimum standard set by government
- incentivising farmers for good animal welfare
- better education of the public about agricultural practices in terms of awareness-raising
- standardisation of product labels such as free-range.

Focus group discussions revealed many respondents were concerned that the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources has a conflict of interest when both supporting the agricultural industry and promoting good animal welfare standards.

Consumers want greater transparency about animal welfare practices and more consistent information so they can make informed decisions. The report found 42% of respondents said there was too much conflicting information about animal welfare, and 40% wanted more information.

Governments need to be pro-active in terms of animal welfare standards and the laws surrounding them across Australia, as the issue of the treatment of ALL animals in an ethical and humane manner is not going away. More and more people across the world are becoming concerned with the treatment of our fellow beings whether for domestication or food, the live export trade or transportation of livestock. This issue of course is connected with the care of our planet, eco systems and biodiversity.

In closing I would like to state that activism of any nature occurs when a community become concerned with treatment of others whether human or non-human. Transparency and proper lawful policing of in-humane practices would alleviate the need for protests. Prison terms or fining will not deter the community from standing up from what is seen as humane and ethical practices in our Western Society.