

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Impact of Animal Rights Activism on Victorian Agriculture

Horsham—Wednesday, 18 September 2019

MEMBERS

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Mr Bernie Finn—Deputy Chair

Mr Rodney Barton

Mr Mark Gepp

Mrs Bev McArthur

Mr Tim Quilty

Ms Sonja Terpstra

PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Ms Melina Bath

Mr David Davis

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Andy Meddick

Mr Craig Ondarchie

Mr Gordon Rich-Phillips

Ms Mary Wooldridge

Dr Catherine Cumming

WITNESSES

Mr Leonard Vallance, Chairman, Victorian Farmers Federation Livestock Group.

The CHAIR: The Committee is hearing evidence today in relation to the Inquiry into the Impact of Animal Rights Activism on Victorian Agriculture and the evidence is being recorded. Everyone here, please make sure your phone is on silent. Welcome to the public hearing of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee. All evidence taken at this hearing is protected by parliamentary privilege; therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Before we start please state your name for the Hansard record, and then we will ask you some questions.

Mr VALLANCE: Leonard Vallance; I a livestock and grain farmer from north-west Victoria, and I am also the Chairman of the Victorian Farmers Federation Livestock Group. As far as I am concerned this issue of farm invasions is actually about law and order and freedom to express yourself and your opinions without impeding other people's welfare and their rights to live in a society which has a government that sets the legal parameters in which we live. Our view is that the activities of people entering farms to disrupt their enterprise, their livelihood and their welfare is contrary to the will of the people, and that is determined by the people sitting on the other side of this table today, those people that sit in the houses of Parliament. That is the sum of where I am at with it. It actually comes down to law and order and your right to express your opinion, which everyone has—we live in the most free country in the world—and whether you are able to express that right without impinging on other people's welfare and their business. That is a pretty simple message.

The CHAIR: Do you want us to go straight into questions?

Mr VALLANCE: Yes, go straight.

The CHAIR: All right. We are happy to do that. How would you like Government to respond to the issue of animal activism?

Mr VALLANCE: The activism has taken a very, I would say, nasty turn in recent times, actually targeting individual farmers rather than in the past, when activism has been through lobbyists in government and industry. We have now seen this turn to farm invasions simply to get media attention, to upset farmers and to provoke them into doing things that they probably should not do because they are vulnerable, and vulnerable people react. So the Government has a responsibility to protect people from people violating their own space and their own businesses. The Government does have a responsibility to do that.

The CHAIR: Do you think there are any policies you would like to see?

Mr VALLANCE: I think in the recent case where goats were stolen from a farm, and those goats were valuable animals, if it was a theft out of a motor vehicle on the street outside this building that person would be charged. The charge would be recorded. They would be fined or in prison. To have a \$2 fine for stealing assets is a silly situation where the judiciary is actually detached from reality and what the community expects.

Mr GEPP: Thanks, Leonard, for coming today, and I have read your submission. I have got a couple of questions, but the first one is about risk. What is the biggest risk that you see to a farm following an invasion? When people come onto the property, what is the biggest risk in your mind?

Mr VALLANCE: It comes in different aspects. We will deal with the farmer and his family for a start. A farm is the home of someone, and the employees usually live on that farm, or they may well actually not even be attached to the farm; they may be renting, and it is not discriminated as to whether they are farmers or not. They may well be a local employee, a mechanic or something else, and so they are impacted as well. So it is not just the farmer; it is also the people that service that farm, whether they be trucks delivering product—dairy trucks—or stock trucks coming and leaving the property or grain trucks coming and leaving the property. They are all impacted as well. So it is not just the farmer. Now the farmer himself and his wife and his children are also impacted. To put small children through that sort of exercise is traumatic. We live in this era now where there is counselling for when there is an incident at a primary school, but there is no assistance for the farmers

whatsoever when they have endured this sort of treatment, and it is very onerous. So there is that aspect of it. Then there is the damage to assets which can occur with these people entering a property.

The major issue, as far as I am concerned personally, is the biosecurity risk to the farm and the food production. Now, we have a voluntary livestock production assurance system in the broadacre farming enterprises, where we are required to have a biosecurity plan for our farms. We are supposed to document who comes and leaves the farm because it is designated as a biosecurity risk. Right at this moment we have African swine flu, which is devastating the Chinese pig industry, and it is rampaging through Europe and it is going to starve the world of protein. Pig farmers in this country have already banned their employees from having any pork products in the workplace for lunch because of the risk, because the swine flu virus can survive frozen for three years or something. So in a treated pig meat product it is a huge risk to the pig industry. Now, bird flu is the same: it is easily transferred. If we take my operation of sheep and cattle, there are various diseases, zoonotic as well as just animal-borne diseases, which can be brought onto the property in dirt, clothing or anything else.

Then there is the issue of leaving stuff around that the sheep and cattle could possibly eat, which then renders them unfit for sale. Now, I do not know whether your Committee is aware or not, but we do have a National Residue Survey which examines meat products and tests them regularly for chemicals in the meat. There is also the issue around other items in the meat. On sheep and cattle that have been fed ruminant products, meat products, there is a ruminant feed ban in this country because of mad cow disease. Now, that is a serious disease to have—we have not had in this country—and to feed meat products to ruminant animals is a clear violation of the laws of this country, and they do this sort of thing.

Now, when it comes to the animal welfare of the animals in particular, if you have, particularly, cattle in a yard and they are disturbed, they can quite easily hurt themselves in the yard, particularly in a feedlot situation where there are large numbers of animals. There are broken legs—it is a mess. You get animals impaled on steel structures and so forth in the yards, and then they have to be destroyed. Now, there is the economic loss of the animals, the damage to the asset and then the distress to the staff and the farmers. It is just not acceptable.

Then you have got the issue of theft and everything else. Now, these people have got a habit of going from one farm to the next. So if they pick up some whatever—material—and transfer it to the next farm, that makes that farm extremely vulnerable to whatever was on the previous farm or wherever they have been, particularly in the pig industry and the chicken industry where biosecurity is extremely difficult to control.

Mr GEPP: Thank you for that answer. Do you think all of those issues are broadly understood by the community at large?

Mr VALLANCE: The farming community understand them very clearly.

Mr GEPP: Well, I know the farming community does, but I mean—

Mr VALLANCE: But, no, the wider community has no understanding of biosecurity or zoonotic disease infections in humans. They have no understanding of that. Now, we will pick on Q fever for a moment. Q fever kills a number of people in Australia annually. In every industry in the processing sector and livestock industries everyone has to be vaccinated for Q fever because they run a serious risk of illness, and it is a terrible disease to have. So the VFF was engaged in an 18-month program of Q fever awareness across the state. We ran right through rural areas to get people vaccinated—to save lives basically. So, no, the wider community have no understanding of the issues around the disease transfer to humans or the disease transfer to other animals.

Mr GEPP: Just my final question, if you do not mind, Chair. I am not sure if you are aware of the partnership between the VFF, the Royal Ag Society and the Government. They have \$1 million in funding hopefully as a mechanism to change the conversation about and community understanding of agriculture in Victoria. Do you think that is a good program, firstly, and secondly, is that a vehicle, perhaps, to broaden education amongst the wider community about some of the issues?

Mr VALLANCE: The VFF has been running its own campaign, called Stock Sense, through rural Victoria for a number of years now, which is funded by producer levies, not by government funding at all, and that last year touched some 5000 peri-urban farmers in Victoria via electronic and one-on-one communication. They are

the people that are most at risk on a day-to-day basis. As for the education of the wider community, any type of education is good education. Probably 'education' is not the correct word. The 'gaining of knowledge' would be better, and the knowledge of how people's food is grown, where it is grown and who grows it is at a serious deficit in our modern society. People are so detached from the people that grow their food that they do not actually understand how food is actually grown for them to eat and to enjoy.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Before Bev asks a question, I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the Member for Lowan, Ms Emma Kealy.

Mrs McARTHUR: Thank you very much, Leonard, for coming in today and enlightening us on the problems that can be transferred with animal activists invading farms, which is putting, as you have referred to in your submission, a \$4.3 billion meat industry and a \$667 million wool industry at risk. My question is: we talk about trespassing, but, really, isn't this breaking and entering if people enter your farm, because if the same thing occurred in a factory or a workplace or a shop across the road here, it would be considered breaking and entering? Do we need to beef up the approach to how we react to this sort of activity?

Mr VALLANCE: It is breaking and entering because it is entering the threshold from the roadside into a business. Now, unfortunately Australian farms are fairly relaxed about the entrance to their enterprises, usually because of the scale of the operation. To give you some idea, I have 79 gates that open onto a public road, so for me to be able to provide security for all of those gateways would be near impossible. But that is the nature of the business, and the wider community need to understand and respect the area which is within a farm. They need to also understand the dangers of entering that business. Farms are the most dangerous workplaces in Australia due to the amount of equipment and the conditions under which farmers operate. So there is that actual danger from that. But they are actually breaking and entering and violating the rights of those people that have an asset which they have purchased and they are responsible for. You are quite right—if it was a business in town, the fines would be much higher.

Mrs McARTHUR: So do we perhaps need to recommend that the parameter of an agricultural business is such that, if you enter unwarranted, uninvited, you are breaking and entering?

Mr VALLANCE: You are, yes. I believe that should be a very strong recommendation of this Inquiry—that it is breaking and entering, whether there is a physical barrier there or not. Once they leave the road easement, it is breaking and entering unless they have authorisation.

Mrs McARTHUR: Correct. And also, if I can go on, you have mentioned the animal welfare problems that occur in this sort of activity, with dogs being let out of trucks onto busy roads, and you have also detailed what happens to cattle in a feedlot if they are frightened or whatever. So we often hear that this is about animal welfare and that the animal activists care about animals, but we do frequently learn about the impact on animals to their own welfare from this sort of activity. Would you like to comment?

Mr VALLANCE: This is not about animal welfare; this is about law and order in our community. One group is seeing fit to pay little regard to law and order and the rights of their fellow people that live in this country. Animal welfare, in my experience of this whole agenda, has been a very low point in their priorities, because in the case of where they stole the goats they placed them in a vehicle unrestrained. They kept them in a house where they could eat the upholstery, which is full of PFAS and other non-compliant materials. They did not feed them properly. The nanny goat, which was milking, got mastitis and had to be subjected to substantial amounts of antibiotics afterwards. If that is their view of animal welfare, thank God they are not producing food for us to eat. They have no concept of animal welfare.

Mrs McARTHUR: Just one final question: the evidence that we have received from animal activists demonstrates that actually they want to put an end to animal-based production in this country and move us all to plant-based enterprises. As the Chairman of a very eminent group within the VFF, how feasible would it be for all farmers to move to plant-based production?

Mr VALLANCE: For the vast majority of agricultural lands in Australia, which are extremely dry where the majority of the red meat is produced, it is completely unviable. I went for a short drive last week from just north of here to the Gulf of Carpentaria and back—

Mrs McARTHUR: Just a short drive.

Mr VALLANCE: A short drive of nearly 8000 kilometres in two weeks. I can assure you that the overwhelming majority of the land I drove through is not suitable for cropping and plant-based production. Therefore if you are going to go down that path, that vast swathe of Queensland and western New South Wales will not be used for anything. Then the community has to control the invasive species in it and control the environment, which will be a huge burden on the Australian taxpayer. So to move to a plant-based system, my short answer to that is: mankind got off its four feet some millions of years ago and then the next big advancement was when it learned to eat other animals, and so the brain developed and became intelligent and so forth with a higher protein diet. To now, 2 million years later, go back to a plant-based diet would be a little devolutionary, wouldn't it?

There is great play made at the moment of factory-grown meat and how it is going to be the new saviour of the planet. It is grown in basically red Gatorade. It is injected with fat and flavours to make it taste like meat, so it is not actually meat. It is a meat tissue and it is generated in a test tube, in a Petri dish, but it is still at a cost of \$4000 a hamburger patty. Now, if people are going to pay that for synthetic meat—well, look out. The cost of growing the crops in the Australian environment—we are all concerned about our river systems—there would be no water in any of our rivers anywhere in this country because it would all be utilised to grow soybeans and corn to feed the population.

Mr MEDDICK: Thank you, Mr Vallance, for your testimony here today. I would just like to touch on a couple of things. You mentioned in your submission and when you were speaking today about the judiciary. For you it is very much a law and order issue, and I agree with that. Are you aware of what the current penalties are for trespass?

Mr VALLANCE: There is an ability there to fine, but the judiciary do not seem to be prepared to impose those fines.

Mr MEDDICK: Sure. But that is a very different thing from law itself. That is what we are talking about here. This seems to be a recurring theme that there is frustration amongst rural communities that it is not so much the law itself—they often feel that the law itself is perfectly fine, that the penalties themselves are actually perfectly fine—it is just that there is a lack of will, if you like, from the judiciary to hand down a sentence that the community believe is adequate.

Mr VALLANCE: But there is also the interpretation of that law, which seems to be highly variable, as to whether someone is actually there illegally or not—the interpretation of that law.

Mr MEDDICK: Again, that is the judiciary.

Mr VALLANCE: Yes. The judiciary allow that interpretation to be extremely soft and rubbery.

Mr MEDDICK: I do not have very much else for you. The only thing I would just want to ask you about—the two might at first not seem interconnected, but believe me they are in my mind—is that very recently we saw the situation happen in Western Australia where a rogue operator was trying to import pig semen in shampoo bottles, I think it was, and they were caught. I think all of us would understand, when you are talking about swine flu, for instance, that that in and of itself is a high and extraordinarily brazen attempt to flout our biosecurity laws. But when we talk about stolen animals, how many instances are there of farm trespass where animals are stolen—again I am talking about the biosecurity problems here—versus large-scale or medium-scale livestock theft as well? I believe when you look at the number of people who actually trespass on a farm, and the incidences are extremely low by comparison, they might take one or two animals—and I agree they should not be taking them—versus medium to large-scale livestock theft across the board; I believe from reading various things from the VFF that this is a major problem.

Mr VALLANCE: It is a major problem, and I spend an inordinate amount of time talking to senior police. To their credit the police have now delegated senior officers to talk to us about this and there are regular meetings here in this town, actually, in the western Victoria division, around how to control stock theft. Do not confuse the trauma of farm invasion with the trauma of having stock stolen. The effect is very similar. The distress on the farmer of losing animals is huge.

Mr MEDDICK: I am not trying to confuse the two at all.

Mr VALLANCE: And so to draw that comparison: what you are seeing in stock theft is highly organised criminal activity with structures similar to mafia-type structures involved, because those animals are picked up, transported, slaughtered or rehomed somewhere else on an individual's property.

Mr MEDDICK: That is a massive biosecurity threat as well, yes?

Mr VALLANCE: It is extreme. It is a massive biosecurity threat and the VFF has been working very closely with Government to get the Premier to understand that rural policing is totally inadequate. The modern rural policeman spends most of his time dealing with drugs, domestic violence and transporting arrested individuals very long distances to jails where they can be held safely.

The town I live close to, Ouyen, has a three-member station. If they arrest someone on the Calder Highway for drugs and so forth, their entire shift is taken up transporting that prisoner to the Mildura cells because by the time they get them there, book them in and get home again, that is the entire shift gone for two officers. So all of the rural theft just gets forgotten. I had a drone in our farm about 12–18 months ago. We reported it to the police. It took three weeks for the local sergeant to come and have a chat, because his workload is so high that he cannot cope with the work.

Mr MEDDICK: I am sorry to hear that.

Mr VALLANCE: We have put in around about \$15 000 worth of automatic surveillance equipment in our farmyards.

Mr MEDDICK: And if it is okay with you, if we get the chance later on I would like to catch up with you and talk about that very specific issue of law and order, how many police and staff there are et cetera. That would be a good thing I would like to go over with you.

Mr VALLANCE: The issue with separating stock theft is that stock theft is motivated by pure greed and personal gain on behalf the thieves, whereas activism is an ideology. They are trying to roll up animal welfare into activism and stopping farming, when they do not actually understand that what the farming is doing is producing food for them to eat as a wider community.

Mr MEDDICK: I was just more thinking in terms of prevalence and numbers to see what is a greater threat.

Mr VALLANCE: Look, I would spend four days talking about stock theft and one day talking about farm invasion in my job.

Mr MEDDICK: Are you happy for me to catch up with you later to talk about releasing numbers?

Mr VALLANCE: Yes, that is fine.

Mr MEDDICK: That would be great. Love to. Thank you, mate.

Ms BATH: Thank you, Leonard, and thank you for representing the livestock group for the VFF today and for coming here and giving us the wealth of your knowledge. Just before, we heard you having a conversation around the judiciary system. I think you used in your submission the Gippy Goat issue. In that case the *Livestock Disease Control Act* was seen to be breached and the magistrate fined the perpetrator \$1, and you are well aware of that. My concerns are that you have just said that you are happy with the laws—that is what you say here—but not the judiciary system. Let me clarify something with you: the law as it stands at the moment has no minimum penalty, so the magistrate was legally within his entire rights to say, 'Here's a \$1 fine'. The maximum was around \$9600. My question to you is: is the livestock group happy with a law that enables a \$1 fine?

Mr VALLANCE: The question earlier on was about the maximum fines, and they are probably reasonable. But your point is about the minimum fine and in particular with regard to the transporting of livestock and removal of livestock from a property. Removing livestock from a property without the correct paperwork and identification is an up to \$10 000 fine. You are correct in that that minimum fine should be much higher, and

this comes back to the interpretation by the judiciary of the importance of this. I agree with you that the minimum fine should be much higher, but the importance of the criminal act is not understood by the judiciary.

Ms BATH: There are two parts to that, I guess, in my understanding. I will give you my feedback and you can provide me with yours. One is Parliament makes the laws. Parliament—the Government—can set a minimum penalty, and at the moment there are none: \$1 is the minimum. Secondly—and we have heard this from a variety of sources—the judiciary system could benefit from education around what happens in a farming situation in the livestock industry in general. We also know that the case for one of the other persons involved in the Gippy Goat scenario was heard in Melbourne, and we have heard that that case was dismissed as a trivial matter by the magistrate at the time.

Your report, your submission, talks about biosecurity legislation with penalties to align with New South Wales, including on-the-spot fines. Do you want to go into why you have put that in your submission: on-the-spot fines?

Mr VALLANCE: It was put to me by one government official that activists are usually university students with very few assets, so by the time you run them through the court system they have probably moved on. The entire court system today is so slow that on-the-spot fines would be a much more effective way of dealing with the criminal act. I mean, we moved away from summonses for speeding however many years ago to on-the-spot fines, and it has been reasonably effective at slowing people down on our roads. In the case of drink-driving today, if you are over the limit, they just put you in the car and take your car off you. That is it; you are done. It is a very effective act right at the coalface to prevent that sort of activity, and that is where we think it should be as well because we have invested a lot of time and money as an industry in providing traceability for our livestock in the sheep and cattle industry.

This current Government, and the previous Minister for Agriculture, invested \$21 million in sheep identification in this state. It makes a mockery of the entire system when the government has invested \$21 million and the judiciary down the road lets someone go for transporting stock without eartags and the necessary paperwork. Why did the Government spend \$21 million? You have got to be joking. It is a ludicrous situation. The Minister has actually been embarrassed by the fact that the money that Jaala Pulford invested in the sheep industry has been a waste of time. It only takes one animal. The British foot-and-mouth disease started from one animal; one careless person. One of the foot-and-mouth disease outbreaks in England started from someone feeding a ham sandwich to a pig on a free-range pig farm at a roadside stop. That is how it started, and it cost the English economy billions.

Ms BATH: Thank you, Leonard. Leonard, you have raised issues about activism and, I guess, the amount of activism. I want to pursue that line of questioning. In Bairnsdale we heard from Graham Howell who is from the livestock transport association or something similar to that.

Mr VALLANCE: Yes. I know Graham.

Ms BATH: He related a number of occurrences where animals were being transported to an abattoir, and there was one occurrence where they were just travelling along the road, where activists actively interfered and, to some degree, very much created a level of anxiety within the people driving the trucks. And they never actually went to the police—they never disclosed them. So do you think that there are occurrences of activism happening, whether it be high-grade low-grade, that are not being reported?

Mr VALLANCE: There are. I know a friend of my son's drives for one of the largest stock carriers in this state, and he regularly gets abused at road houses for the way he treats his dogs. Now on one particular occasion he got laid into by about six activists at a road house. He had actually just bought them all chicken burgers for tea—

Ms BATH: The dogs or the activists?

Mr VALLANCE: The dogs. No, he bought the dogs chicken burgers for tea and he had just spent quite a bit of money feeding his three dogs because he had actually run out of dog food on the trip because it went a day longer than it needed too. He bought them human food for tea and he got abused for it. I have heard cases

where they would pull up at roadside stops and they would let the dogs out of the trucks. So now they have to have the dogs in the cabins with them.

There are instances of trucking companies carting pigs into Melbourne where they have to sit on the side of the road for anything up to 4 or 5 hours with the pigs on the trucks so that the police can clear the activists in the city so that they can get them into the slaughterhouses. Now the animal welfare issue of those pigs sitting on those trucks for that extra period of time is entirely unacceptable to anyone who is interested in animals—how do their actions justify that sort of treatment? It is very convenient that the public never see those trucks in the outskirts of Melbourne sitting there and waiting to get the okay to enter the city. It is just a ridiculous situation.

I am a member of the Victorian livestock transporters association, and they would like to see amendments to the act where it includes livestock transport vehicles, because the moment they open the gates on the stock trucks, or the dog kennels on the trucks that is breaking and entering as well, and that is overlooked by everyone at this point in time.

Ms BATH: So just for clarification, you are saying that an invasion or a trespass offence should include—

Mr VALLANCE: A vehicle.

Ms BATH: a vehicle as well—

Mr VALLANCE: Yes, it should.

Ms BATH: and actions to that vehicle that are unauthorised by the person in charge of the vehicle.

Mr VALLANCE: I would also emphasise the point that those dogs that travel in those trucks are very expensive animals. They are highly trained. They cost probably up to \$15 000 individually, because those dogs are able to unload a truck very, very efficiently. They are highly trained animals, and the truck drivers value them.

Mr BARTON: Thanks, Leonard. I am just going to go over a few things. One of the consistent messages that has been coming through this week is that penalties are not strong enough and that the Committee should consider recommending on-the-spot fines. If we look at the extreme end of the activists, they have a philosophical view that we should not be farming animals. What is your view about how we are going to deal with that extreme?

Mr VALLANCE: If they do not want to eat animals, that is fine. That just leaves more meat for me and you to eat. That is their right. It is a free society. Men and women died in paddocks overseas for our freedom. I would challenge anyone who has never stood in a killing field to understand that. Everyone should go and stand in a killing field overseas. We have never endured that in this country and I hope we never do. But those people died so we could enjoy what we do today, and no-one should ever forget that.

The activists—their ideal of plant-based protein is not a viable option for the human species; we cannot do it.

Mr BARTON: We had a family yesterday who are chicken farmers. The new generation is coming on, the younger group—new babies in the house and all that sort of stuff. They are scared to live on the family farm. Have you come across that?

Mr VALLANCE: Not directly, but I do know that he is probably the largest chicken farmer in Victoria, and he has real concerns about his son who lives right on the property. He has serious concerns around the welfare of his grandchildren. It is an issue for the family that they have to manage. They have to ensure today that someone is there. The days of going up to the shed and leaving the kids in the house are finished. That is done. They cannot do that anymore. It is only 100 metres from the main house to the chicken sheds. So someone has to be there all the time. They are in a highly populated area. I visited the farm this year and it is a spectacular property. It is really well run, but the impact on that family is enormous.

Mr BARTON: Correct me if I am wrong, but it seems to me that the chicken industry is getting targeted more than the rest of the industries. Would that be correct?

Mr VALLANCE: The more intensive industries tend to be closer to populated areas. It is a simple issue of transportation. Chickens can only be transported for probably 2 hours on a truck before slaughter, and so they have to be reasonably close to the slaughter facilities, which have to be reasonably close to a pool of work people to operate the abattoirs. So by necessity of economics and animal welfare they are all very close to the populated areas, and that is why.

Mr BARTON: The other issue is mental health, which is enormous. We know that country people struggle more than city people for all sorts of reasons—loneliness, income, and a whole set of pressures. Have you seen evidence of this exacerbating the stress that people are under?

Mr VALLANCE: The bloke that I have most to do with, Allan Bullen, who is familiar to some of you, I have known for four or five years, and I would have to say his whole personal demeanour has changed considerably in that period of time because of the stress level. He feels responsible for the entire industry as Chairman of the chicken group and the VFF—he has just recently stepped down from that position. But Allan was the person that I dealt with most in this area, and Allan's stress levels were at an extreme level, which I do not believe was doing his health any good.

Near our farm we have a feedlot operation—sheep and cattle feedlots—and the guys that run that property are constantly telling people to leave the property. A proportion of them are inquisitive—they are just there for tourism and that type of thing. But with the issues they have with people entering the property, they are on constant alert now. Someone has to be around all the time.

Mr BARTON: And that creates tension.

Mr VALLANCE: Surely families are allowed to go to the football on a Saturday.

Ms BATH: Where is that, Leonard?

Mr VALLANCE: At Nandaly. Yes. There are six family members who work on the farm, but someone has to be there constantly now.

Ms BATH: For security?

Mr VALLANCE: For security. The sheep feedlot is separate to the cattle feedlot. The young guys play footy, and they are involved socially and so forth, and it is very difficult for them to leave their business and go and enjoy the family parts of life. If they want to go to the lake for a swim or something like that, they cannot do it anymore. Someone has to stay home. The concept of the whole family going for a picnic or going fishing for the day—it cannot happen anymore. Someone has to stay at home.

Mrs McARTHUR: Leonard, yesterday we heard of people entering a property in black balaclavas and in the middle of the night. This is more than animal welfare activism; this is verging on terrorism, surely. If anybody else wandered around doing that, we would wonder what on earth they were doing.

The CHAIR: Order! Order, please. Let us get to the question.

Mr VALLANCE: We live in a free society where people feel very comfortable to show their faces wherever they go.

Mrs McARTHUR: Right.

Mr VALLANCE: So we automatically associate someone who wants to cover their face with their not being there to help you. They are usually a threat to you or your business—usually you.

Mrs McARTHUR: So, Leonard, my question would be: should this Committee condemn this sort of behaviour that is occurring with people who are legally able to conduct a business and have the right to farm?

Mr VALLANCE: I think that in the case of people entering covertly covered in black balaclavas and all the rest of it, you do not know whether they are there to destroy the asset, to make a political point or threaten you personally. Now, home invasion in Melbourne today is pretty common. They have usually got balaclavas on

and a large baseball bat. So what is the difference when you are farming at Ouyen and someone turns up at your residence or in your business dressed the same? What is your reaction going to be? Probably self-defensive immediately. I am a motorbike rider. When I go into a service station I have to remove my helmet because they will not let you pump petrol unless you take your helmet off.

Mrs McARTHUR: Okay.

The CHAIR: May I clarify something here. I think the first part of the question from Mrs McArthur was not the intention from her side. She was saying what she had heard yesterday. It really was not her view or the Committee's view.

Mrs McARTHUR: Yes.

Mr VALLANCE: It depends on your definition of terrorism.

The CHAIR: I had to clarify that, but anyway.

Mr VALLANCE: But for the people who are living through this, it is terrorism for them, because their normal life is being disrupted by someone who wants to interfere with it.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Any further questions? If not, on behalf of the Committee I would like to thank you for your time and your contribution. You will receive a copy of the transcript for proofreading. Thank you very much.

Mr VALLANCE: Okay. No worries. Thank you.

Witness withdrew.