

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Impact of Animal Rights Activism on Victorian Agriculture

Bairnsdale—Tuesday, 20 August 2019

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WITNESS

Ms Meg Parkinson

The CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearings 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. We will allow you some time, and then please allow us some time to ask questions, but before you start can you state your name for the Hansard record.

Visual presentation.

Ms PARKINSON: My name is Meg Parkinson. Thank you very much for inviting me here today. I really appreciate it. I have been doing, as you would have seen from the submission, animal welfare for an awfully long time. Looking at the terms of reference and looking at some of the submissions, I thought it might be helpful just to start on some basic stuff around the legislation and the codes of practice, because there does seem to be a lot of conversation around that even though it is not strictly within the terms of reference. The first one is just the legal requirements. This is just eggs, just for egg farmers; every commodity has a similar sort of thing. We have regulations around food safety for grading, stamping and packing. We have animal welfare, both the actual looking after the animals on farm, which is the first link, and the second link is for land transport, so when animals are moved both to and from farms they come under the animal land transport code.

On the next page we have the biosecurity, which is getting quite a lot of run in the information. Then we have labelling, which is different for eggs than all the other animal commodities. This is not state legislation; this is federal legislation. It is not about stocking densities or free-range or cage or anything else; what it is about is how you label your eggs. To be able to label them 'free-range' you have to comply with the ACCC enforcement guidelines that you see there on the right.

Just very quickly, the next bit is about the Victorian legislation. We have the POCTA, the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act*, which is about the code that we all work by. The cruelty and aggravated cruelty offences are the main part of it, as well as information around the inspectorate and how it works and what rights and responsibilities they have. The poultry industry also have the poultry regulations, which is explained more in the department of jobs and precincts submission, which you might want to have a look at.

There is also the *Livestock Management Act* and its regs, which basically gives exemptions for approved QA schemes. The regs have two types of animal welfare at the moment: one is for pig standards and one is for land transport. The reason they are there and nothing else is that they are the only codes so far that have been done under standards and guidelines, which is a nationwide process.

Then we have the *Livestock Disease Control Act*, which is about disease and biosecurity, and then we have the regs under there, so it is how you test for diseases, what is appropriate, where the Ausvetplan fits and all that sort of thing. The regulations under the POCTA for the poultry industry came out of the last code review, so that is the fourth edition of the model code, which is the second edition of the Victorian code.

Really quickly, the other part of it is about the animal welfare code of practice. We have national standards and guidelines which were agreed at a ministerial level. The jurisdictions have legislative powers for animal welfare—apart from exports; that is the commonwealth. We have an organisation called Animal Health Australia, and a similar one called Plant Health Australia, which has been contracted by the animal welfare committee, which is a committee under AGSOC—the agricultural bureaucrats, the senior bureaucrats at secretary level—to set up a thing called the Animal Welfare Task Group, which reports back to the animal welfare committee. There is a writing group that has been established which actually writes the drafts. There is a full—and I do mean a full—process. This goes to every sort of poultry, from chooks through to quail through to emus and ostriches—everything on two legs and two wings apart from caged birds like budgies and things like that. And we have these very big meetings. As well as representatives from each of the industries there are representatives from each of the jurisdictions, plus the commonwealth, plus the Animal Welfare Science Centre, plus the CSIRO to look at the research, plus the contractors who are writing the regulatory impact

statement which goes with all these documents—because these are regulations; they are not legislation. As you can see, the stakeholders are there.

The final decision is made on a decision RIS, which is made by the ministerial council. If this is accepted—if the decision RIS is accepted and the draft standards and guidelines—then ministers take these back to each jurisdiction to implement subject to the parliamentary and cabinet process, which is normal for all of these things. So when they get into Parliament, they lay on the table in each house for ten sitting days, and then if everyone is happy with them, they go forward, the same as all other regulations. So that is the way the process is. I thought it was a good idea to talk about that.

In Victoria we have current codes and regulations for livestock. Livestock codes are made under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act*. They are made under what is called section 2 code, and if you can show that you comply with that code, that is a defence against the charge of cruelty. The charges of cruelty under section 9 of the Act do not only apply to livestock. They apply to a whole lot of other species—wildlife, pets and so on—but for livestock that is how it works. The regulations are enabled under the Act and are explained by the code, so if you look up the poultry regs, if you do not understand what they mean or you do not see how they work it out, then you refer back to the code, which has detailed information under each of those. And that is actually changing. With the new process that we are part of, currently it looks like we will have some enormous number of regulations, assuming Parliament accepts that enormous number and assuming the parliamentary counsel are happy to put them in. Some of them will not be able to be enforced. Just the way they are written it is not possible to enforce them, so then it comes down to Parliament, whether they are happy to do that—to pass things that they know cannot be enforced. But we will have that discussion at the time. So regulations define, for example, water requirements for poultry, and the code gives information that tells you what you do about this.

Farm invasions in the egg industry started in 1994 at Happy Hens with Animal Liberation Victoria. If you look on the website Open Rescue, you will find them all. You will find all the photos and information. This has happened many, many, many, many times. It particularly happens when we have code reviews. The poultry industry is on its fifth review at the moment—well, the fifth model code, the fourth review—and every time we have a code reviewed you end up with quite a lot of people trying to break into farms.

Animal Lib Victoria have also over many years—I am not sure whether they are quite doing it now or not but they have over many years—given out brochures at school gates and in the Bourke Street Mall, and sometimes when holding a bucket of blood, which is to say to people, ‘Do you like this?’. This is the idea of having blood that comes from animals, even though it is coloured water. Some of the photos they use in these things are not Australian—certainly not modern Australian. When, for example, I look at them I can see that these photos come from places like Thailand. It is very clear to me by the birds that are in there and by what the cages are that they are not Australian.

The invasions are aimed at the media. The activists often call the media themselves and the police. If the media do not attend, they send the videos to the media and then walk out and go, so it is purely a media stunt. They also, as everyone knows, invade chicken meat, pig, dairy and livestock farms.

We really feel that the penalties that the lady was talking about—the dollar—for the Gippy Goat just shows that there is a lack of balance and a lack of understanding. I do not know of my own knowledge whether this is true, but it said in the media that the magistrate said, ‘Keep doing it. Just make sure you don’t get caught’. That is what was quoted. If that is so, that is terrible and that magistrate should have recused himself from that position and let someone else do the job. But, as I say, that is what it said in the media.

To me, animal activists are not talking about animal welfare, they are talking about animal rights. You look at their websites and they say about animal rights. I was once interviewed on the *Country Hour* and I said that, and they said, ‘Well, that doesn’t sound right’. So they interviewed Patty Marks, who was president of Animal Liberation Victoria—and still is—and to quote, she said, ‘Well, at least she’s got that right’. So that is what they do. In my view activists can express their view but they should not be threatening, they should not be misleading and they should not trespass.

The Aussie Farms website, which comes up quite a lot in all these conversations, to me is about one person deciding whether farmers should farm in a particular way rather than that decision being made by the market and the Parliament to reflect the views of the majority of the community. It is not appropriate to have one person enforcing their views and setting up systems that make it easy for things not to go right, and threatening people, intimidating people. We call this bullying, and it is most inappropriate for this to happen. Activists take away the freedom of farmers to act in compliance with the law, because that is what we are doing—we are acting in compliance with the law. They take away the freedom of farmers to support low-income earners who need low-quality protein. They take away the freedom of farmers to feel safe in their homes and the freedom of their employees to feel safe at work. And they take away the freedom of rural communities to continue to be viable.

As for us, well, we work pretty hard. We do it seven days a week. We do not think we should be threatened by activists who act for their own philosophical and political reasons. Farmers are the backbone of our communities. We are in sports clubs, CFA, CWA, VFF, pool committees, Landcare. These are the places that we live, and nobody likes being threatened. Farmers care about their families and their land and their animals and their communities, and we contribute to a strong Australian economy. Agriculture is the backbone of the Australian economy, particularly exports. If we did not have the exports that we have out of agriculture, we would not have the strength of the economy that we have. Every time mining drops down, agriculture remains as the highest earning sector of the economy.

Really there is no need for trespass or for threats. There is market choice, which is much more effective. It is a lot cheaper for Government. And it is what people want. The egg industry has adapted to what the market wants, and it will continue to do so. That is the way it should be. It is not a matter of being threatened or feeling frightened.

And the last one is just to say thank you, and some pretty looking animals, a couple of cartoons which I think are rather good and an animal rights person throwing—I do not know if it is real blood or fake—blood into a butcher shop. So thank you very much.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. Look, you just mentioned the invasion, and in your submission you mentioned as well that the animal activist trespass was for media attention, not for the welfare of animals. What do you believe the law should be? Do you have any idea or have you suggested any—

Ms PARKINSON: Well, I did say that you need a review of that section of the Crimes Act and the Summary Offences Act. I do not feel I have the experience or the knowledge to tell the Attorney-General how to draw up these acts, but I—

The CHAIR: But you strongly support a review, correct?

Ms PARKINSON: They need to be reviewed so that they can be looked at properly by people with that knowledge that we do not have.

Mr GEPP: Thanks very much for your presentation. I have got a couple of questions, Chair. Meg, you talked about farm invasions for the last 25 years.

Ms PARKINSON: Yes, thereabouts.

Mr GEPP: Yes, about that. Can you give us a bit of a snapshot about how the industry practices have changed during that period of time? And why are some farms singled out, do you think, and not others?

Ms PARKINSON: Well, I know why Happy Hens was singled out, of course, according to Patty Mark anyway, who was doing it. She did not like the name.

Mr GEPP: Oh, okay.

Ms PARKINSON: That is what she told me.

Mr GEPP: Yes.

Ms PARKINSON: Well, she told somebody who told me.

Mr GEPP: But there has been many—

Ms PARKINSON: I should say that correctly.

Mr GEPP: You said that there have been many others over the last 25 years. I see the wealth of experience that you have got in the industry, so you would be familiar with any of the circumstances, or the instances, of those invasions. Do you have any sense about why certain places have been invaded and others have not?

Ms PARKINSON: I think it is easy if their places are easy to get to. None of them are very far out of the city, which has got to have something to do with it. These are city-based people, like the Hahnheusser thing down at Portland, which you will be aware of—when Ralph Hahnheusser put pork into the sheep that were going to the Middle East. That was a terrible thing to do. Those sheep had to end up being killed because they could not be exported. He probably thought that was a win, but it was not a win because people could not buy food at the price they could afford in these countries—so the people lost out, the animals lost out and he created a problem. It might have made him feel good, but it was not clever and he ended up being prosecuted in the court. It went all the way up through the system, and he ended up being prosecuted severely, as he should have been.

As for the egg industry, we have adapted to the market over the last 25 years or thereabouts. Well, actually, you can go back further: there was a Senate committee in 1988 which was where all this originally started. But you know, the market has changed so we sell product the market wants. Some of the data you see is scan data—supermarket data—so that is not actually completely correct because the supermarket data leaves out all the small corner shops and all of those sorts of things. The only way you can work it out legitimately is to work it out on the number of birds, not on the sales. Because sales do not include eggs that cannot be sold for one reason or another. So if you are working it out on the number of birds there is about 60 per cent of the industry that has cage birds—60 per cent of birds. About 30 per cent are free-range, and somewhere around 10 per cent are barn. It is not exactly those amounts. The barn is increasing because the supermarkets are pushing for the barn to be increased. Rather than sell cage they want to sell more barn, so the barn numbers are increasing. So those figures might be changing a little bit at the moment.

Mr GEPP: And out of free-range, cage and barn, which do you think is the best methodology for the birds?

Ms PARKINSON: For the birds probably cage, and that is based on the work of the Animal Welfare Science Centre. Taking off what we do personally, we do free-range because we prefer to do free-range. But when I look at the work of Professor Hemsworth, who is a very eminent professor of animal welfare—he recently had an AM and he recently had a very prestigious international award—and when you look at their work, basically they say that it depends on which issue you are talking about. If you are talking about disease, it is cages because they are not exposed to disease unless people bring it in, which is what happened with avian influenza. People brought it in on their shoes.

With the ability to move around, birds do not really care, because there are about three in a cage or maybe five in a big cage. It makes no difference. These pictures of birds putting their wings out and they cannot fit are not true because with the number of birds in the cage the cage gets bigger and bigger and bigger. So if you have got 20 birds in a cage, they will all be able to put their wings out. So it does not mean anything. It is the amount of space that the birds have per area. So some of these things are very misleading.

If you are talking about birds being able to not be attacked by other birds, it has to be cages. One of the problems you have in free-range is that birds are not that bright—they are only chooks when all is said and done—and they smother each other. And no matter how good you are and how hard you work and how much you try and help them, there will be at times, under particular circumstances, times when they will smother. But it is up to the individual and it is really up to how you do it within that system.

Mr MEDDICK: I just wanted to ask a couple of quick questions. You were talking about the terms of reference and the laws et cetera that were not part of that. Well, one of the terms of reference is around seeking, if there is a need, better improved welfare outcomes for animals, and clearly standards and guidelines relate directly to that, because we talk about the laws then that enforce that sort of thing.

Ms PARKINSON: So I am pleased I did it then.

Mr MEDDICK: I will get to my question, sorry, in a moment. The standards and guidelines, are they mandatory or are they voluntary, in your knowledge?

Ms PARKINSON: It depends what you are talking about, okay—

Mr MEDDICK: All of them.

Ms PARKINSON: Well, it depends what you are talking about. We do not have a standards and guidelines process at the moment for the poultry industry. But when we do, when it goes through Parliament, the standards will be regulated—that is, compulsory, mandated, regulated. The guidelines are advisory.

Mr MEDDICK: I just wanted to say, because you talked about POCTA as well, are you aware, because I have it in front of me here, that where an industry is involved in animal agriculture—and it talks about where there are guidelines and codes of conduct—they are exempt from POCTA?

Ms PARKINSON: No. Codes of conduct are not about agriculture. Codes of conduct are about research.

Mr MEDDICK: Codes of practice, sorry.

Ms PARKINSON: Codes of practice, yes.

Mr MEDDICK: Where an industry uses codes of practice or guidelines they are exempt from the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act if they are involved in animal agriculture. I am happy to hand it to you; I have got it here.

Ms PARKINSON: No, that is about the Livestock Management Act, and that at the moment basically applies to pigs. They have got a QA program, and it applies to livestock standards, transport standards. They are the only two codes which come under that process.

Mr MEDDICK: In regard to caged hens—this just sprang to mind; you were talking about them before—you think that caged hens are clearly happier and healthier.

Ms PARKINSON: I did not say that.

Mr MEDDICK: Well, I am asking you that question. You think that the best outcome for the animals, which was the question before, is for them—

Ms PARKINSON: What I said was: looking at the research work, that is the opinion—that the animals do not have as many seizures, which they do not. There is any amount of evidence to show that, and—

Mr MEDDICK: What size is a cage, by the way?

Ms PARKINSON: Depends on how many birds you have got in it. Some of them are very big. Some of them only have one bird, and they are smaller.

Ms BATH: Thank you, Meg. Just a couple of points that I wanted to pick up, and forgive me for doing this, but in your contribution just then you talked about low-quality protein for low-income earners. I think what you were referring to—

Ms PARKINSON: I meant high-quality.

Ms BATH: was high-quality for low-income earners.

Ms PARKINSON: Yes, I did. My apologies for that.

Ms BATH: It is just the fact that, you know, the product that you produce, eggs, is very high quality and often quite inexpensive, so families who are doing it tough know that they can go to the supermarket or the health food store and buy good-quality ingredients.

Ms PARKINSON: Thank you for that.

Ms BATH: That is the first one. Sorry for sounding pedantic. A couple of things that I would like to understand is, first of all, in your submission you talk about home and farm, so I will ask you: how far away is your home from your farm? I also want to ask you, and we have been asking this question today: have you had any direct experience with activists on your farm, on your premises? But also I would like to understand a little bit more about how you see activists operating. What is their modus operandi? What are some of the structures? I know that is about three questions in one, but see how you go.

Ms PARKINSON: Okay. Well, our shed is about 10 or 15 metres from the fence around our yard, which is about 10 metres from the house, so it is pretty close. We have no problem at all hearing if there is a problem in the shed or whatever. You can hear them. Direct experience with animal rights: I put in the submission that we had these two boys—and they were boys—wander down our drive. I was quite ill at the time. I had the latest go at whatever it is—not influenza but whatever it was, common cold. I went outside in my dressing-gown, and I asked them if I could help them. They said they thought they would come and get a couple of birds, which I found absolutely astounding and arrogant.

I had my two dogs with me, and they were obviously scared of the dogs, especially the female. She did not like them. She took one look at them and went ‘Grrr’. The male was standing in front of me just blocking them. They had climbed the fence to get in because the gate had been closed because I was going to bed. When we do these things we lock the gate so people do not turn up while we are not feeling well or whatever. Those people did not like it, so I told them to get off my farm and not come back. I got my phone out of my pocket—because everyone carries their phone everywhere—and turned it on, which they did not like. I just kept it on while they walked all the way down the track. I could see their car. The magnification on these phones is incredible, so I got their car on there as well. I did talk to the police about it. I thought it was disgusting that you cannot be on your own property without people trespassing. If I had not come out, there would have been a burglary. It is terrible. If I walked into your house, or your house, or your house, and did the same thing, you would not like it. And why should I?

Ms BATH: Are you on the Aussie Farms website?

Ms PARKINSON: I have not looked. I just assume these people do these things. I find it so arrogant what they are saying—so arrogant that he is making a decision about how people should do things that I just cannot be bothered. And sorry, the third one?

Ms BATH: It was in relation to some of the structures of the activist groups. They are not random, in my understanding; they are quite an organised situation.

Ms PARKINSON: The RSPCA has an Act under the Victorian Parliament, which I am sure you are all aware of, for what they can and cannot do and how they can and cannot do it. AA—Animals Australia—does not. It was formed after Peter Singer, who was at Melbourne Uni at the time, brought out his book *Animal Liberation*. Originally it was formed for both Australia and New Zealand. The overall organisation was Australia-New Zealand animal societies, and Animals Australia is the Australian one and SAFE-something New Zealand is the other one.

To the best of my knowledge—although they have a lot more money these days does Glenys with Animals Australia; she has a lot more money these days because she got money from various people, various organisations—it is the same basic thing. The members are predominantly Animal Liberation in each state, apart from Victoria because Patty does not think that they are aggressive enough and has says so publicly. But all the others are members, and some of those animal liberation organisations have changed their names over the years and there have been a number of other organisations join. Also the other side of them are organisations like the ones who are concerned about primates and horses and so on who use Animals Australia as a secretariat—who do not do all of the rest of the stuff very much but who use the secretariat.

Ms BATH: Meg, I am just struggling to put those in a column, we will say. Is there any way you could make some documentation and provide it to the secretariat?

Ms PARKINSON: Sure, yes.

Mrs McARTHUR: Meg, I have got a couple of points I wondered if you would comment on. First of all, do you think organisations that break the law should retain charitable status? Secondly, do you think there is needed any changes to the Crimes Act and the cruelty to animals Act? And finally, would you like to comment on international animal rights organisations and how they impact on activism in Australia?

Ms PARKINSON: Thank you, Mrs McArthur. Well, no—if they break the law, they should not. I understand that some come under Victorian law and some come under federal law, and obviously you can only do Victorian law. But you can certainly lobby for the federal stuff, which I think you should do. I did put in the submission some changes under POCTA and the Crimes Act. The POCTA is being reviewed at the moment. There is an organisation called Animal Welfare Victoria, which I am sure you are all aware of. It has been reviewing it for the last two or three years. It is still happening because it is a very complicated Act and a very complicated process. It has been there since 1986, and there have been a lot of changes over the years. It is a very difficult thing just to change or to rewrite it into another Act. I definitely think they should be reviewing this.

It should be equally an offence—it is cruel—for animals to be removed from places. For example, when they take out them out of cage establishments that have air conditioning and they take the birds out into the cold, they should not be doing that. In fact I recall a man from RSPCA Victoria got stuck in my head—quite a few years ago now—saying that when animal lib Victoria turned up with media in tow with some birds they had taken from Happy Hens, these birds had moulted. He told them that what they had done was wrong and those birds had suffered and they all had to be put down because of what they had done. That really did stick in my head in the days before I was doing—

Mrs McARTHUR: And their response?

Ms PARKINSON: They did not care.

Mrs McARTHUR: They did not care?

Ms PARKINSON: Well, they do not. It is a political stance. It is a philosophical stance. It is about the media. It is not about anything else. And they are allowed to have those views, but they are not allowed to enforce it on others.

Mrs McARTHUR: The international issue?

Ms PARKINSON: Well, the really terrible things on the international ones—the Earth Liberation Front in United States, which is now in Australia, unfortunately, is regarded by the FBI as a terrorist organisation, and Voiceless has brought over a guy called Will Potter, who has done this book about green and red, basically saying the Greens are the new communists. That is effectively what he says in his book, and that is a positive thing, as he regards it. But you can read it online; the book is online. He said that our people—our Animal Liberation people—should get in contact with these people and learn how to do it properly here. I was at that meeting in Melbourne University, and I was quite shocked, I have to say.

But the one that shocked me worse was in the US. There is a group called the Huntingdon medical research organisation in Huntingdon in the UK where the animal rights people so dislike what they are doing that they have been digging up bodies—the relations of people who work there—and leaving them in front of the research establishment, which I felt was abhorrent. And people who are in there, they have to put mirrors under their car to see whether there is bomb under it before they get in in the morning—terrible things. I would hope that our people at least do not do those things.

Ms TERPSTRA: Thanks, Meg, for your presentation. I just want to go back to a comment or a statement you made earlier where there was a question asked about whether you felt caging birds was better for the birds? Could you just expand on that a little bit? Which point of view are you talking about? Are you talking about from the health perspective of the bird or the welfare of the bird? Could you just elaborate on that a bit more, please?

Ms PARKINSON: Sure. Once again it depends on what you are saying. The health one is simply the agriculture department data is there—you can look it up on the website, it is all there. So it is not a matter of

opinion, it is just there. Being a parliamentary Committee you can get all this information from the department and they will give it to you; there is no problem.

Welfare tends to be a value judgement. I think our birds have a pretty good life, but then I am very biased. So if you are talking about welfare from a research situation, where they do the research, there are a number of different ways of looking at welfare on a research basis. There is the biological way—that is, they take bloods and so on and see where the cortisone levels are and things like that. And then there is the way of doing it where the birds choose. So they run them down Y mazes and they choose this or that or something else. Then there is one that is not really used anymore, where it is observation. It does not really get used anymore, so it is usually one of the other two.

One of the very frustrating things, especially when you are doing things like animal welfare codes, is there is not any really clear data. There is on some things but not on others. So you cannot do the whole thing. There is some very good research which has been done by Professor Hemsworth's group—not him himself but his group—at Melbourne University that actually breaks it down. So they refer to this bit and that bit and that bit and where there are clear examples of a benefit and where there are not. It is well worth a read. I can send the reference.

Ms TERPSTRA: But I was asking you because you made a statement about it. So I was asking your view about it, not to review the research but what is your view about—

Ms PARKINSON: Well, my view is about my birds. I would prefer the way we do it, but I do not blame that—

Ms TERPSTRA: Yes, which is caged.

Ms PARKINSON: No, we have free-range.

Ms TERPSTRA: You have free-range?

Ms PARKINSON: But I do not force that onto anybody else for any other reason. That is the way we do it. We do not say that everyone else should do it our way.

Ms TERPSTRA: If you can enlighten me a bit, there is a practice of debeaking in the industry. Do you endorse that practice, and do you use it with your birds?

Ms PARKINSON: Well, debeaking does not happen. What happens these days really is a beak trim, which is done at the hatchery. So when the birds are a day old, they get a vaccine against Newcastle disease, which is a legal requirement in all states; they get a vaccine which they have to have for another couple of diseases; and they have that much taken off the tip of their beak, just like that, about half a mil. At that stage they do not have any pain, any nerves, in that part of the beak—it is like cutting your fingernail—so they do not feel it.

Ms TERPSTRA: And do you know what the rate of injury or damage to a bird is as a result of debeaking in the sector?

Ms PARKINSON: No, I have no idea.

Ms TERPSTRA: You are not aware?

Mr QUILTY: Just briefly, you have called for an increase in penalties to an acceptable standard, particularly for stealing animals; also for trespass. What do you think would be an acceptable penalty to deter this behaviour, and are there issues with enforcing the law as it exists?

Ms PARKINSON: I do not know what would be appropriate. That is really up to the Attorney-General and the *Summary Offences Act*. I have no knowledge of that, so I do not know. But I am quite certain that when they look at it from the point of view of the problems they will come up with an appropriate thing. As for the enforcement, do you mean the judges or do you mean the police?

Mr QUILTY: Both.

Ms PARKINSON: I do not think there is any issue with the police at all. I think they do a pretty good job given the circumstances, especially some of the people they have to deal with. As for the judges, well, they need to understand the requirements and the expectation of the community, and it seems to me that some of them at least do not. That is not to say that a higher level magistrate may not notice. I understand that the courts do do training for judges on various issues. I know they had training a couple of years ago on the POCTA, on the cruelty provisions of the POCTA. So if they have this training, there is no reason why they could not have training on this as well.

Mr MEDDICK: Just very quickly—to borrow Mr Quilty’s catchphrase, I will be brief—I just wanted to say first of all that I am terribly sorry you were in a situation where you had a couple of people on your property and that you had to go and confront them. That is a terrible thing for anybody. But I just wanted to ask: is there any evidence that they were animal activists, or are these just two people who perhaps were just coming on like—I am hesitant to use the phrase—common burglary, for instance?

Ms PARKINSON: Well, they told me they were coming in to take birds. That is what they told me.

Mr MEDDICK: But coming in to take birds—someone entering a chicken farm is necessarily going to take birds.

Ms PARKINSON: No, I do not wear that one, Andy. No, I do not wear that one.

Mrs McARTHUR: Meg, you mentioned that these activists are not animal welfare experts. Can you just expand on that? Who are the animal welfare experts?

Ms PARKINSON: Well, the farmers are predominantly the ones who know about the animals that they do. On a broader scale you have got researchers and so on who are doing it for a particular purpose and trying to learn more. I have to say there is a great deal of research that needs doing, I really do think there is, but we deal with animals every day. We know what they do and how they react. Besides, if you did not like them, you would not be doing it. I mean, if you did not like chooks, it would drive you around the bend having thousands of chooks running around. We like our animals. We are fond of them and we look after them. We just do not have the idea that animals are people, because animals are not people and animals should not be treated like people; they should be treated and respected for the animals that they are.

Ms BATH: Meg, you mentioned, and I have done a tiny bit of reading, that you are on many ethics committees. I guess my assertion there is that you have dealt widely in circles. What is the mental health impacts or the mental stresses that you feel that could be associated with these invasions—that is, the Happy Hens or the other farms that have been invaded? What do you think the feeling is within your industry?

Ms PARKINSON: People feel stressed, they feel unhappy, they feel that they are being mistreated and disrespected. It is a rip-off. There are a lot of people in this world who are making judgements. They do not know anything, they do understand anything but they think they are experts and then they try and force their views onto other people. It is just like someone breaking into your farm. If I went to your place and I threw rubbish on the side of your house and forced a door open and walked in and picked something up and took it out, you would not be happy. It is the same thing; it is exactly the same thing. These are our homes. We have children; people have grandchildren. They get worried. It is just wrong to treat people as if they are—they do not get treated with respect. Therefore of course the idea that animals are more important than people is not so. Animals are really important—they are really important to us—but they are not more important than people, because in the end, if we do not look after the people, there will be no-one to look after the animals. It is really that simple.

Mr GEPP: Just one question, Meg. I am wondering: how do we get industry and our animal activists in the same room and have the appropriate dialogue? Is that a worthwhile objective? And if we were to be able to get them in the same room to commence having that dialogue about, you know, animal welfare, where would it take us, do you think?

Ms PARKINSON: Well, we already do it.

Mr GEPP: Well, it is not working.

Ms PARKINSON: Look, Glenys Oogjes, Hugh Wirth—I know he is now dead—and myself for about 20 years we were on the state ministerial council and the national ministerial council and, when that died, on AAWS, the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy. We are on the poultry code review, which is going on at the moment; we were on the previous one and the one before that. We do talk to each other, but there is a difference. Glenys Oogjes is just not breaking into farms, even though her members do, and—without wanting to create problems for her—she is prepared to sit down and negotiate, as everyone else is. So when that happens, you get a middle ground. But the problem is that that does not get you through to the people who do the things they should not be doing, because the people who are prepared to do this are not prepared to do that.

When I was on the state AWAC—when it was the ministerial council, not advisory as it is now—I chaired a thing called the production animals task group, Glenys chaired the wildlife and Hugh chaired the domestic animals, so we all had a little bit. I had this woman from one of the animal rights groups—it wasn't Animal Lib; I am sorry, it has escaped me which one it was—and she said, 'I think cattle farmers are cruel'. I said, 'Why?' and she said, 'Because they feed grain to their cows'. This threw me. I did not understand what she was saying so I asked her to explain. She said, 'Well, grain's not natural. They should be feeding grass'. So I explained to her. I said, 'Do you have a rye grass lawn around your house?', and she said, 'Yes'. I said, 'Well, if you let that grow and force some seed head, that seed head is rye; it is a grain. All grain is the seed head of grass'.

And that is what we are dealing with. We are dealing with people who know nothing and who cannot be bothered learning. It is not that they know nothing that upsets me. It is that they cannot be bothered learning—and that is a barrier. But at the next level up, yes, we do.

The CHAIR: On behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank you for making your time available and for your contribution. In a few weeks time you will receive a copy of the transcript for proofreading. Thank you very much.

Witness withdrew.