

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Impact of Animal Rights Activism on Victorian Agriculture

Warragul—Wednesday, 21 August 2019

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WITNESS

Mr John Gommans, Gippy Goat Farm.

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. I would like to welcome everyone in the gallery, especially the local Member for Narracan, Mr Gary Blackwood. Welcome. Before we start all the formalities and the hearing my colleague here, Mr Tim Quilty, would like to make a short statement.

Mr QUILTY: I would just withdraw the remark I made earlier. It may have caused offence to some people, so I withdraw.

The CHAIR: Thank you for that, Tim. Now we will move on. 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 might not be protected by this privilege. I advise you to make a short statement and then allow us some time to ask questions, but before we start if you could state your name for the Hansard record.

Mr GOMMANS: My name is John Gommans.

Visual presentation.

Mr GOMMANS: Mr Chairman, members of the panel, thank you for the opportunity to be heard today. I have paper copies of my presentation and a digital copy as well, and I also will have a copy of the text of my talk. My position is that we do not require operational oversight by moralist vigilantes and activists in order to ensure that best practices are kept on farm. My position is that I believe that farming of livestock is a natural and proper undertaking and that it is in no way morally conflicted. So my wife and I, we chose to stand up in public in the full recognition that we may become targets again as a consequence of giving evidence today.

My name is John Gommans. I have a bachelor of agricultural science degree in animal production and environmental science from Massey University and I have a postgraduate qualification from Monash University. Our farms are monitored by several regulatory authorities to make sure that we conform to animal, environmental and food safety standards. You can see on the first bullet point there that we are monitored by DPI, Dairy Food Safety Victoria, Agriculture Victoria, the EPA, the RSPCA and the local shire, which is Baw Baw. The standards that are applied to the livestock industry by these authorities are available to the public for scrutiny and input. These standards that these authorities operate under were developed in front of and with consultation with the public and appropriate qualified people. Those standards are regularly updated as expectations and farming technology changes. I believe that those regulatory bodies are sufficient to ensure that the standards are met and there is absolutely no requirement for an additional regulatory system based on civil disobedience by vigilantes.

This is what we have had to cope with since October of last year. My farms have been targeted by protesters on two occasions, and that means they have come in the daytime on two occasions and we believe there have been other occasions at night. Livestock have been stolen repeatedly, and there were four occasions of that. I was threatened by telephone directly with violence against myself and my family, my staff and their families, and the business. Our cafe staff were harassed on social media for months on end to the point that we closed the cafe. My customers were contacted en masse via social media and our business was slandered online. I was slandered online. Repeated complaints have been made against us to the authorities—and again they have that right—but each one of those investigations has been found to be without justification or without any form of non-compliance.

This was the first invasion or protest which was at our Caldermeade Farm, which is on the South Gippsland Highway just out of Lang Lang. So about 30 or 40 people turned up in October of 2018. Staff were upset by this and two of them subsequently resigned, one from the kitchen staff and one from the farm. Over the next three nights three kids and two calves were stolen from the petting zoo. We raised this issue on Facebook—I

am not a fan of Facebook, but being in the business, you have to be on Facebook. We posted on Facebook about the Caldermeade events, and we were contacted by a number of farmers. They were farmers of all sorts—everything from chickens to pigs to beef to cattle and bee farmers. We were contacted by people from the horse industry—just riders, people who had horses—saying that they also had been attacked. So we became aware of the problem at that point, and we invested \$20 000 in cameras on our own farms for the inevitable day.

This one here is a video taken by the activists themselves. The point that is being made by the activists on many occasions is that we were cruel to our livestock, and at court the same claim was made. They were so motivated by the mistreatment and the cruelty of what we were doing to our animals that that is why they actually stole them and took them away. This video, which we will play with sound—we have done transcripts underneath it for you—clearly shows they marched straight up to the property. Within 2½ minutes of actually walking into the property the animals from the petting zoo were loaded into a car and driven away.

Video shown.

Mr GOMMANS: So that was an organised, coordinated event, and I must give the activists credit for keeping everybody to one side so they did not run anybody over. If you could go to the next one, this is our security footage. Now, some of this is a repeat. If you could bring the arrow across to about half a minute, the purpose of this is to show the very short amount of time. From first appearing on screen to leaving with the animals was 2½ minutes.

So that first footage was from what the activists actually posted on their Facebook sites. You can see that people have shown up. The car is already there. This theft was not done because of some horror event, that these animals were mistreated. You can see the condition on those animals. They are beautiful. These were pets. People enjoyed them. One of the greatest pleasures we had at the Gippy Goat Cafe was we would get people with disability. They would come and they would interact with those animals many times a week. That was one of our greatest pleasures. But at 2 minutes 25 I believe the car has gone and they went off to the dairy.

The CHAIR: That was on the website?

Mr GOMMANS: I believe we posted that one on our Facebook. We did post the activists' Facebook as well, on the very first bit of media footage. It is 2 minutes 25, I think, that that action took. You can go to the next one. After that the activists went over to the dairy where milking was taking place. There was a goat in the yard with a sore foot, and that goat was subsequently named Angel. The point of this video is that that goat was taken from the yard and the activists again made many claims that we were not treating animals and that they would take the animals to the vet and get proper treatment and repair it. It is very clear footage that they say they are not taking it to the vet because they will get in trouble.

Video shown.

Mr GOMMANS: There are six of them to lift the goat. I reckon they need a bit more meat because they have not enough strength. That is a repeat of the earlier one. The last video, and I do not want to take too long on this, is the discussion between the police and the activists when the police arrived, which was about 20 minutes after the activists first arrived. The point to this video is that the activists had zero respect for the police—that is, complete and utter disregard for the law. They say on here that they will not be leaving in spite of the police giving instruction to leave.

Video shown.

Mr GOMMANS: My point there is that there was zero respect for the police, the law and the situation of the farmers.

There was an organised harassment campaign that followed that event, and the Gippy Goat's Facebook page was subjected to an online harassment strategy, with hundreds if not thousands of vilifying posts put on and messages sent to our customers and family members as well as harassing calls to the cafe. When we first put up the post about the first invasion we had over 600 000 people and over 600 000 engagements on our Facebook site within days, and by far the overwhelming majority of those people were supportive of the farm and the

situation we found ourselves in. Customers who had put on our Facebook page how they had enjoyed the day interacting with the animals and such were directly targeted by abusive messages, and this ultimately led to all the visitor posting being removed by the people. I know that for a fact because my own family members who had put messages up on Facebook also received the terrible messages that were given.

Ultimately, considering our experience and personally receiving abusive phone calls threatening ourselves, our family and our staff, and in conjunction with the reduction in patronage and the lack of judicial response that we subsequently encountered, we decided that we could not ask the cafe staff to work under those circumstances, and this led to the closure of the cafe.

Overhead shown.

Mr GOMMANS: This is my summary of the judicial response. At the—I do not know what the actual word is, I am sorry—court hearing we were guilty of animal abuse without a trial; that is how we felt. It is my recollection that at the sentencing the magistrate said, ‘No-one likes animal cruelty. Keep doing what you’re doing, but don’t get caught’. He then said, ‘I should have said, “don’t get in trouble with the police”’. I believe at a court case last week in Melbourne, with the last of the people charged in regard to the theft at Gippy Goat, the magistrate or judge, I am unsure, dismissed the case and said that it was trivial.

Rural people now know that trespass, theft and biosecurity breaches are trivial matters not worthy of the judiciary’s time and effort. Two thousand dollars worth of livestock was stolen from us, and it still remains in the activists’ hands. Compensation was set by the magistrate at \$250 with six months to pay—to date we have not seen anything—and the biosecurity breaches were assessed at \$1. So we were devastated by those results, and to us that was the grossest failure of justice. The impact on us and our staff is difficult to quantify, but I can tell you that it is quite severe. Imagine how hard it is to tell your staff after the court hearing that no-one gives a damn about them—that what we do, our farms, our business, are of no consequence at all.

The post on the left is of the three that were caught in Morwell. Such is their contempt for the system that it is ‘Screw you, Gippy Goat! No conviction’. And then of course that is the *Weekly Times* one.

We were told by the police that the court has little appetite to penalise young people, but these young people are learning that they can repeatedly break the law and get away with it. I believe that instant fines of a substantive nature might help these people understand that it costs to break the law without the disadvantage of having a criminal conviction, because I understand that issue. But people need to understand that if you break the law, you should pay.

Our staff refer to the event as an invasion. They describe feeling violated—and that is the word that they use—by the activists and are devastated by the theft of the animals they cared for. They also worry about where the goats are now, because there are plenty of Facebook posts where people steal goats and they effectively die under their care. Their views on social media have preyed on our minds and the minds of our family, our staff and their families and the wider community. There is this continual threat which is, I guess, implicit—we just believe that—of further attack, accusations and blatant lies, and this is tough on everybody.

We received a lot of support for our position. We received heartfelt letters mailed to us. We had plenty of conversations with people in the course of the normal day and private messages on Facebook, but overwhelmingly those people have asked to remain anonymous, such is their fear of an attack on them.

Animal rights groups have demanded that they take control of educating the Australian public about food production, with their media to be shown in schools and to Government, and their media is presented as information that the animal agriculture industry is purportedly trying to keep secret, but there is no secret to farming—you can drive along any road, and you can see any farm you like. It is also important to note that both livestock farming and vegan farming have an impact on nature, the environment and other species. So if any education program is found to be needed as a result of this Inquiry, it should be based on facts and science and not on political dogma. The activists in their utopian vision for society believe there should be no domesticated livestock, pets or service animals and no products derived from animals such as textiles, medicines, vaccines, paint, cash, glue—and the list is endless of items that we use every day that are animal products. To date there

has never been a society that is vegan. It is simply a fantasy. The activists would have us believe that we can live in some sort of nirvana where we farm our unicorns and the lions will eat carrots. It is just unreasonable.

Aussie Farms is a doxing site, and what doxing means—I will read the definition, so excuse me on this—is the practice of disseminating personally identifying information as a means of shutting down the opposition. It is an offensive tactic often used to inflict harm, harassment, shaming and vigilante justice. The Aussie Farms network demonstrates profound irresponsibility in their decision to publish identifying information directly adjacent to supposed abuse. So this is from Aussie Farms. This is the Gippy Goat Cafe and my name—it is not very clear in there—Johannes (John) Gommans, and my wife, Penelope Gandar. Adjacent to that, and part of the picture, are goats that have probably undergone some sort of autopsy procedure, and that is a gruesome look—I get that. But what Aussie Farms does is it conflates those two images and then implicitly suggests to vulnerable people that they can come onto our farms and attack us because of all that, and that tactic is well understood by Aussie Farms.

Now, activists maintain that they are not interested in people's homes. That is a common thread to their claim, but they have chosen to define a home as a house. That is far from correct. A home is where your heart is. It can be your house, your property, your town, your state or your country. So a farm is more than a place of work; it is where farmers and their families live. That is their home. So on this site there is a certain amount of abuse about Gippy Goat. The one on the left: 'Don't be fooled by the Gippy Goat'.

The owner John Gommans owns many other farms which are not open to the public and that is where the horrors take place.

And there is a little bit of other stuff. There is a picture of a dead goat and a glass of milk. 'Behind every glass of milk—the Gippy Goat.' That goat is probably the one that one of the activists had die and there is one that was in nappies in her bed. And in the one on the right there are three people celebrating their invasion of the cafe. Nothing about animal cruelty in most of that.

Now, you can see by the original video that the people are trained in their actions on what to do, and there is disruption training. This is a moral dogma that is being espoused here. It is not a spontaneous event.

I have some concerns about the sanctuary farms. I believe that they are undertaking, to some extent, deceitful fundraising, and I have a couple of images here I will take you through. They raise money from the vulnerable and the ignorant—that would be the way I would characterise it. Animals in care on these sanctuary farms are euthanised, neutered, castrated, vaccinated and housed, yet commercial farms, which do the same, are vilified. And sanctuary farms do not have DPI oversight. This sheep, this merino ewe, I can tell you as a farmer, is in severe distress. It has had its leg amputated and it has been put into a trolley. That, chairman, is barbarous cruelty, and if I did that on my farm and had animals coming up to my facilities running around in trollies, I would deserve to be prosecuted. And yet what disturbs me most about that is that there is a sector of society that think that is cute and they give money to that.

Now Angel, the goat that was stolen from the yard, the one with the sore foot, very soon after the theft—unfortunately her disease is fatal. There was the suggestion that the Gippy Goat, the farm, had CAE. That farm is clear of CAE. Every animal has tested clear. So they suggested that goat had CAE and that her disease was fatal, and there was a request for funds to look after her. That is a picture of the goat once it was returned to us, and we held it in quarantine because we quarantine our farm. If I looked that good on my deathbed, I would be quite happy.

Also, as part of fundraising, the sheep in the trolley was from the Strong Hearts Farm, which I believe is at Cranbourne—and this is from the same; I just went to one. That calf is presented as having been run over by a farmer. I have no idea why a farmer, as a first response to having run over an animal—that the first thing he would do would be to take it to a sanctuary farm. I do not believe that. But anyway, that calf was presented on their Facebook media as having a broken leg, and you can see on the X-ray that that leg is quite badly damaged. That calf was farmed for another two months or thereabouts while they raised \$6500 to have an orthopaedic surgeon repair that broken leg. Lo and behold, just prior to the surgeon doing that and being re-X-rayed they discovered that the wound had healed. And that \$6500—at the bottom there is a post there:

I wouldn't cancel the fundraiser. Keep the \$\$ to help with the rest of her treatment and all the other work you do. People wouldn't have donated if they didn't want you to have the \$\$\$

There are two issues with this. One is the fundraising is deceitful. Nobody in their right mind would farm an animal for two months with a broken leg because, again, that is barbarous cruelty.

On biosecurity, that same farm—and I did not put it up there, I am sorry; I should have done so—had a cow that was diagnosed with Johne's disease. They kept that cow on their farm—bear in mind this farm gets animals in, farms them and then moves them on to the larger community—with Johne's disease for six months before the thing finally died. Every animal that now passes through that farm and to everybody else is potentially contaminated with Johne's disease, and that is a notifiable breach of biosecurity. On biosecurity, those laws are there for good reason. In 2019 our farms spent—across the goat farms—\$115 000 on animal health costs, and the majority of that was on vaccinations, prevention and blood testing for disease. So we have an elimination strategy for disease. In 2011 we had a disease outbreak on one of our goat farms and the vet bill went to \$400 000 for that year. We cannot establish how that disease got onto the farm, but it was interesting to note that as part of this Gippy Goat invasion there was a media post of our kid-rearing facilities, and that was taken around that time. Now, I cannot say that that disease was brought in by that person, but—

Ms BATH: That is a separate place, John?

Mr GOMMANS: That was at the Trafalgar farm. The two events happened at a very similar time. It took us three years to eliminate that disease. Disease control is a key part of animal husbandry, and it is done to protect the welfare of the animals and humans and the security of our nation's food. So my recommendations to the Committee are that, because the courts appear reluctant to provide punishment, we should have on-the-spot substantive fines for trespass and breach of biosecurity. Activists are confident in their ability to ignore the police when it suits them. Drawing you to the New South Wales example, you can have an on-the-spot fine of \$1000, \$220 000 if you are an organiser, or \$440 000 if you are a corporation. A similar process in Victoria would be helpful. I also would like to see minimum fines of 50 per cent of the maximum total levied. It was disappointing to have people who pleaded guilty get off scot-free or pay \$1. I would like to see the stopping of discharging without conviction, though I realise that is a bigger issue. And lastly, I believe that in other states and federally protections for farmers have been bolstered, and I believe that the Victorian Government has now fallen substantially behind in their legislation. I believe it would behove Victoria to keep up. Thank you for hearing me.

The CHAIR: John, thank you for your presentation. I am sure you have answered some questions without us asking you. I just remind my colleagues that we are running a bit late.

Ms BATH: Thank you, John. I would just like to personally say thank you to you and Penny and your manager and your staff. In January we first came out there to understand this issue; we saw it on Facebook and contacted you and went out to your farm. I understand that really in one way you have all become unwilling participants in this huge story about the effect of activism and on-farm trespass in your family, in your farms and in your life. I thank you for actually being the whistleblower in terms of farming communities and what is going on and the depth of damage that it can do, not just to your family but to the wider employees and community. There has been an outpouring of sympathy for you. I think it is an indictment of society if we do not push back and if there are not changes to laws in our country, in our Victorian state, to protect you in the future.

I would like to just understand a little bit more about what happened in the magistrates court that you sat in on, because I think it has relevance to our terms of reference and to the public understanding what you saw and felt.

Mr GOMMANS: The police and Agriculture Victoria had charges that they wished to lay against the people that were in court on that day, and they basically pleaded guilty immediately. That prevented, in my opinion, the magistrate from being fully aware of the charges that were laid or the context of the charges that were laid. That magistrate then spoke only with the three activists that were there, and the activists proceeded to tell how they were so appalled by the brutality and the mistreatment of our animals—and bear in mind we were a completely open farm; you could see every animal twice a day—that that is why they took the animals from us. In my opinion the magistrate made no effort to establish the truth of the matter, and it was clear to me that the activists had been schooled on what they should say. They had been advised—and this is part of the strategy—on how to act with the magistrate.

That magistrate, like I said, then said, ‘Nobody likes animal cruelty,’ as though we had been cruel to our stock. So we were guilty straightaway. ‘Nobody likes cruelty. Keep doing what you’re doing’. And we felt terrible about that. My farm manager was there and we felt as though we were guilty. We had not done anything wrong. We were not on trial. They had come to our farm, stolen our animals and all of a sudden, simply because we are farmers, we were guilty. We felt terrible. We felt this was a real miscarriage of justice.

Ms BATH: And one final question: what would you like to see evolve from this? This has happened, we cannot go back. What would you like to see in response in relation to the magistrate system, the court system?

Mr GOMMANS: It is a difficult question for me to answer. I believe that on-the-spot fines would prevent that situation from arising. It would be a penalty for the people who have committed, if you like, the offence in the first place. They would not go to court. I cannot help it that the judges do not think that rural lives matter or rural events matter. I cannot change that. But they are clearly selecting, in my view, the magistrate that they want—one who has sympathies—and getting away scot-free to simply go and do the same thing again, over and over again. At least a fine will have some chance of creating an impact.

Mrs McARTHUR: Thank you, John, for being so frank and for being so public about this appalling issue that you have had to deal with. I cannot believe that anybody on this panel or in this audience could possibly condone what happened to you and what happened to your animals. I just cannot accept that.

I also would like to go to several of the points that you have made about the differentiation that is made, it appears, in the law between a home in the city if somebody invades it, or a business or workplace in the city, compared to what happens in rural and regional situations, so that the invasion that you had to endure of your home, which is your farm also, seems to be different from what would occur in an urban situation.

You mentioned all of the monitoring bodies that you have to comply with. I mean, it begs the question: are there too many? Because clearly there is so much monitoring of what happens on farms and in production facilities that you cannot imagine why there is need for any more. But if we are going to have a national approach to guidelines for animal welfare, as we discussed earlier, perhaps we should have a national approach to the law as to how we deal with farm invasion of this type.

I am also wondering if you might like to comment on whether the Aussie Farms site should be closed down. Should these sorts of operations have charitable status? Is it okay for people to have the right to invade, steal and threaten? It is appalling to think that your stock has not been returned and that you were also not properly compensated.

I wonder also, as an animal producer, what level of stress do you think those animals endured as people bundled them into a car and then—we subsequently learned—put nappies on them and put them in beds? How do animals respond to that sort of activity?

It is also appalling to hear that this case was in any way described as trivial. That is totally unacceptable, and I cannot believe that in any other situation such an offence could be described as trivial. It is extraordinarily sad to think that your business has been closed down, your staff are out of work and the public do not have access to your facility.

Mr GOMMANS: Should Aussie Farms close? Without a doubt. You would not see a similar site identifying religious groups. You would not see a similar site identifying policemen. You would not see a similar site for any other purpose. It clearly is a doxxing site designed to inflame and get people who are vulnerable to those images to take action. As to national standards—yes, I agree there should be national standards. I think there are constant changes in the way we produce food—particularly so with animals as people become more and more aware of animal welfare, and I have seen that in my farming career, so yes, there should be standards, and farmers should keep up with those standards. For example, when I started farming nobody would have thought to give animals pain relief for some reason. Now any animal that has any condition—and I mean any condition—receives treatment, receives pain relief, as we do with people. In terms of stress on stock, bundling them into the back of a car—I am pretty sure that was stressful to them, yes. It is not normal. All animal transport is stressful and has to be done that way. In fact in the video it was not clear, but they clearly had banged one of those goats on the head as they were trying to shut the door.

Ms TERPSTRA: Thanks, John, for coming in and giving your evidence to the Inquiry today; I appreciate it. Just a question on the court case that you were describing, and perhaps if you could just shed a bit more light on some of those events that happened. As you said, the activists pleaded guilty to the offences. Were both parties legally represented at the hearing, and did you get an opportunity, or through your legal representative if you had one, to put your version of events, or did that not occur? Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

Mr GOMMANS: I must admit we were not familiar with the court process. We try not to go there.

Ms TERPSTRA: Yes, sure.

Mr GOMMANS: It was our understanding that the case was being prosecuted by the police in conjunction with Ag Victoria. They had some biosecurity breaches that they wished to prosecute as well. It was my understanding that the police and Ag Vic were going to do that. So we did not have a lawyer at all. We did not understand—we did not know—

Ms TERPSTRA: You did not think it was necessary.

Mr GOMMANS: No, we did not think it was necessary. The evidence was so clear on all the footage of both the activists and everything, of what happened, and we honestly believed that justice would be served. We did not get a chance to speak. We were not asked if we would be willing to make a statement.

Ms TERPSTRA: Have something to say—yes, okay.

Mr GOMMANS: Yes. So we just got to sit there like stunned mullets really and take what was dished out. In retrospect I would probably have stood up and taken a chance, but that was the first time.

Ms TERPSTRA: But because it was being brought by authorities, there was—

Mr GOMMANS: Yes.

Ms TERPSTRA: Yes, okay. Thank you.

Mr BARTON: G'day, John. In my view you have been let down badly. Just a couple of things. At the Magistrates Court, was there an order for the return of the animals?

Mr GOMMANS: No.

Mr BARTON: So there was no order to return the property that you owned?

Mr GOMMANS: Correct.

Mr BARTON: Okay. In terms of the fines, the toughening up of the regulations around the country and your view that we are slipping behind here, is it too early to tell whether these are having an impact in those other states and territories where these things are happening?

Mr GOMMANS: I guess because the laws are new it would be hard to tell if anything has happened.

Mr BARTON: Yes, yes.

Mr GOMMANS: And most of the activists are young people. I do not want to see them in jail or have a criminal conviction, to be honest. I would have thought \$1000 would matter and you would get them paying attention to that.

Mr BARTON: Think a bit more, yes.

Mr GOMMANS: Just to go back, you asked if there was an order for the animals to be returned. The magistrate almost scoffed at the idea that those four animals were worth \$2000, and he said, 'How did you get that number?' to the police prosecutor. He was unable to answer that question well, and the magistrate said, 'Oh, no, \$250', as though our farm stock is worth nothing. He then asked Cara Garrett, as it was, whether she

could pay the \$250 as compensation—for some reason that was enough. She said, ‘I could do that over three months, because I don’t have a full-time job’ yada, yada. And the magistrate said, ‘Take six’.

Mr BARTON: How very generous of him.

Ms BATH: Have you been paid, John?

Mr GOMMANS: No.

Mr GEPP: Thanks, John. Thanks for your testimony today and obviously reliving what was a difficult period in your life and your family’s, so thank you. I wonder whether you have sat back now. You talked about you closed the cafe, so I am wondering, from an economic perspective, whether you have done any calculations on the monetary impact on you and—how many workers?

Mr GOMMANS: There were eight staff at the Gippy Goat.

Mr GEPP: Were they all full time or were they part time?

Mr GOMMANS: No, half of them were full time, or basically full time.

Mr GEPP: Right.

Mr GOMMANS: The Gippy Goat had a turnover of in the order of \$800 000 a year. To be fair, nobody gets rich on a farm cafe, but for us the cafe was a very important part of our business strategy. We actually started it as a marketing tool and to demonstrate goat farming to other farmers. And that was still a very valid use for the farm, but the amount of harassment and vilification on social media meant that that strategy, if you like, or that value was removed. It became a significant business risk in my view. As well, the reduction in patronage greatly reduced the cash flow.

Mr GEPP: Did you source product from around the area?

Mr GOMMANS: Yes.

Mr MEDDICK: Thank you, Mr Gommans. I will address a couple of things that we are talking about. Core to what is being discussed here, and one of the terms of reference, is animal welfare or the inference of animal cruelty. So I will address that first and then I would like to speak more directly about the Aussie Farms. But I just want to quote here, first of all, from a statement from a former worker of yours:

Probably the biggest atrocity there is what happened to the male kids. Every day after the newborn kids were collected, the doe kids were put into pens to be raised—

this is part of your business—

the males were put in a pen by the entrance to await the herdsman. Often hundreds of buck kids every day during kidding season—they were bludgeoned to death with a hammer to the head. It would often take the herdsman an hour or more to finish killing them. They were thrown into the tractor scoop and taken to the dead pit out the back of the barns. They were often still alive with their skulls crushed in, their eyeballs would pop out, and they were still thrown on the pile to suffer and die slowly. This was a daily occurrence for at least a decade, and I believe probably still is.

Is that a common practice in the industry? Is that part of guidelines? Is that acceptable practice under the guidelines and codes of practice?

Mr GOMMANS: It is not what we do.

Mr MEDDICK: They have a worker that is saying that you do.

Mr GOMMANS: There is a worker—I saw that Facebook post, right? Nobody calls it a tractor scoop. I believe that email is likely to be constructed, so I have no knowledge of that, and that is not what we do.

Mrs McARTHUR: So, just to be clear, Mr Gommans, are you saying that is a false accusation?

Mr GOMMANS: Yes. The detail of that is false.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Mrs McARTHUR: Thank you.

Mr MEDDICK: And the other, the one about the Aussie Farms. What do you think should happen to people who publish a map like that online? What do you think? Should there be some sort of punishment or retribution for people who publish that sort of map?

Mr GOMMANS: Take it down.

Mr MEDDICK: Take it down? So you would believe then that the Federal Government should take down their site?

Mr GOMMANS: I believe that—

Mr MEDDICK: The Federal Government site, I am talking about. Because I had a look online last night and I have a map here that is actually produced by the Department of the Environment and Energy, and that actually does exactly the same thing. It shows every single agricultural site in Australia, the type of farm that it is. But it not only does that but it also lists its address, the people who own the farm and their contact details. So do you believe the Federal Government should do the same thing and that they should face retribution for what they have done?

Ms BATH: Mr Meddick, does it actually also say, 'Go onto that farm. Take footage of animal cruelty'. Is that what that site does?

Mr MEDDICK: The Aussie Farms website does not say that either. It actually explicitly says not to do so.

The CHAIR: Okay, okay. John, any answer?

Mr GOMMANS: I feel slightly bullied by that question—

The CHAIR: You do not have to answer it.

Mr GOMMANS: And I cannot answer what the Federal Government does, so I would need to consider an answer to that question.

The CHAIR: Members, thank you very much. On behalf of the Committee, John, I would like to thank you for your time and contribution. In a few weeks time you will receive a copy of the transcript for your proofreading. At the same time I would like to thank the media, I would like to thank everyone in the gallery. I would like to thank Mr Blackwood for his attendance. Thank you very much.

Witness withdrew.