

# **LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE**

## **Inquiry into the impact of animal rights activism on Victorian agriculture**

Melbourne—Wednesday, 4 September 2019

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**WITNESS**

Ms Abby Zonino.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome to the public hearings of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee. All evidence stated 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 allow us some time to ask questions. Welcome.

**Ms ZONINO:** I would just like to rectify first of all that my last name was wrong. My last name is Abby Zonino. I know it says Abby Awad there, but it is Zonino.

**The CHAIR:** So that is wrong?

**Ms ZONINO:** That is wrong, yes.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. We will correct it after you leave.

**Ms ZONINO:** I am just letting you know.

**The CHAIR:** Sorry for that.

**Ms ZONINO:** No, that is all right. My name is Abby, and I am a university student and activist for several causes, including animal liberation. I extremely honoured to be here today to represent a cause that is very close to my heart. I have always been a true believer in the goodness of the human heart, that might does not equal right and that we all inherently want to do some kind of good in the world whilst we have the chance. It is part of the human experience to want to leave some kind of impact on the world and to feel like one did something worthwhile with their life. However, in more recent times it has become apparent to me that goodness has been overshadowed by greed and power—the need to dominate others to continuously feel superior and to destroy all individuals which we deem as inferior—and that some lives simply matter more than others, which therefore allows us to feel entitled to take something that was never ours to begin with, the life of someone else.

Whistleblowers are crucial in every single industry. They challenge ideologies that have been ingrained into us our entire lives and seek the truth that has been so conveniently hidden from the public. They create change and allow us to move forward as a society and create a better world. Thus far animal liberation activists who have broken laws and trespassed for the sake of transparency have uncovered the slaughter of week-old calves in the dairy industry, the maceration and gassing of day-old chicks in the egg industry and, more recently, the destruction of day-old male goats in the goat dairy industry and the way in which dead and dying goats are disposed of. All of these standard practices have been deemed as humane by the Government.

If I may, I would like to include the definition of ‘humane’ in my evidence. ‘Humane’ is defined as showing compassion or benevolence. Synonyms include ‘compassionate’, ‘kind’, ‘kind-hearted’, ‘considerate’ and ‘sympathetic’. There is no compassionate, kind, kind-hearted, considerate or sympathetic way to kill someone who does not want to die. Humane slaughter is simply an oxymoron, and the word humane should never be associated with something so sinister as taking someone else’s life. I reject any and all ideas that there is a right way to do the wrong thing. It is also worth noting that if these horrendous acts were occurring to domesticated animals such as cats and dogs, we would not be having this discussion. Since we value the lives of domesticated companion animals far more than we value the lives of animals we breed for human consumption, we can therefore justify the way in which we treat them. It is unfair to have jail time for those who abuse domesticated animals yet absolutely no consequence for those who abuse animals in the name of profit.

I would now like to discuss the Gippy Goat action and the reason behind the liberation of Angel and others. Before I begin I would like to make it clear that activists did not attend the Gippy Goat farm to liberate animals. Our main goal was to create transparency around the goat dairy industry and exhibit to the public the state in which the goats were in and the way in which they are commodified. I would like to start with the reasoning

behind the liberation of the kids and lamb. The Gippy Goat Cafe has perpetuated the idea that the kids who are taken from their mothers are simply kept as part of a petting zoo. However, this is the furthest thing from the truth. The dairy industry is inherently cruel to those already being exploited for those their reproductive systems and bodily fluids and to their young. In this case, it is the male kids of the goat dairy industry. Since males cannot produce milk they hold no economic value to the industry, which therefore makes them a waste of resource. If they cannot make money from them, then their life holds no value. They are separated from their mothers directly after birth and are killed within 24 hours of being born. According to Animal Health Australia and the Goat Industry Council of Australia, humane methods of killing include blunt-force trauma to the forehead or using a firearm, captive bolt or lethal injection. It is to prevent such atrocities occurring to innocent individuals that we intervened and liberated them from a horrible future.

In the case of female kids, they are also separated from their mothers after birth; however, their fate is different. They will be used to replenish the herd once their mothers have produced their maximum amount of milk and then sent to slaughter. The female kids will produce milk for human consumption for a period of up to 10 years and will then have the same fate as their mothers. As we approached the herd, the goats were hooked onto the milking machine by their udders, whilst others were roaming around. Surrounded by their own faeces, we quickly noticed how many goats had abscesses and open sores on their faces, goats who were walking on their knees and unable to stand up and goats whose udders were almost dragging on the ground. We then spotted a goat who was down on the ground making constant bleating noises, which indicated that she was clearly experiencing severe pain. Every time she tried to stand up she would struggle to walk even two steps and proceed to once again go down onto her knees. Activists present made several attempts to reach out to the vet on site in order for him to help Angel receive adequate vet care, and each time they were shut down.

After many unsuccessful attempts to get someone to help Angel, as any citizen who would be concerned about the wellbeing of someone else would do, activists decided to liberate Angel in order to get urgent vet care for her. The intentions behind the liberation of Angel were anything but sinister. An individual who was clearly suffering from unknown health complications and who could have possibly died had she not received vet care deserved to be liberated from such vile conditions. It was a morally right thing to do, and given the chance, where the circumstances are the same and no-one is willing to help, I believe that I speak for most activists when I say that we would do it again. Angel's location is unknown, but I believe that, wherever she is, I take comfort in the fact that she will never again be subject to industrialised violence. She is now living the life that every individual is entitled to—a life free from harm and exploitation.

The public are entitled to understand the practices involved with the way in which they clothe themselves, feed themselves and their general way of life. It is for the greater good of everyone, if we are truly as honourable as we say we are as a country, to include CCTV in all abattoirs; to include the slaughter of animals in the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986*, as clause 6 states:

This act does not apply to—

the slaughter of animals in accordance with the **Meat Industry Act 1993** ...

to introduce an act which stipulates that animals who are farmed for human consumption are indeed sentient beings; and to create tighter laws around those who harm animals, not those who work to eradicate all harm to animals.

Animal liberation activists do not carry an unspoken vendetta towards farmers and trespass on their properties with the intentions to hurt them or their families, as it has been so conveniently painted. They do not want to rob them of their livelihoods; they want them to create a livelihood that does not involve breeding animals into the world for the sole purpose of killing them.

My motivations for activism are simple: since I deem all life to be of great value, I find it within myself to seek justice so long as injustice exists. In this case the injustice occurring to non-human animals is on a scale that is so large that it becomes insignificant because of how widespread and normalised it is. Animals are not property, objects or means for a profit; they are living, sentient beings who want to experience joy and have the ability to live their lives free from dominion and exploitation. They create lifelong bonds with their friends and family members and are far emotionally superior to human animals. They see the world for all its beauty, even if they are only able to live one-quarter of their lives before they are taken from the world—

**The CHAIR:** Take your time.

**Ms ZONINO:** The fight for life, the want for freedom, the fear in their eyes are all evident.

**The CHAIR:** Are you okay, Abby?

**Ms ZONINO:** Yes; I am fine—sorry.

We have taken everything away from them—their individuality, their right to live and their freedom. In the eyes of non-human animals, we are the devil. We rip the very skin that once kept them warm off their backs and reduce them to nothing but commodities. We have demonised those who commit such vile acts to the human species but have normalised it when it occurs to those who are unlike us.

This is the truth. The truth will always remain the truth so long as we are alive. That is one thing that will never disappear, and neither will we. I cannot speak for others, but I speak for myself when I say that, despite any outcome that may occur, I will never stop seeking and speaking the truth. So long as it is acceptable to commit unspeakable acts of violence to non-human animals, my voice will not shake nor soften. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Have a deep breath before we start.

**Ms ZONINO:** Sorry.

**The CHAIR:** Have a deep breath; relax. Are you okay?

**Ms ZONINO:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Good.

**Mr FINN:** I only have one question. I was interested—throughout your address to us today you constantly referred to animals or an animal as ‘someone’. What is your view of the moral equivalence of animals and humans? Is there no difference? Morally, is there no difference between animals and humans?

**Ms ZONINO:** Morally, I do not think there is a difference in our ability to want to live our lives free from harm. I think there is no difference.

**Mr MEDDICK:** Likewise I just have the one question. We are in a very unique situation here through this inquiry process and indeed as members of Parliament. What would we need to do to ensure that you did not have to partake in this kind of activism again?

**Ms ZONINO:** I think if activists like myself and others were adamant that there was equal representation of animals in the law, then we would not feel the need to prove to people why they deserve this sort of equality.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Thank you, Abby. I am just curious to know what other causes you might be involved in.

**Ms ZONINO:** I do do some refugee activism sometimes and also mostly other human rights activism.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Sorry?

**Ms ZONINO:** Human rights.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Human rights activism; okay—that is great.

**Ms ZONINO:** I see that both of them are interrelated, that if we can do these things to our own species, then of course we can do it to other species.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Also, do you see all animals as sentient beings?

**Ms ZONINO:** Yes, I do.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** So that would include the insects and animals that would be exterminated in the production of cotton, for example—

**Ms ZONINO:** Yes.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** and plant-based products?

**Ms ZONINO:** For the argument about the mice, as it was a very highly anticipated question, I think there is no actual evidence or citations in that sort of argument, and for the argument against using more plants, killing animals for the consumption of plants, it takes more plants to feed animals which we consume than it does for us to actually eat the plants ourselves, and it is a longer process.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** We can all question statistics.

**Mr QUILTY:** You were telling us about the Gippy Goat raid. The Committee watched security camera footage of that. It appears that, pretty much, you rolled straight in, you grabbed the animals, loaded them in cars and were off again. There did not seem to be a whole lot of time to be investigating the condition of the animals and so on, as you described.

**Ms ZONINO:** In the beginning when we did take the kids and the lamb, as I stated, there was nothing wrong with their condition. We saw it as liberation to stop something further happening to them because, as you know, the kids, especially the male kids, in the industry are killed right after they are born. So it was not that there was something wrong with the kids, it was when we inspected the condition of the mother goats. That is where I described the conditions.

**Mr QUILTY:** So there was clearly intent to grab the kids?

**Ms ZONINO:** Yes. Before we actually went to the Gippy Goat there was no discussion of liberating any kids because we were not aware that there was the shed with a petting farm, but when we did see that we did take the opportunity to liberate those animals.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** What is the difference between liberation and theft?

**Ms ZONINO:** We do not see animals as objects, so you can steal a car but you cannot steal a person. You can liberate someone from harm, but stealing only applies if you see someone as property or an object.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Okay.

**The CHAIR:** Is there anything you would like to tell us before I close the meeting, because under your circumstances in this situation I will allow you to.

**Ms ZONINO:** Not really, I am good.

**The CHAIR:** You have covered everything? I am happy with that. Just because of the stress you were under, sometimes you forget.

**Ms ZONINO:** No, that is fine.

**The CHAIR:** All right. In a few weeks you will receive a copy of the transcript for your proofreading. On behalf of the Committee, I would like to thank you for your time and contribution.

That is the end of the day, and I would like to thank everyone in the gallery. Thank you very much for your patience and for being here all day, and staff and members, thank you very much.

**Committee adjourned.**