

Parliamentary Inquiry into the Impact of Animal Rights Activism on Victorian Agriculture

Additional questions to Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions – 23 September Hearing

1. How many Agriculture Victoria staff are located in country areas of Victoria compared to Melbourne?

Agriculture Victoria currently employs around 1150 staff across a wide breadth of functions. These functions include things like agricultural research, supporting industry to increase productivity, developing and implementing policy relating to Agriculture Victoria's responsibilities, responding to and assisting agricultural recovery after emergencies, and administering agricultural and animal welfare legislation. Agriculture Victoria staff are strategically located across the state in order to deliver these functions, with approximately 90 per cent of staff based outside Melbourne's CBD.

2. In relation to your organisation's submission: on page 6 it was noted that in 2018 there were two prosecutions out of 500 regulatory outcomes, with a combined total of around \$22,000. What breaches were involved in those matters?

The specific breaches associated with the two prosecution matters in 2018 were:

- Multiple charges relating to failure to provide proper and sufficient feed (s. 9(1)f of the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986*) (the Act) and aggravated cruelty by way of death or serious disablement (s. 10(1) of the Act), specifically associated with a large number of cattle suffering from malnutrition
- Charges relating to failure to provide veterinary or other appropriate attention or treatment (s. 9(1)l of the Act), does or omits to an act with the result that unreasonable pain or suffering is caused (s. 9(1)c of the Act), and aggravated cruelty by way of death or serious disablement, specifically associated with a cow suffering from a malignant tumour of the eye

The two prosecutions resulted in 35 charges being proven, with one conviction.

The matter involving the conviction also involved the issuing of a conditional order and a one-year community corrections order and a requirement to perform 100 hours of community service.

The conditional order required that a registered veterinarian must attend the property every quarter to inspect and assess livestock and provide a report to the department for a period of five years.

Agriculture Victoria adopts a risk-based approach to monitoring and enforcing animal welfare compliance. Compliance outcomes range from the provision of information and educational measures, such as advisory letters and extension material, through to the issuing and follow up inspections associated with formal Notices to Comply, the issuing of warning letters and prosecution, depending on the nature and circumstances of the individual matter.

In 2018, Agriculture Victoria responded to 1485 animal welfare alerts, of which 590 alerts were substantiated (meaning that follow up action of some kind was required). Of these 590 alerts, 496 regulatory outcomes were applied, including the issuing of regulatory letters and the issuing of 182 Notices to Comply under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986*.

In the preceding year (2017), 17 matters proceeded to court, with a total of 195 charges proven. \$192,700 in fines were awarded, with 14 convictions recorded, 6 banning orders for up to two years, and 4 conditional orders.

To date in 2019, five matters have proceeded to court, with a total of 17 charges proven, with four convictions and \$27,500 in fines. A further 11 matters have had charges set and are currently awaiting court hearings.

3. What is the net value to the Victorian economy in terms of dairy, beef, wool, sheep, poultry, eggs?

The food and fibre sector is an important economic driver for Victoria. It contributes an estimated 4.8 per cent to Victoria's Gross State Product (GSP) and employs 5.3 per cent of the workforce.

The total value of agriculture production increased by 6.4 per cent to \$14.9 billion in 2017-18, compared to \$14.0 billion in 2016-17.

Victoria's share of national agriculture production increased by 2 per cent from 23 per cent in 2016-17 to 25 per cent in 2017-18.

Broadacre livestock industries performed strongly, with an overall increase in value of 22 per cent to \$5.3 billion in 2017-18, with increases to wool (63 per cent), sheep and lamb (15 per cent), and cattle (11 per cent) values.

Dairy industry value rose by 20 per cent to \$2.6 billion, reflecting improved opening prices per kilogram of milk solids and strong domestic competition for milk.

The agriculture sector generates over 207,000 jobs such as pickers, packers, transport and logistics export companies. In Victoria, 87 per cent of agricultural employment is concentrated in regional areas.

4. How does a member of the public report an animal in distress?

Individuals and groups with a concern about the welfare of livestock or other animals can:

- Contact Animal Health Officers at Agriculture Victoria's regional offices across the state
- Call the DJPR customer service centre on 136 186
- Email aw.complaint@ecodev.vic.gov.au
- Contact RSPCA Victoria, local governments or Victoria Police
- DJPR also has an after-hours service for emergency disease and animal welfare matters.
- People can call the DJPR customer service centre 136 186 after hours.

A duty officer will triage complaints and, if a complaint is deemed to be an animal welfare emergency, officers may be deployed to action the matter.

People alerting to a possible animal welfare issue can remain anonymous.

5. Could members of the public upload photos or videos anywhere?

Yes – people are able to email photos, videos, or links to: aw.complaint@ecodev.vic.gov.au

6. How long would it take from the report being received to an authority attending the property to check?

All animal welfare complaints received by Agriculture Victoria are assessed by an Agriculture Victoria inspector authorised under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986* (the POCTA Act).

The inspector assesses the complaint and assigns a triage level. The triage approach allows determination of the appropriate response time based on the potential risk, the consequences of the circumstances reported, and available resources.

Triage level	Response time	Risk mitigation
1	0 – 48 hours	To prevent animal cruelty continuing
2	2 – 5 days	To prevent animal cruelty occurring
3	Discretionary	To educate producers to improve practices

Assessment may involve the identification of a relatively minor issue(s), or specific breaches of the POCTA Act or codes of practice, or factors that pose a significant risk of future breaches, or which affect the ability of a person to implement remedial action.