

**INQUIRY INTO LANDOWNER PROTECTION FROM
UNAUTHORISED FILMING OR SURVEILLANCE**

Organisation: Australian Veterinary Association

Date Received: 7 July 2018



*Legislative Council Select Committee on
Landowner Protection from Unauthorised
Filming or Surveillance*

Submission

Submission from the
Australian Veterinary Association Ltd
6th July 2018



Introduction

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the national organisation representing veterinarians in Australia. Our 9,500 members come from all fields within the veterinary profession. Clinical practitioners work with companion animals, horses, farm animals, such as cattle and sheep, and wildlife. Government veterinarians work with our animal health, public health and quarantine systems while other members work in industry for pharmaceutical and other commercial enterprises. We have members who work in research and teaching in a range of scientific disciplines. Veterinary students are also members of the AVA.

Overview

The AVA supports initiatives which may bring about improvements in animal welfare and consumer confidence in the provenance of animal products.

Existing animal welfare legislation in states and territories is in place to provide safeguards for animals in Australia. However, State government agencies do not appear to be adequately resourced to effectively implement this legislation. As a result, a section of the public has lost its confidence that legal protections for animals are adequately enforced. Some animal welfare advocates have felt compelled to take matters into their own hands by undertaking their own surveillance. This situation is undesirable because of the potential for breaches in biosecurity protocols and disturbance to animals from unauthorized entry to farms.

Animal welfare inspectors currently rely on complaints from the public to alert them to breaches such as the existence of puppy farms, substandard livestock operations or serious abattoir negligence. Additional state resourcing to permit proactive monitoring by regulators under formal monitoring schemes would help to improve this situation.

The key to sustainability of livestock and other animal-use industries is building consumer confidence and gaining public trust through schemes which promote transparency of operations. Better animal welfare monitoring, whether by the regulator or through accredited industry quality assurance and auditing programs, is key. These sorts of initiatives will help to ensure ongoing public confidence and support for animal use across all industry sectors.

The focus on preventing farm trespass may have the unintended consequence of creating a perception that animal industries have something to hide. A better approach would be to resource schemes which promote transparency and restore community confidence, such as independent auditing schemes and farms which 'open their doors' to public scrutiny. Examples of these are RSPCA approved foods in Australia and the Red Tractor QA program in the UK: www.redtractor.org.uk

The former Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS) was instrumental in promoting sustainable improvements in animal welfare as well as increased community awareness through education and extension activities. National leadership in progressing best-practice animal welfare is required, along with measures to fortify animal welfare regulation in the states and territories.

Promoting transparency in animal use

The key to restoring public faith in animal-use enterprises such as livestock industries, research, recreation and sport is greater transparency of operations. Consumers have a desire to connect with the origins of their food and this is an increasing trend in younger consumers (Smith and Brower, 2012). Retailers respond to pressure from both activists and consumers. Similarly, use of animals in research, teaching and other areas such as zoos and circuses is under increasing public scrutiny such that continued access will rely on a 'social licence' to operate. Continued support from the community is key.

The AVA supports the concept of independent auditing schemes such as the RSPCA approved food scheme, accredited industry quality assurance schemes, and retailer animal welfare marketing schemes which allow the consumer to make informed decisions. The Australian Animal Welfare Strategy was on the right track as it promoted sustainable improvements in animal welfare practices and at the same time, community awareness through extension programs. This approach is preferable to a "closed shop" approach which engenders suspicion and unease in the community.

Some industries have already realized this and are making moves to "open the farm door" either physically or virtually. This includes web cams established on free range egg farms, inside farm sheds and farm tours, and is a critical educational approach to increase understanding of agriculture among consumers. Temple Grandin is a strong advocate for this kind of transparency.

"Laws which make it a crime to take undercover video send the wrong message to today's consumer. Agriculture has to look at everything it does and ask themselves, "Can I explain this to my guests from the city?" (Grandin, 2014). (See also the Glass Walls series of videos available online: <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLkBbso1kwZ3bZTqN5MBLqHWGpRqPCH7gK>)

Some US and Canadian slaughter plants have voluntarily established video auditing by third party auditors for this very reason. In England, CCTV will be introduced in all slaughterhouses in 2018 following support from both industry and the public.

According to Environment Secretary Michael Gove, England has "some of the highest animal welfare standards in the world" and the introduction of CCTV would "cement our status as a global leader by continuing to raise the bar". He added that the response to the consultation, which found respondents 99 per cent in favour of the introduction of CCTV, "highlights the strength of feeling among the public that all animals should be treated with the utmost respect at all stages of life and be subject to the highest possible welfare standards."

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/cctv-to-be-introduced-in-all-slaughterhouses-in-england-in-2018> (accessed 17 March, 2018).

Australian Pork Limited chief executive officer Andrew Spencer said in 2014 that the pork industry would be holding discussions on how to improve its transparency levels.

"If consumers want to know how we produce pigs, they have a right to know - so we need to do better at letting them have a view to our industry," he said. "That isn't so easy because of biosecurity and other reasons why we don't want people on our farms.

"But with today's technology there are many other ways to see how pigs are produced with a proper understanding and contextual explanation along the way.

"That's the kind of thing we need to do – transparency is the key word and we need to have more of it" (Farmonline, 2014).

Charlie Arnot, CEO of the US Centre for Food Integrity, says the risk is a lack of understanding by consumers; this is being tackled in the US via the smart use of modern technology such as real time webcam in the sheds and visits by consumers to real farms. He maintains that a move to more transparent operation is essential. (Agriculture today, 2012)

Some forms of animal use may not lend themselves to this type of 'open door policy', such as use of animals in research laboratories where complex ethical arguments and controls are undertaken to assess the use of animals for scientific purposes. This is where it becomes so important that the public have faith in strong regulation and enforcement so that this sort of animal use is being properly monitored.

Ultimately a blend of better monitoring and regulation, combined with schemes to promote transparency wherever possible, are key to ensuring ongoing public support for the use of animals to benefit people.

Recommendations

- Greater government investment and resourcing of animal welfare enforcement agencies, increased investigative powers and strengthening of existing animal welfare legislation is urgently needed. This will reduce the need for covert and illegal activities to uncover breaches in duty of care (neglect) and cruelty. Formal monitoring schemes by the regulator are a key component. Empowering regulators to conduct random audits would go a long way towards reducing the perceived need for undercover surveillance by members of the public.
- Schemes to promote transparency such as industry Quality Assurance schemes and independent auditing should be supported in order to maintain consumer confidence and trust in all areas of animal use.
- The Australian Animal Welfare Strategy or a similar national initiative should be reinstated to promote sustainable improvements in animal welfare across all animal use sectors and coordinate animal welfare improvements across Australia.

References:

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