

**Submission
No 331**

**INQUIRY INTO USE OF BATTERY CAGES FOR HENS IN
THE EGG PRODUCTION INDUSTRY**

Name: Ms Polly Watkins

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Dear Committee members,

I have five beautiful hens - Edie, Coco, Grace, Saga and Ollie - who lay delicious eggs for my family. They have a large fox-proof coop for night time and a huge backyard to play in. After five years of hen keeping I know that hens are incredibly curious, funny and love to free range for hours among the shrubs and plants of our yard. I know that if they had to endure the cruel and barbaric practice of being treated as machines stuck in cages without being able to express their natural behaviours, they would die of despair.

It is long known by those who read the science that animals have emotions and feel pain, shock, despair and grief - as well as feel joy and playfulness, delight and pleasure.

The use of battery cages to provide eggs for people is indefensible and only prolonged by those who only care about money and have no concern about the suffering and abuse of chickens, who are reduced to 'products', 'processed commodities' in this hideous system of industrial farming.

I am hopeful that NSW will reject this systemic abuse of chickens as entirely unacceptable as a way of farming sentient animals. I am hopeful that NSW will take this opportunity to phase out this barbaric practice and show the rest of Australia - vision and leadership when it comes to animal welfare.

The majority of Australians do not support hens to be confined to barren battery cages- with as much as an A4-size floor space for the duration of their sad, short lives. I know how much my chickens thrive on being able to express normal behaviours - nesting, foraging, scratching, and dustbathing and sunbathing; dashing about from one end of the garden. to the other. When they are in their coop waiting to be let out in the morning, they literally flap up against the wire door impatient for me to let them loose, eager with anticipation of the delight they experience, simply being themselves!

They do not need much open space, they need 'habitat' - a mix of open spaces and corridors of shrubs and bushes where they can dig, cool off in the shade on hot days, hide and run to if they feel unsafe or get spooked.

Those who have decided that hens 'don't like open spaces' do not understand that - hens love open spaces but they do not like being totally vulnerable - that's why natural habit with a mix of covered and open space is what works.

The continued use of battery cages into the 21st Century - is a sad reflection on how agendas - money and politics - rule. It is obscenely cruel and the science is clear that hens suffer from many health and psychological issues when having to endure such treatment:

- * extreme behavioural deprivation;
- * the highest rates of disuse osteoporosis (brittle bones);
- * the highest rates of bone fractures at depopulation; and
- * the highest rates of non-infectious diseases such as fatty liver disease.

These issues can only be addressed by allowing hens to live in a natural environment with proper space and habitat, in which they can express their natural behaviours.

Battery cages have now been phased out of all 28 nations of the European Union, several US states including the largest egg-producing state of California, and are in the process of being phased out in

New Zealand and Canada. Will NSW lead the way for Australia to leave the dark ages of animal welfare? Or will NSW condemn our animals to more decades of cruelty?

Given the ground swell of citizens who want to ban battery cages and the major Australian and international brands are also moving ahead. Arnott's, McDonalds, Hungry Jacks, Subway, Nando's, Oporto, Coles, Woolworths, Aldi, Harris Farm Markets, Ikea, Kellogg's, Compass Group, Mars, Nestle, PepsiCo and Unilever, have all committed to putting battery cage-free eggs on their shelves and in their products - all because of continued public pressure - it is time to get rid of this form of systemic, abusive farming.

I am hopeful that the NSW Government will not waste the money spent on this inquiry - but will take heed of the massive public sentiment, the overwhelming science and the lead the business community have already shown - to commence a phase out.

Cruel farming systems like the battery cage taint the reputations of all Australian farmers and farming sectors, and have no place in the future of sustainable agriculture. We can do better for animals, and farmers - to ensure a sustainable egg production with high welfare Standards that have the hens at the centre of the farming, and not money or efficiency.

On behalf of five very loved and special chickens - Edie, Coco, Grace, Saga and Ollie and my human family - please use compassion and conscience and use your power wisely to create change and transform this archaic industry.

Kind regards,
Polly Watkins