

**Submission
No 364**

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

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Online submission to the 'NSW Legislative Council Committee on the Use of Battery Cages for Hens in the Egg Production Industry'

Dear Committee Members,

I thank you for the opportunity to contribute my views via the following submission to the inquiry.

Chickens are intelligent, emotional beings with unique personalities. They “are behaviorally sophisticated, discriminating among individuals, exhibiting Machiavellian-like social interactions, and learning socially in complex ways that are similar to humans.” - *Lori Marino, Neuroscientist* If you take an object away from a chicken, they will still know it's there — this is something even young human kids aren't able to do. <https://www.theage.com.au/environment/conservation/chickens-exhibit-machiavellian-tendencies-new-research-shows-20170105-gtm7ah.html>

They have language, communicating where food is, warnings of overhead or ground predators, calling their chicks back, even communicating with them in the egg, so that the chick learns to recognise her voice. They recognise over 100 of their friends, and are great problem solvers.

Chickens develop strong bonds with their babies. They will fuss over them, protect them from predators and the cold, and teach them the ways of 'chickenhood'.

And they dream:



Photo: Two rescued battery hens rest peacefully in the sunshine for the first time. Courtesy: [Brightside Farm Sanctuary](https://www.brightsidefarm.com.au)
<https://www.newscientist.com/article/dn14214-secret-sleep-of-birds-revealed-in-brain-scans/#.XSlaoK9cndF.email>

And this is how we treat them:

In Australia alone, some 12 million gentle hens are imprisoned in one of the cruellest farming devices ever invented – The battery cage.

Firstly, Male chicks

To replace 'spent' hens, millions of chicks are hatched yearly, of which only half will grow up to lay eggs. The other half — approximately 12 million economically 'worthless' [day-old male chicks](#) — are either gassed to death or ground up alive. This applies to male chicks born into all egg production systems – cage, barn, free range, organic.





- <https://vimeo.com/164371192>
- [industrial hatcheries throughout Australia](#) (Animal Liberation and Aussie Farms)

However:

[Germany says no more **chick** shredding! | Animals Australia](#)
<https://www.animalsaustralia.org/.../germany-stops-shredding-chicks.php>



- 15.11.18

For females - Typically:

- Five or more hens crammed in a cage. Room for each hen is about the size of an iPad.
 To reduce frustration pecking due to overcrowding and confinement, new born chicks are de-beaked with a hot blade. As their beaks are full of sensory receptors and nerves, this mutilation is acutely painful, and lead to chronic pain and difficulty feeding.
 It is prohibited in several countries. (RSPCA scientific report: "The science is in: Battery cages must go" 02.08.16)
- They are forced to stand, sleep, and lay eggs on a wire mesh floor.
 Painful consequences include feet injuries (e.g. lesions, claws getting trapped and broken), and feathers rubbed off exposing their sensitive skin.



Photos: “Egg Corp Assured” ‘state of the art’ PACE farm factory, NSW, August 2014
 Dozens of hens found abandoned among enormous towers of rotting faeces beneath the long rows of cages, stacked vertically up to six rows high.
 (Animals Australia)

- 4 out of every 5 hens suffers from crippling bone disease osteoporosis. Studies reveal many suffer from metabolic fatty liver disease, broken bones, and chronic pain.

Due to “severe behavioural restriction”, and “the very high rates of egg laying”, these birds have “the highest number of fractures at depopulation of all housing systems”. (RSPCA Scientific Report 02.08.16)

- Forced moulting involves starving the hens for up to 3 weeks, so that they will produce larger eggs later, and/or the hens can be kept for an additional egg-laying season. It is extremely stressful. They lose a ¼ of their body weight, and a reduction in bone mineral density and content (with 4 out of 5 suffering osteoporosis this can be devastating). The risk of hens dying during forced moulting periods is significantly increased.

It is banned in the UK, India, Israel, and the European Union. McDonalds, Burger King, and Wendy's have all pledged not to buy eggs from producers that engage in this practice.

- The air is acrid with ammonia, and is aversive to hens. It can also damage their respiratory system, and cause infectious disease. (RSPCA Scientific Report 02.08.16)
Rescuers experience painful stinging, and watering eyes, and difficulty breathing.

'Spent' hens

After 18 months, the hens are exhausted and have reached the end of their 'economically useful' lives.

Transportation and Slaughter

It begins with 'depopulation', which involves grabbing animals out of cages and from sheds and quickly pushing them into small cramped transport crates. Caged hens are particularly at risk during this time due to their weakened and brittle bones, and **many will suffer broken or fractured bones during handling and transport.**

Slaughterhouse operators work on quotas and strict time schedules. As transportation and abattoir investigations reveal again and again, there is little opportunity and incentive to avoid animal cruelty – legal and illegal. Workers handle them roughly, mock, abuse, and torture them. The birds literally scream with terror and the pain - It is unmistakable.

The following examples are far from being isolated cases. They are a small sample only of the volumes of evidence of unforgivable cruelty to those among our most vulnerable. And it is thanks only to the exposés of courageous whistleblowers and investigators – All to whom I am eternally grateful:

1 Rescuer report --



-- “She died like this. There was nothing humane about it. Nothing. She was grabbed and thrown in to this transport crate on a Tuesday evening, and was dead on arrival at the slaughterhouse Wednesday night. She was literally squashed to death from overcrowding in that crate. After 18 months as a layer hen, this is how it ended for her.”

“Last night, my team and I rescued 54 of the sickest and broken hens we have ever rescued. **In a delivery to the abattoir in their thousands, hens were jammed into crates that were so full that each crate sported many dead and dying hens. We currently have hens in our care who have broken hips, severe bruising, broken wings, laceration, egg yolk peritonitis and worse. These hens have been literally thrown from their cages to the crates. Heaps have been kicked and stepped on by farm workers.**

The rescue team are currently waiting at the vet for help. The worst of the girls will be put to sleep gently, the rest will be given a chance to be rehomed when they are well and experience kindness for the first time in their lives.” (October 2016)

2 “Hate it when their heads come off”: footage reveals cruelty at egg farm

Workers at one of the largest egg producers in Australia have been caught kicking, throwing and abusing hens in footage that is likely to spark a fresh debate about animal cruelty.

In the footage, a worker picks up a live chicken, throws it into the air and then uses his hand to slap it across the room. Another throws a live bird onto the concrete floor with sufficient force to leave it maimed. Another worker attempts to drop kick a bird.”



<https://www.theage.com.au/business/companies/hate-it-when-their-heads-come-off-footage-reveals-cruelty-at-egg-farm-20190615-p51xyj.html?fbclid=IwAR2TbaO7X5tkelwXLYIX635NY7jRovlALmpxpFY5hbBBH3-rlf8WDL1gil> By [Latika Bourke](#) and [Darren Gray](#) June 17, 2019 — 3.49pm

Watch the footage here: <http://bit.ly/2WLq0p7>



3 At the slaughterhouse, some birds will be placed in CO₂-filled chambers and gassed to death.



I urge you to view: <https://www.facebook.com/AnimalLiberationORG/videos/659837191145326/>

4 Conveyor belt slaughter

At many slaughterhouses, birds may be shackled into ankle cuffs on a conveyor belt. They will be **left hanging upside down for several** minutes — a position which would cause great pain for animals who already suffer from osteoporosis, weak and underdeveloped joints, and broken bones.

The suspended conveyor line then moves and the birds' heads are dipped into an electrified-water stunning bath. The production line moves on, and the birds have their throats cut open by a spinning blade. They're assigned a few minutes to bleed to death before being **plunged into scalding tanks of boiling water** which are designed to remove their feathers.

Routinely, terrified animals will swing their heads out of the way of the electrified-bath and the mechanical blade. Others don't fully 'bleed out' in the allotted time. These birds — who aren't dead by the time the conveyor belt they're shackled to reaches the scalding tanks — will be **dragged alive into boiling water**, as exposed in [a shocking investigation by animal protection campaigner and photographer, Tamara Kenneally](#) and revealed on the ABC. - Animals Australia, January 12, 2018

[ABC News](#) added a new video: [Chickens boiled alive in abattoir.](#)



<https://www.facebook.com/abcnews.au/videos/10155904739829516/>

Article: <http://ab.co/2muVbTR>

ABC News 16.11.17

Serious allegations of collusion and corruption:

“Egg farmers have been accused of engaging in systemic collusion with the NSW Government to deliberately thwart moves to outlaw battery hens across the country.”

“It has been described by one governance expert as "collusion" and an "act of systemic corruption".

<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-12-21/egg-farmers-accused-of-colluding-with-nsw-government/9229242>

“Executive email reveals stoush over 'stage-managed' process to benefit egg industry.”

“The NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) has allowed the drafting of new welfare standards for poultry to be "stage-managed" by industry in a process lacking "transparency", "governance" and “independence”.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-01-08/concerns-poultry-welfare-standards-stage-managed-by-industry/9299256>

“Independent regulator needed”

“This saga seems to underscore a claim that lawyers have been [making for years](#): that animal welfare regulation is characterised by conflicts of interest and dominated by industry.”

“The Productivity Commission, in 2016, recommended the establishment of a standalone statutory animal welfare commission to manage national standards development. It further recommended that state and territory governments separate agriculture policy from livestock welfare monitoring and enforcement.”

“To restore public confidence, we need to take animal welfare out of the hands of state and federal agriculture and industry departments, and give it to an independent umpire.”

<http://theconversation.com/governments-cant-be-trusted-to-deliver-welfare-standards-for-chickens-90091> 12.02.18

Summary

Australian governments and industries are lagging well behind community expectations, as well as international standards when it comes to our treatment of hens:

"Not just activists, 9 out of 10 people are concerned about animal welfare in Australian farming"
- and "... 91% want reform to address this."

“Clearly people are concerned about animal welfare – and the report says concern has been growing over the years, and shows no sign of abating.

It predicts that more exposés, negative media focus on farm animal welfare, and a perceived lack of governmental responsiveness will intensify public outrage and demand for reform.

The report says one of the best indicators to explain the growing concern for farm animal welfare was the public’s views on [animal sentience](#) – the capacity to experience suffering and pleasure.”

Over 90% believe farm animals are sentient.

<http://theconversation.com/not-just-activists-9-out-of-10-people-are-concerned-about-animal-welfare-in-australian-farming-117077> 15.05.19

"84% of Australians are opposed to cages."

“The bottom line is, the **battery cage** industry can't continue to function with such severe and growing public **opposition** to its cruel farming practices, ...

<https://www.rspca.org.au/.../breakthrough-research-finds-84-australians-want-end-batt...> 26.11.17

"Aussie senators have condemned the suffering caused to hens in battery cages AND called for CCTV to be used in ALL Australian slaughterhouses!"

<https://www.facebook.com/AnimalsAustralia/videos/10157077296175299/>

The European Union banned battery cages in 2012, 20 years after Switzerland. Several states in the USA have banned cages, and more are coming on board. Banned in New Zealand and Canada.

NSW will continue to lag well behind until the allegations of collusion and corruption are seriously and transparently addressed. If the allegations are not true, there is absolutely no reason not to ban the entire battery cage system, and all its’ attendant egregious cruelties.

“There is nothing so powerful in the world as an idea whose time has come and animal protection is just such an idea.” - The Honourable Michael Kirby, AC CMG, Former (and longest serving) Justice of the High Court, and ‘Voiceless’ patron.