

**Submission  
No 393**

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

**Name:** Dr Miranda Coulson

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I am a member of the Australian public who is extremely concerned about the treatment of animals in the Australian farming system, and particularly chickens which are subject to treatment which has become routine and normalised cruelty.

In the egg industry, the needs of animal welfare compete against human desires, namely

- a) the desire for profit,
- b) the market desire for egg consumption.

Where profit is a motive, unless there are market forces driving animal welfare, such concerns will not be a priority.

Arguments regarding the welfare of hens in cages being superior are spurious. I am not convinced by any argument that winged and feathered creatures are happier living in soulless cages crammed with others, where they can barely move, let alone stretch. Watch any chicken and you will see wing-flapping, foraging, walking, dust-bathing and general curiosity. This behaviour cannot be satisfied in battery cages which are an abomination and an affront to a thinking person with any sense of compassion whatsoever. Use of so-called 'enriched colony cages' are also a repugnant attempt to appease commercial operations. I have yet to see any webcam footage from inside commercial battery sheds displaying happy, healthy hens after months of incarceration.

Arguments regarding the liberty of non-caged chickens and the risk of predators, disease and injury risk and egg cleanliness are also meaningless when all these issues have been addressed in many successful systems of hen management from across the world as well as in Australia.<sup>1,2</sup>

The cost of eggs to consumers is another much touted reason to maintain the status quo. There is ever increasing demand for non-caged eggs despite the slightly higher price.<sup>3</sup> This is a first-world nation and there are many other far more expensive activities and indulgences that the public is more than willing to purchase, which far outstrip the cost of a mere box of eggs.

There are numerous horrifying examples of dreadful treatment of layer hens away from public scrutiny. We cannot tolerate this in our society.<sup>4,5,6</sup>

The role of government is to respond to the concerns of the public and to lead the way in setting standards of welfare which are transparent and with clear regulatory guidelines.

Opaque statements and lack of clarity belong in the past. This type of statement was particularly evident in the Regulatory Impact Statement (RIS) for the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Poultry 2017.<sup>7</sup> The stated aim being to evaluate options to 'minimise risks to the welfare of poultry due to deficiencies in existing codes of practice and other standards in this area'. Despite this, later contradictory statements included that 'non-regulation of the guidelines is a fundamental premise on which industry engagement and support for this process is based'.

Clearly when this kind of attitude is evident in a major document such as this, there is little hope for any improvement in welfare, unless there is leadership which is independent of the agendas of agribusiness.

The Select Committee of the NSW Parliament has the role of setting a much higher standard in its thought processes and determination.

The World Organisation for Animal health has published a statement regarding the Principles of Animal Welfare, which is an excellent guideline by which to measure our treatment of layer hens.<sup>8</sup>

The Australian Senate recommended the prohibition of battery cages in 1999.<sup>9</sup> The Animal Protection Index, a comprehensive assessment of animal welfare for 50 nations rates Australia as a 'C', while New Zealand and the UK, both rated an 'A'.<sup>10</sup> It is our duty to rectify this failing and to put in action plans that will see Australia rated equally to countries like the UK and New Zealand. ACT has made the step to ban battery cages and many countries in Europe as well as in New Zealand have banned them or are phasing them out.<sup>1, 11, 12</sup>

Simply put, deprivation of an animal of any ability to move, socialise, or perform basic behaviours in fresh air is no longer acceptable.

Now is the time to act to put the battery cage in the history books and make a move forward for animal welfare in Australia.

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