

**Submission
No 397**

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

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Caged eggs and other practices

Below I very briefly outline just three of the many horrific practices routine in the egg industry in Australia and across the world, and explain why they ought to be banned. The primary section of interest is the first one regarding caged eggs, but I have included two other practices that are relevant. The main take away should be that defenders of caged egg and other cruel practices must justify, ethically, why some animals (e.g. dogs, cats) are subject to radically different moral standards than others (e.g. chickens, pigs).

Caged Eggs:

It is utterly incredible that caged eggs are legal in Australia, a seemingly progressive western society, when the majority of European countries banned them years ago. This started two decades ago (1999), when the EU began the process of phasing out caged eggs, achieving a complete ban by 2012.

Unless you can prove a strong scientific consensus that caged farming does not, in fact, cause a significant amount of suffering (and that somehow all other existing research is wrong), then you have no ethical justification for permitting the practice.

As specified by section 6.1.1.6 in the 'NSW Animal Welfare Codes of Practice: Breeding Cats and Dogs', a single small dog (<40cm, roughly the size of a hen) cannot be kept in space less than 1.5 square meters. This is considerably smaller than the space that *multiple* hens must squeeze into in caged egg farms. There is no evidence that hens feel less pain or can suffer less than dogs, and so there is no logically consistent justification for the extreme differences in animal welfare practices.

Killing Male Chicks:

I have not yet touched on the routine killing of day-old male chicks that are useless to the egg industry, which are killed by the thousands every day. It is worth noting that the majority of consumers seem to be completely unaware of this (perhaps compulsory images similar to cigarette packaging should be introduced). Typical arguments made in support of this practice include suggestions that the deaths are painless and instant, or that the egg industry would be uneconomical if it was stopped.

The first argument is simply false, evident by the readily available camera footage obtained from RSCPA approved hatcheries across Australia (see video links on <https://www.animal-lib.org.au/campaigns/animals-for-food/eggs>). These videos (and others like it) show many chicks being tossed by the grinders and trying to escape, many falling onto the ground outside of the machine left to die slowly after being seriously wounded.

The second argument essentially means that a ban would raise the price of eggs, making them less economically feasible. This is not, by itself, an adequate response. In order to make this argument you must show that the economic pressure on consumers and the egg industry as a result of a ban would be more significant than the massive pain and suffering caused to the millions of chicks every year in the status quo. I do not believe this is the case. Suppose that the price of a carton of eggs would triple if a ban was implemented, then consumers would be paying only around \$10 more (likely an overestimate). I think most reasonable people would agree that this is a small price to pay to avoid the needless suffering of millions of animals every year. Consumers who cannot afford the difference could simply reduce their consumption of eggs and switch to cheaper protein options

(e.g. tofu or lentils), or find somewhere else in their cart to save money (e.g. meat, alcohol, sugary drinks).

Debeaking:

Please refer to the previous link (and watch “debeaking of female chicks”) for video footage of this practice occurring in Australia, which again seems to be unknown to the majority of consumers. Note that this practice occurs at RSPCA endorsed facilities, and the hatcheries supply to both caged and free ranged eggs. I don’t think free ranged shoppers would like to know they’re paying for this to occur!

Under the Animal Care and Protection Act 2001 (QLD), it is an offence to perform certain surgical procedures (on dogs, cats, horses etc.) unless done by a professional veterinary surgeon and is in the interest of an animal’s welfare (e.g. sect 26).

Contrast this now to the video you just watched where the ‘surgical procedure’ of debeaking was performed on an assembly line by a large piece of machinery rather than a veterinary surgeon. In addition, the procedure is certainly not in the best interest of the animal, rather it is in the interest of the egg supplier who benefits economically from keeping the hens crammed into tiny cages (where they are forced to peck at each other feathers).

Again, the onus is on the Australian animal welfare regulators to explain this large inconsistency in the way different animals are treated. Chicks do indeed feel pain in their beaks and there is plenty of evidence in support of this. It would be illegal to cut off a dog’s nose just because the owner would somehow benefit economically from it, as the dog would experience extreme pain and suffering. There is no clear justification of why this same logic does not to apply to a chick.