

**Submission
No 418**

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

Name: Ms Szun Tay

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Dear Sir/Madam,

It is irrefutable that condemning hens to live in battery cages for their entire lives simply to produce cheap eggs for our consumption is a cruel and barbaric industry practice. Hens, like our beloved dogs and cats, are smart and social animals. Normally, they can live for up to more than 10 years and are outdoor creatures. They forage for food, spread and flap their wings, enjoy the sunshine and engage in healthy behaviours such as ground-pecking and dust-bathing. They also communicate with each other to form social groups. Prior to laying eggs, hens seek out secure spots, perform daily routines to prepare their nests and hatch their eggs. Basically, NONE of these natural behaviours are possible in battery cages. In these barren cages made of wire, including wire floors, hens live their lives in a space smaller than an A4 sheet. Due to this lifelong confinement, hens get extremely stressed and are denied even the most basic freedoms of movements: to be able without difficulty to turn around, groom itself, get up, lie down and stretch its limbs. Denied their natural nesting instinct, they get frustrated and peck each other; some try to crawl under cage mates to nest. To prevent pecking, hens are debeaked painfully, without any anaesthetics - the beak is a very sensitive organ that is full of nerve endings, to induce such pain is unimaginable. Due to the sheer numbers of hens per cage, farmers often can't see or access injured hens. These injured, dying, or dead hens have been left to struggle, suffer and rot, right under their cage mates, in manure pits that accumulate under the cages. From the lack of exercise and calcium depletion due to constant egg laying, caged hens get brittle bones and fractures. This makes them even more vulnerable to injuries at the end of their lives, when they are dragged into trucks for slaughter, often by workers who are under pressure to do this as quickly as possible. These hens never see sunshine their entire lives, until their last few moments on slaughter trucks. An extensive body of scientific evidence confirms that birds confined in barren battery cages suffer immensely [attachment 1].

Battery cages are indefensible from a welfare point of view. A perpetrator would normally be prosecuted if this level of abuse and neglect was visited upon a companion animal - there is no justification for battery cages. This form of cruelty is globally acknowledged and rejected, leading to the ban of battery cages in the European Union in 1999, twenty years ago, which has been phased out since 2012. New Zealand has banned battery cages by 2022 in favour of larger colony cages, or barn and free-range rearing. Australia is lagging behind, despite consumer demand, societal expectations and public sentiment. If no action is taken now, more than 200 million hens will continue to suffer this fate for at least the next 20 years, as Australia's appetite for eggs is increasing - an increase of 54% over the past decade. In 2018, 16.9 million eggs were eaten every day, an equivalent of 245 eggs, per person, per year; with a production record by the industry of close to 6.2 billion eggs reached in 2018.

What do Australians want and do they care about where their eggs come from? In a CSIRO survey of more than 12,500 Australians commissioned by Australian Eggs [Moffat K, et al. Australian Egg Industry Community Research 2018 Report. EP188834], Hen Welfare was consistently rated "very important". Australians "strongly agree" hens should be well cared for, and in fact, the type of egg farming system "ranks number one" in influencing egg purchase decisions (followed by price, clear labelling and product information). In addition, the increasing demand for free range eggs despite increased price, also reflects how deeply Australians care about hen welfare. In the last two years, more free range eggs were sold than caged eggs, with free range eggs accounting 45% sales compared to 44% for caged eggs.

Whilst Australians care deeply about how their eggs are produced, worryingly, the survey showed that they are also confident the industry was already effectively regulated, with almost 70% of participants agreeing with this sentiment. There is major concern whether Australian's trust in the egg industry is misplaced, since most people do not know what percentage of eggs are from battery

cages. They also do not know that half of caged eggs go into the food industry and food outlets and “hidden eggs” [Egg Farmers of Australia website]. So, even a customers exercise their preferences by paying more for cage-free eggs at the supermarket, they are not free to exercise the same choice for “hidden eggs”. That is more than 7 million eggs per day unaccounted for, for consumers who care! It is also common for the same egg producer to produce both free-range and caged eggs. So it is possible for a consumer to unwittingly support a company they deem unethical. Without light being shed on true industry practices, consumers remain in the dark. More transparency and accountability is required in the egg industry, so that people know their choices are being honoured and before their trust is earned.

In response to consumer pressure, 1727 major retailers and global food businesses have already announced they will completely remove cruel caged eggs from their supply chains by 2025. More commitments are being published by the day on Chicken Watch, which tracks the worldwide trend toward improved hen welfare. In Australia, 15 companies, including household names KFC, Hungry Jack’s, Ikea, McDonalds, Subway, Harris Farms, Arnotts, are already cage-free. Future commitments have been secured from major retailers including Coles, Nestle, Starbucks, Aldi, Mars Inc, to be cage-free by 2025 (Table 1).

Already cage-free

Commitment to cage-free by 2025

KFC Cage-free in Australia since 2017.

Hilton Hotels Cage-free in Australia since 2018.

Coffee Club Cage-free in Australia since 2018.

Grilld Cage-free in Australia since 2004.

Guzman y Gomez Cage-free in Australia since 2016.

Hungry Jack's Cage-free in Australia since 2016.

Ikea Cage-free in Australia since 2017.

McDonald's Cage-free in Australia since 2017.

Nandos Cage-free in Australia since 2013.

Subway Cage-free in Australia since 2015.

Harris Farm Markets Cage-free in Australia since 2018.

Arnott's Cage-free in Australia since 2017.

Olivers Real Foods Cage-free in Australia since 2018.

The Food Company Cage-free in Australia since 2014.

Snowy Mountains Cookies Free-range in Australia since 2010.

Coles Supermarket Cage-free (all brand shell eggs and private label ingredients) in Australia by 2023. Private label shell eggs are already cage-free.

Starbucks Australia Cage-free in Australia by 2020 for private label, by 2023 for all ingredients.

Nestle Cage-free (shell & ingredients) in Australia by 2025.

Aldi Australia Cage-free (shell eggs) in Australia by 2025.

Mars Inc Cage-free in United States, Canada, Australia by 2020, cage-free in Europe.

Spotless Cage-free (shell) in Australia by 2023.

Simplot Cage-free (private label products) in Australia since 2018. Cannot guarantee cage-free for ingredients in pre-made products they purchase.

Pancake Parlour Cage-free (shell eggs) in Australia since 2011. Pancake mix ingredients may not be cage-free.

George Weston Foods 100% cage-free in Australia by 2025.

Patties Foods Cage-free (private label products) in Australia by January 2019.

Doodles Creek Cage-free in Australia since 2009.

Burger Edge No public policy. Free-range eggs listed on menu in Australia since 2010.

In addition to consumer pressure, more could be done legislatively. Currently, the law defines the acceptable treatment of animals according to their use. Cruelty to farmed animals is often not considered in the same way as the treatment of pets. In NSW, it is an offence to fail to provide an animal with adequate exercise except if the animal is a cow, sheep, goat, pig or chicken [Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979 (NSW), s 9].

The EU and Canada has transitioned successfully into cage-free production systems to achieve good animal welfare practices [attachment 2]. "Having good technical guidance to help producers in the transition towards good cage-free systems as well as clear product declarations are very important to make the sector more resilient to change as well as economically viable". This document presents concrete ideas that can make producers fit for the future so that they are enabled to keep up with evolving societal demands for a more humane treatment of farmed animals.

In summary, Australia's appetite for eggs is huge. Caged-hens suffer immeasurably. People are deeply concerned about hen welfare. Consumer demand reflects this. There is precedent and guidance for transition to cage-free systems. The egg industry and government must respond in line with people's choices.

Thank you for considering my views.

Szun S Tay