

Submission
No 438

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

Organisation: Name suppressed

Date Received: 25 July 2019

Partially
Confidential

26 July 2019

NSW Select Committee,
Parliament House, Macquarie Street,
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Committee,

RE: Inquiry into the use of battery cages for hens in the egg production industry

Throughout much of this time, cage egg production has been a large part of our business and has produced many millions of eggs for Australian consumers and provided employment in many ways for local families. The investment in conventional cage systems in the 2000's was extremely high for our business and is still part of our debt/ asset ratio and the effect of possible changing of the rules for our cage facility would have a highly negative impact on our business and our industry.

We are extremely disappointed that an NSW Government Inquiry would use the wording of 'Activists' and label our production system 'battery cages'. The industry has used the word 'cages' for many decades, and since introduction of the Model Code of Practice (MCOP) - Poultry 4th Edition, has been also labelled our production system as 'Conventional Cage'. For a Select Committee to show such disregard to the families operating in NSW with such poor language is extremely frustrating to our family, our staff and our consumers, all of which are looking to the NSW Government for proper leadership.

Conventional Cages have been part of the egg industry for many years and clearly show the benefits for animal welfare on many levels. Whilst we also have non caged systems in our industry, we believe that the consumer is the best to provide the feedback as to what production system that they wish to purchase their eggs from. This decision should not be manipulated by Government or the supermarket giants but given to the consumer by allowing the egg industry to provide choice of eggs produced from different production systems to the consumer. The Government can be involved in the animal welfare of the birds, but choice given to the consumer should be the key driving determination for any government.

The controlled environmental conventional cages systems that are majority operating today, and which we are operating, have the lowest impact on the environment and are the best for the health and welfare of our staff. The conventional cages have a very small footprint in comparison to all non-caged production systems and with land very expensive in many areas, building large houses for poultry in non-caged systems and the additional costs for range areas for free range production, meaning the impact on the environment is greater.

Staff operating the conventional cage system are in environments that are well and truly improved to that of non-caged production. The temperature is controlled with ventilation continually coming through the houses to keep the houses temperature constant. With the birds removed from their manure the dust within the house is very minimal, when considering both barn production as well a free range, the birds are dust bathing in the litter both inside and outside the houses which creates this increased level of dust. This is problematic for both the birds as well as the staff looking after the birds and their environment. The level of dust can have detrimental effect on the respiratory system of the birds as well as making the house difficult to work in as an owner or employee.

As a business that had to rebuild our cage facilities to meet the new rules of the MCOP - 4th edition, in the 2000's, it is frustrating that the NSW Government would look at changes to facilities that have both, 1. not been fully re paid to our bank financiers or 2. been depreciated as per our Government regulations. These changes as outline in the MCOP - 4th Edition were only legislated in 2008, and we are looking at changes just 11 years on. The ability of our business to refit within 20 - 30 years of the last Government change is impossible. The ability to reduce numbers within our cage production system would make our production system unviable and clearly be detrimental to our banking relationship with now less birds within our system to repay the outstanding loans. The new guidelines from bankers, which are looking for better collateral from businesses for lending, as well as faster repayment of loans, makes our business less viable in the long term and constant reference to banning cage egg production further affects our banking relationship.

This inquiry is also overlapping and confusing the process of the National Poultry Standards and Guidelines which NSW is part of. The Standards and Guidelines

process, we hope is finalised this year as we are unsure of the new set of Standards and Guidelines which will replace the Model Code of Practice Poultry - 4th Edition. With this information unknown, the possible investment into our industry is somewhat paused, which is never good for a healthy industry to continue with supplying a great protein source to consumers and to keep up with the growth of our industry.

Our business is a member of the NSW Farmers Association, Australian Eggs and Egg Farmers Australia, and we understand that they have all provided submissions to this inquiry. We have full confidence in our peak bodies and their submissions to this inquiry.

We, as a family business and large employer in our area, hope that the Select Committee members show leadership to our industry through this inquiry. Leadership in the way of allowing market forces and consumer choice to define the NSW Government's way forward. Leadership to look at the science and note that all egg production systems have both positive and negative outcomes on welfare to the birds, but that all systems are striving for better overall welfare for the birds in our care. Leadership is never defined as allowing minority groups to dominate the debate or take over the process.

thank the Select Committee for accepting our submission to this inquiry. The support of our egg industry by the NSW Government by allowing all production systems to operate is critical for our industry to continue to grow, which is beneficial to us as a business, but also our staff and their families which support our business, our consumers of our quality egg and egg products. A growing and profitable business in NSW is also a positive for the NSW Government.

Your sincerely,