

**Submission  
No 447**

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

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## SUBMISSION TO SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE USE OF BATTERY CAGES FOR HENS IN THE EGG PRODUCTION INDUSTRY

I have prepared this submission to provide information to the select committee who are tasked with inquiring into and reporting on the use of battery cages for hens in the egg production industry.

I am a veterinarian and a resident of NSW with concerns regarding the welfare of hens kept in battery cages for egg production.

I have reviewed the terms of references and have prepared answers in relation to this document.

The committee proposes to investigate the below:

1. Whether or not the use of battery cages to contain or accommodate hens in the egg production industry is:

i) associated with poor animal welfare outcomes or is accompanied by poor animal welfare practices,

ii) justified by any other consideration, and

iii) consistent with community standards and supported by the public,

My comments:

i) I can answer as a veterinarian and keen observer of animal behaviour that the use of battery cages is associated with poor animal welfare practices.

The below principle of animal welfare is taken from the American Veterinary Medicine Association (AVMA) Animal Welfare Principles

<https://www.avma.org/KB/Policies/Pages/AVMA-Animal-Welfare-Principles.aspx>

- Animals must be provided water, food, proper handling, health care, and an environment appropriate to their care and use, with thoughtful consideration for their species-typical biology and behavior.

There is no consideration for species-typical biology and behaviour when keeping hens in battery cages. Normal behaviours of hens include foraging, perching, dustbathing and laying their eggs in a nest - none of these natural behaviours are possible when hens are kept in cages.

ii) Hens kept in cages are provided water, food, proper handling and health care, however this does not provide adequate justification for denying hens an appropriate environment for their natural behaviours of foraging, perching, dustbathing and laying their eggs in a nest.

iii) Keeping hens in battery cages is not consistent with community standards, nor supported by the public.

Maintaining hens in battery cages is not consistent with community standards. The EU banned the use of battery cages in 2012:

“EU Council Directive 1999/74/EC on the Welfare of Laying Hens is due to come into force on 1 January 2012.[1] Under the Directive the use of conventional cages (commonly referred to as 'battery cages') for laying hens will be prohibited in the EU as will the marketing of eggs from hens housed in such cages.”

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmenvfru/830/83004.htm>

“The New Zealand Government will phase out battery cages for egg farming and ban them from 2022. From today, no new battery cages can be installed on New Zealand farms, as part of a phase-out similar to the Tasmanian Government's plan to ban the cages.”

<https://www.abc.net.au/site-archive/rural/news/content/201212/s3649653.htm>

These NZ legislation changes were introduced due to pressure from the community and animal welfare groups. Australia has many residents who were born in, or with family members born in the EU and NZ and many Australians share the community standards of these countries.

Keeping hens in battery cages is not supported by the public as evidenced by the increasing purchasing of free-range eggs, despite higher prices.

In 2006/2007 supermarket sales of caged eggs were 71.4% vs 23.4% free-range eggs, in 2016/7 this had changed to 48.9% caged eggs vs 41.3% free-range eggs.

([https://www.nswfarmers.org.au/NSWFA/Posts/The\\_Farmer/Trade/Inside\\_the\\_caged-egg\\_vs\\_free-range\\_debate.aspx](https://www.nswfarmers.org.au/NSWFA/Posts/The_Farmer/Trade/Inside_the_caged-egg_vs_free-range_debate.aspx).)

This represents a significant increase in free-range egg sales despite higher prices demonstrating the increasing public support for free-range hens.

The committee is also tasked to investigate what legislative measures should be taken to:

- (i) prevent poor animal welfare outcomes to hens in the egg production industry of New South Wales, and
- (ii) set appropriate minimum standards of accommodation for the accommodation and treatment of hens in the egg production industry,

The most appropriate legislative measure is to follow the EU and NZ and ban the use of battery cages with a suitable phase out period.

Although it is likely that there will cause difficulties to the egg production industry, farmers in both EU and NZ have accepted these changes.

“On 25 February 2014 the Animal Welfare (Factory Farming) Amendment Bill 2013 was passed by the ACT Legislative Assembly. The Bill is noteworthy as it is the first time that certain intensive farming practices – specifically the use of battery cages in egg production and the use of sow stalls and gestational crates for pigs — will be banned in any Australian jurisdiction.

Battery cages have been banned in a number of countries including Switzerland, Austria and Sweden. They are being phased out in New Zealand and

in a number of states in the USA, including California and Michigan. Conventional battery cages have been banned in the European Union since 1 January 2012 (although birds may still be housed in 'enriched cages')."

[https://www.aph.gov.au/About\\_Parliament/Parliamentary\\_Departments/Parliamentary\\_Library/FlagPost/2014/February/ACT\\_bans\\_battery\\_cages\\_and\\_sow\\_stalls](https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/FlagPost/2014/February/ACT_bans_battery_cages_and_sow_stalls)

Australia is ranked a C on the Animal Protection Index whilst UK and NZ are ranked an A.

<https://www.worldanimalprotection.org.au/news/find-out-how-australia-ranks-world-animal-protection-index>

This is a very poor ranking in comparison to other first-world nations and reflects a very disappointing disregard for animal welfare.

Australia ranks 4<sup>th</sup> on the list of countries with the highest standard of living compared with NZ at 10<sup>th</sup> and the UK at 9<sup>th</sup>.

The "Social Progress Index" collates the scores of three main indexes:

- Basic Human Needs, which includes medical care, sanitation, and shelter.
- Foundations of Wellbeing, which covers education, access to technology, and life expectancy.
- Opportunity, which looks at personal rights, freedom of choice, and general tolerance.

<https://www.businessinsider.com/19-countries-with-the-highest-standard-of-life-according-to-the-social-progress-report-2016-6?r=AU&IR=T>

Australia is an affluent country with a very high social progress index reflecting how well Australia looks after its people in relation to human needs, well-being and opportunities.

It is very disappointing that Australia currently permits battery cage egg production which makes it appear that Australian citizens are happy to disregard the basic animal needs of hens for the sake of profit for farmers.

It is apparent that the current legislation allowing for battery cage egg production does not reflect the values of many Australians who are unhappy with battery caged egg production and are increasingly choosing to purchase free-range eggs or keep their own chickens.

Australia is reliant on the agricultural industries and animal welfare should be a priority for such an affluent country.

I would strongly advocate that legislation to ban battery caged hens is introduced throughout Australia, with an appropriate phase in period.

Best regards

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