

**Submission
No 441**

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

Name: Ms Jenny Ankin

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Submission to the Legislative Council Select Committee on the Use of Battery Cages for Hens in the Egg Production Industry.

I am totally Opposed to the use of Battery Cages for hens in the Egg Production Industry.

I strongly urge the the NSW Government to act on behalf of all Australians who want this cruel and inhumane practice of battery cages for hens stopped permanently. I would also like you to consider the many unacceptable cruel practices that occur with all laying hens generally, including barn laid, free range and organic.

Australians are outraged when they learn from journalists and animal welfare groups how cruel and non caring the egg industry is whilst the hens are alive, let alone how they are slaughtered and the carelessness and mistakes that happen during this inhumane process. Revealed through their own investigations into egg production practices, the treatment of all poultry and in this case hens. We do not want to overlook these unacceptable practices any longer.

Some Facts About Chickens:

They are complex creatures.

Have Hierarchies - pecking orders.

They love to play - active chickens have improved bone health.

Research suggests they are cleverer than toddlers.

They experience rapid eye movement (REM) sleep.

Chickens have pain receptors - allowing them to feel pain and distress.

Communicate with more than 24 vocalisations - each with a distinct meaning.

Chickens display object permanence - an understanding that when an object is hidden, it still exists. Even young children don't have this ability.

Chickens have evolved over millions of years, originating from tropical rainforests.

In their natural habitat chickens will survive a predator attack 90% of the time. In artificial pastures they feel vulnerable and exposed.

Hens defend their young from predators.

Can distinguish among more than 100 faces of their own species.

Have full colour vision.

Mother hens talk to their unborn babies and they chirp back through their shells. Factory farmed chicks are taken away as soon as they are laid never meeting their parents. This must be continually distressing to both hen and chicks.

Hens defend their young from predators.

Love dust baths - keeps them clean.

In the wild, the rooster is the protector of the hens, chicks, and territory of the group. Roosters perform a little dance to woo hens.

More chickens are raised and killed for food than all other land animals combined.

It is well known and there is more than enough evidence that hens are social creatures, with their own individual personalities. Like all beings they need to exhibit their natural behaviour, they like to enjoy stretching and flapping their wings unimpeded, scratching, foraging, dust bathing (to keep themselves clean, ward off parasites and to cool down), chickens love to play and should not spend their lives in cramped sheds with less floor space than an A4 piece of paper, movement and play has shown to strengthen their bones and muscles. They also like to be free to perch and nest. They are subjected to artificial light to increase laying which is abnormal, they must be allowed natural sunlight and fresh air, not dark windowless sheds.

The following is a piece taken from: <http://sciencenordic.com/chickens-do-best-when-they-can-play-climb-and-bathe>

“Toys in the chicken coop”

"Broiler chickens seem to thrive better if they live in an environment that provides more materials to play with and platforms to climb onto. They become more active and vary their activity with this kind of “environmental enrichment,” as researchers call it.

"Just as people stay healthier by climbing stairs rather than taking the elevator, it seems that chickens’ bone health improves with this kind of activity,” says researcher Guro Vasdal at Animalia, Norway’s leading research and development specialist in meat and egg production.

Animalia is owned by Nortura and the Norwegian Confederation of Meat and Poultry (KLF), which collaborated with the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU) to carry out this study.

Research on animal welfare has gone on for decades, and in the 1960s researchers pointed out that farm animal welfare is not just about doing away with pain and fear, but also about creating a setting that gives livestock the freedom to do things they like to do in nature.

"In the 1990s animal welfare began to expand its focus to include animals’ emotional state. So today we say that good animal welfare involves a healthy animal that displays natural and positive behaviours, like play and exploration," says Vasdal."

Poultry farmers use beak trimming (debeaking) as a preventative measure to reduce damage and injury caused by pecking including cannibalism. Evidence shows this is caused by frustration of overcrowding and stress. Chickens have pain receptors, enabling them to feel pain and distress. Imagine their pain, when they endure mutilations such as having the ends of their sensitive beaks cut off with an infra red laser, or a hot blade or an electric current used to damage the beak so that the tip falls off, with no pain killers.

Wild chickens only lay approximately 10-15 eggs a year during breeding season, compared to hens bred by the egg industry to lay every single day, constantly suffering from painful reproductive disorders and become exhausted after a year or two.

Traditional breeds are at risk of becoming extinct because many farmers prefer hybrid chickens who consume minimal amounts of food and produce vast quantities of eggs.

Current farming practices do not address the health risks to their workers and hens, as they are still being exposed to harmful gases and contaminated soil and water. This also becomes an environmental problem.

Male chicks are considered an unwanted by product of egg production and are killed and disposed of shortly after birth (along with any unsuitable females). The waste of millions of male chicks killed in horrific and unacceptable ways by carbon dioxide gassing and maceration (being minced alive) is unacceptable and uncivilised. This is reported by the RSPCA, hardly what you would call humane! “Gassing results in gasping and head shaking and, depending on the mixture of gases used, it may take up to two minutes for the chick to die. The RSPCA continues to urge the egg industry to invest in alternatives that avoid the potential for pain and suffering with current killing methods of male chicks.”

Sadly, all these intelligent, sensitive birds are subject to horrific conditions before they are slaughtered.

Cruelty and suffering of these birds happens because of weak and inadequate legislation from government. The egg industry shows no interest except for profit as it continually overlooks the welfare of chickens through lack of accountability, standards and acceptable practices. This is why the vegan movement is on the increase!

We need new legislation for chickens and other poultry, for the ethical and humane treatment of these birds. This industry then needs to be policed properly with regular scrutiny of its practices and the banning of farms breeding chickens who are caught breaching new industry standards.

They deserve the right to exhibit their natural behaviour and live a humane, cruelty free life.

Thank you for considering my submission.

Yours sincerely
Jenny Ankin