

**Submission
No 68**

**INQUIRY INTO PROVISIONS OF THE RIGHT TO FARM
BILL 2019**

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Date Received: 30 September 2019

THE RIGHT TO FARM BILL

I believe the Right to Farm Bill is a Trojan horse, in that, although ostensibly an attempt to prevent trespass on industrial farming facilities and, by such prevention, to veil significant abuse of non-human animals, it carries within it much broader threats to the rights of Australian citizens to congregate in order to protest what they deem to be unfair, unjust or inadequate government policies.

I will address these concerns in turn.

With regard to the proposed punishments for trespass on industrial farming facilities, the provisions in question are of a kind that have come to be called 'ag-gag' laws and amount to an admission of governmental failure. Their principal concern is to ensure that 'activists' cannot have access in any form to animal processing facilities without in any way addressing the reason these 'activists' attempt such access in the first place, which is to alert those very governments, and the public those governments represent, to animal abuse that, were those governments protecting animals and pursuing issues of animal welfare as they are legislatively obliged to do, and as indeed they have frequently claimed to do, should not be occurring in the first place, or should be known already to the government and be in the process of remedial prosecution. But, despite the existence of such deeply compromised institutions as the RSPCA and National Parks and Wildlife (for this neglect is a wildlife issue also), the state and federal governments alike have no adequate system in place for the independent monitoring of such facilities. Until the government commits far more resources in this direction, and shows that it has a real intention to impose and maintain far higher standards of animal welfare than it has yet displayed, such legislation as is currently proposed stands as nothing but a shameful testament to governmental impotence and hypocrisy - an admission, in effect, that it has been breaking its own animal protection laws by neglect. The federal government is presiding over a long, slow catastrophe, and is attempting to silence those best equipped to tell it so. A wise government would be working with these activists to resolve the problems they have been pointing to, not treating them, ludicrously, as enemies of the state.

Much the same could be said for the broader, yet covert, targets of this excessive, grandstanding and draconian legislation. A democracy is by definition a place where people have the right to express their opinions, whether or not those opinions are in accord with government policy, and where their rights to do so are protected, not circumscribed, by legislation. There are no guarantees whatsoever in this proposed legislation that it can and will not be used to violate Australians' rights to protest and to express opinions contrary to those of the government of the day on any matter upon which that government feels sensitive or ethically vulnerable. The proposed legislation is therefore undemocratic, un-Australian, and, in the severity of its proposed punishments, utterly out of proportion to the matters it claims to address.