

**Submission
No 160**

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

Name: Ms Kathryn Woolfe

Date Received: 30 September 2019

**SUBMISSION:
THE RIGHT TO FARM BILL 2019**

NSW is a state with a robust farming tradition, this has increased from the small, family farm, to the corporatisation of animal production, where animal welfare is subordinated to economic efficiency, and large-scale animal suffering. Unfortunately, NSW laws fail to provide adequate protection for farm animals.

I am opposed to the Free to Farm Bill as it targets whistle blowers, animal activists, concerned members of the public, and private landowners. Instead, of investigating the lack of protection for farm animals, and implementing Legislation to protect animals from mistreatment, combined with the need for transparency of the agribusiness industry in NSW. We need Animal Law Legislation and Reform which protects farm animals, not a Bill which closes the door on Reform, by creating a environment of secrecy and vilifying whistle-blowers

After careful perusal, I have reached the conclusion that the Right to Farm Bill is an aggressive attempt at hiding the truth about the lack of protection of animals in the agribusiness industry. I believe this is out of line with community expectations for animal welfare. There is also a serious concern that this Bill will have significant implications on civil liberties, including the right to peaceful protest and the ability of whistle-blowers to report animal cruelty.

The Bill will make aggravated trespass punishable by up to \$13,200- and 12-months imprisonment. Now, the maximum punishment is \$5,500 and no jail time. This is more than doubling the existing penalty.

The Bill will make an individual accused of aggravated trespass face up to a \$22,000 fine and up to 3 years imprisonment if they are in the company of two or more people.

The Bill also changes the definition of aggravated trespass to include “wilfully or negligently” releasing livestock.

There is no evidence that there is a need to increase punishment for farm trespass, or that this increase will deter trespassers. Previous attempts by the government to stifle whistle-blowers only led to more community concern regarding animal welfare.

I believe the Bill hides the truth from the general public/the consumers, who are entitled to know who and what their money supports.

This legislation raises public suspicions about the welfare of farm animals

If there is nothing to hide, why is this Bill necessary? There are other solutions.

Such as CCTV, spot checks by independent monitors for breaches in animal welfare, spot checks by the health department to monitor biosecurity risks, education in animal welfare, and punishment for those who abnegate their responsibilities to the animals in their care, this should apply to the farmer, and to the employees, as well as those who control the agribusiness conglomerates.

While the Bill focusses on the trespass threat posed by animal advocates, this is inconsistent with a statement by NSW Police last month that ‘the majority of trespass on rural properties was due to illegal hunting not animal activism.’

The Bill will prevent consumers from having access to information they want and need about what goes on behind closed doors in the animal agribusiness industry.

This affects every member of the community, it is a Bill put together with ignorance and arrogance, which turns the farming sector into an elite group above the law.

Consumers are becoming increasingly 'savvy' about the products they purchase, use and/or consume. We all want to know where it was produced, or manufactured, its use by date, list of ingredients, is it environmentally friendly etc. Therefore, we want to know what is happening to the animals in the agribusiness industry. We want the truth, just as we want to know about other products we purchase, we want information about meat, pork, dairy, chickens, eggs, and other farm animals/products before we make decisions about supporting the farm or corporation supplying them to our supermarket. Animal cruelty must never be allowed to occur on a farm, slaughter house, stockyard, or any agricultural facility. It should be zero tolerance, no excuses for the abuse of animals.

The community is concerned about animal welfare. We see this response in consumer demand for 'humane meat' and free range' etc, and the move towards 'plant based' products, the number of these products is rapidly increasing on supermarket shelves, and more people are transferring to plant based diets for ethical, health and environmental reasons. This Bill has the capacity to cause angst within our community, it is underhanded, and punishes those who support an ethical lifestyle, and are against animal cruelty, while it protects the perpetrators of mistreatment. It fails to include tougher farm animal cruelty legislation. This is a significant omission given the number of animals on sheep and cattle stations, as well as other grazing animals, and other feed lots, saleyards, slaughterhouses, battery hen facilities, piggeries, road transport. etc.

Five Freedoms

Freedom from thirst, hunger and malnutrition

Freedom to express normal behaviour.

Freedom from discomfort.

Freedom from fear and distress

Freedom from pain, injury or disease.

I fear the farming sector fails to guarantee the 5 Freedoms for ALL farm animals, and this non-adherence to these freedoms by the farming sector is the reason the Whistle-blowers, Animal Activists, NSW public, consumers, taxpayers and voters are concerned with regard to farm animal cruelty, neglect and lack of Duty of Care. The whistle-blowers and Animal Activists speak for all who care about farm animals, and the necessity of making the agribusiness industry transparent, instead of hiding it behind the closed doors of the Freedom to Farm Bill, and placing farm animals at risk of more of the animal atrocities we have all witnessed on social media, news broadcasts, media coverage, and articles by investigative journalists and Animal Welfare Organisations who were alerted and informed about these atrocities through the courage and footage of whistle-blowers.

Farmers and all those involved in the agribusiness industry are not above the law, they must be held accountable like any other organisation or business. The Freedom to Farm Bill removes all accountability, while, it tramples on the freedom to speak out against animal cruelty, and neglect of the billions of animals the industry depends on for its livelihood and financial gain.

Thank you for the opportunity of voicing my concerns

Kathryn Woolfe MSc.