

Submission
No 245

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

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LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE NO. 4 – INDUSTRY
Provisions of the Right to Farm Bill 2019

The Right to Farm Bill 2019 makes me feel very uncomfortable. I am quite stunned that the Government has taken such a targeted and bullying approach towards people trying to expose animal suffering and support the communities “Right to know” about the food they are consuming.

The Bill exemplifies why people who are concerned about animal suffering come onto farms to try and provide transparency to the Australian public, a nation of animal lovers, about what goes on behind closed doors. The Government is not concerned about animals. This entire Bill panders to protecting farmers and there is not one single mention about protecting animals. The ill treatment of animals is the basis of trespass, yet there are no mitigation strategies to address this. If Government really cared about farmers and trespass they would ensure “transparency in farming” was legislated.

I am 57 years old and it was only last year that I learnt about animal farming practices, thanks to information provided by animal activists. This information was never forthcoming from animal agriculture bodies, farmers, via supermarket packaging, marketing, media, education or government initiatives. I am ashamed that I lived my life so ignorantly, playing perfectly into the hands of marketers.

If there are no laws to protect farm animals, no transparency to inform consumers, no Government oversight for animals, then why do you think there is a groundswell of people being forced to “be active” to bring to light the suffering of animals?

Farmers are important, but the provision of food doesn't mean they can treat animals, including wildlife on their properties however they want to. The Government legislation for farmed animals is abysmal.

For years the public has been lulled into a false sense of security about farmer's being kind to animals. Due to activism people are waking up. Wouldn't it be a good idea to just be kinder to animals?

The Bill is back to front and is doing nothing to address the issues that lead to animal activism. On a practical level animals, the community and farmers would benefit if:

- an “Animal Welfare Commissioner” is appointed
- farms have CCTV camera's
- slaughterhouse workers are psychologically tested
- cruel farm practices are called out for what they are and stopped
- legislation is introduced to treat farmed animals with respect and dignity (instead of lawful cruelty)
- police were resourced appropriately to action animal welfare abuses rather than depending on a charity

Do you think animal activists enjoy exposing animal suffering? It is very traumatic for individuals who have empathy and compassion to endure this, but if our Government doesn't acknowledge that animals are sentient beings then what are the options? This Bill is a band aid solution, and provides no resolution for the issues at hand.

One must ask what processes are in place to monitor the treatment of farmed animals and to report to consumers so they can make informed choices? It seems that without the work of brave people trying to expose the poor and cruel conditions endured by animals in farm

sheds, feedlots and slaughterhouses, then nothing would ever be communicated to the public.

I consider this bill to be over reach for political gain. It demonizes people who care about animals, and considering so many people in Australia are animal lovers I find this quite compelling. It seems to be the Right to Farm Bill 2019 is a placatory tool used to pacify farmers and create a backlash against the “whistleblowers” rather than address the issues driving activists who also address the needs of the public.

I also feel that farmers are protected by our laws, more so than non-farming citizens. Why is it that farmers can lawfully do things to farmed animals which if done off their property to any other animal would be a criminal offence? The Right to Farm Bill should not provide carte blanche for secrecy, cruel farming practices and the destruction of wildlife. How about cruelty to farm animals attracting a \$22,000 fine and 3 years imprisonment, including people who tell others to be cruel to farm animals and wild life on the properties. Wouldn't that make more sense.

The question also arises as to what is being done about those that use the internet to boast about farm cruelty, animal abuses and animal farmers who direct staff to do inhumane things to animals? What are the consequences of these behaviours?

There is already adequate trespassing legislation in place without a discrete bill for animal activists. To me this appears to be bullying and intimidating a section of the community who already are up against it trying to break down the impenetrable bond between animal agriculture and Government.

“The Morrison government is committed to keeping Australian farmers and their families’ safe.”

The activities of animal activists have been sensationalised to promote fear and contempt in the minds of the general community i.e. invasion of family homes, green and domestic terrorists. Activists care about exposing the plight of ill-treated farm animals - animals in sheds - very far away from children in their beds.

Animal activists wear bio hazard clothing and carry camera's, and may knock down a fence post, but they just want to shoot footage. However, I am aware of farmers being harassed and intimidated by hunters trespassing on their land, with guns, and illegally shooting wildlife. Apparently, this is more of a problem for farmers, and rightly so, than animal activists trespassing. I know who would scare me the most. Why are animal activists with biosecurity clothing and cameras treated the same as illegal hunters who shoot guns on their property?

Animal activists are helping the public, they are doing the work of government by highlighting risks to animals and public health which would otherwise go unchecked.

A common complaint from farmers is the disconnect between animal farming and the “latte” sipping city dwellers. My impression is farmers actually value this disconnect so consumers will continue to purchase their products, contentedly unaware of the conditions in which the animals were raised and killed. If farmers are concerned about consumers being more connected with the animal farming practices then they would be more transparent and welcome public scrutiny.

The maligned Aussie Farms map is actually helpful in reducing this divide as most people would otherwise have no idea about nearby farms. This information can promote connections, for example teachers can ask to take children on tours to teach them first-hand

about animal agriculture. My father once asked me where all the farms are, and until Aussie Farms published the map I had no idea. He is 80 years old and found it to be a great resource, as he was unaware there was so much animal farming close by to where he has lived for 60 years. This is a source of useful information, not the evil map deigned as a threat to farmers. It is an informative map, which I personally found quite interesting as the farms are usually so well hidden you wouldn't even know they existed. Again, the secrecy. What is being hidden?

It seems to be a case of punish the messenger rather than addressing the issues at hand – animal cruelty for profit. If the focus was on stopping the terrible abuses inflicted on farm animals, currently done under a shroud of secrecy then that would be a step in the right direction. Nothing is being resolved by punishing the people in society who are looking out for sentient beings suffering a life of misery. This Bill is not only unfair to animal activists it disrespects the public generally and shows how far Government will go to support poor farming practices and the rights of farmers to treat their “products” with no accountability.

Farmers and Government do not have the right to target and intimidate animal rights activist as a means to deflect the suffering they inflict on animals hidden from the public eye. Farmers are not a law unto themselves. Being on private land does not give farmers the right to do whatever they want to animals and deny transparency to the public who have the right to know what goes on behind closed doors. What have they got to hide?

Overall, I find this Bill akin to school yard bullying, counter-productive and of no advantage to farmers, animals, activists, people who care about animal suffering or the community in general. Instead of putting CCTV camera's outside the farm sheds to monitor activists, why not put them inside the sheds, that way the activists don't have to.

“This Government is committed to addressing all of the risks posed by unsafe protest activities happening on farms including risks to farmers, their businesses, their animals, protesters and the public.”

Mr. Adam Marshall, 2nd reading speech

Please address the issue at hand. Stop cruelty to animals and animal suffering.