

**Submission
No 300**

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

Name: Mr Michael Powell

Date Received: 1 October 2019

Dear Committee,

I am writing to express my strong concern about the proposed **Right to Farm Bill 2019**. It has been reported that Schedule 2 of this Bill will effectively make it illegal to peacefully protest in a wide range of situations where citizens should be able to exercise the right to do so.

The punishments for entering enclosed lands without permission and for “hindering a business” have been increased to Draconian levels such that, in a very wide range of circumstances, no ordinary persons will be able to risk engaging in their fundamental right of protest.

People legitimately and peacefully protest about many issues of genuine concern to them. The appropriate site for such protests is very often enclosed in some way, or may quickly and cynically be made enclosed by the deployment of temporary fencing by Government authorities or private businesses. Apparently the proposed legislation only requires a defined boundary of some kind to fit the definition “enclosed”.

“Hindering a business” is also very broadly defined so that many kinds of protest which have previously been accepted as legitimate may be subject to severe penalties. It has long been an established tradition that activists may lock themselves to equipment or place themselves to block access roads etc. It is easily recognised that such actions in the distant past, such as the suffragettes chaining themselves to railings in their campaign for women’s right to vote, have been important in securing outcomes of unquestionable benefit and justice to society as a whole.

The lack of basic democratic rights in Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union provide potent examples of the horrific excesses that become possible in anti-Democratic regimes. Anzac Day speeches commemorating the sacrifices made in defence of our Democracy also highlight its fundamental importance to our nation and community.

Some of the larger scale issues of today, notably climate change, are of such importance to the health and safety of this and future generations that it could be seen as “criminal” to suppress the protests of ordinary people where a “business as usual” attitude in the corporate world will lead to disaster. The immediate financial interests of corporations must not be allowed to hinder democratic freedoms and processes.

I spent the first eleven years of my life on family mixed-farms in southern NSW, northern Victoria and then a dairy farm on the north coast of NSW. I remember the uncertainties and hardships my parents lived with and have sympathy for farmers subjected to the added risk of invasive protests. I also have sympathy for animals subjected to painful procedures that may be required for their own long term health or to achieve productivity in an industry where economic survival is very precarious.

This is a dilemma for the whole community. It is not uncommon for conflicting legitimate interests to need a long and frustrating process for their resolution. Peaceful protest, or at least the right to use it, is an essential component of that process.

Thank you for the opportunity to express my views.

Michael Powell