

Animals Tasmania Submission
on the
Productivity Commission Draft Report
into the
Regulation of Australian Agriculture

18 August 2016

ANIMALS
Tasmania

all animals, no exceptions.

www.animalstasmania.org.au

Introduction and Background

Animals Tasmania (AT) is an animal protection group based in Tasmania whose principal purpose is to advocate for better treatment of all animals in this state and beyond. We provide education to the public about ways to live as much as possible in harmony with all creatures both human and non-human. We respond to issues involving non-human animals through the various forms of media. We lobby government for better laws and regulations for non-human animals.

This submission is being provided to address some of Animals Tasmania's concerns with the Productivity Commission's Draft Report on the Regulation of Agriculture (PCDR) as it relates to 'animal welfare'. Added to the comments on the recommendations are more general expressions of our views for better care and protection for animals incarcerated in agricultural systems around Australia.

AT would prefer to see an immediate move away from animal agriculture and towards plant-based agriculture. We know this process has begun already as evidenced by the rise in vegetarianism in Tasmania and Australia.⁴ Although we realise this change will happen gradually, we value being part of making the change happen more quickly.

General Comments

Sentience

Non-human animals caught in the web of wide-scale industrial agriculture are the victims of centuries of wrongful thinking. There is a historical belief of biblical proportions that claims non-human animals were put on this planet for humans to dominate. That very early misconception has set in place a mindset that situates other species below our own in rankings of importance, intelligence, and so on.

Early thinkers claimed non-human animals were mere machines, automated 'things' that had no sense of feeling, no conscience, no thoughts, no soul. That idea was shared by many, perhaps for reasons of convenience more than any other. Anyone who has spent time in the company of a dog, horse, budgie or kangaroo would surely dispute such a claim. It becomes self-evident that such a claim is false, and there is a raft of scientific evidence that proves the contrary.

Many studies have been made to determine the existence of sentience in other species of animals. The scientific community now widely recognises that sentience does exist in many species. The Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness, signed in 2012 by a group of eminent international scientists, confirms that many animals are sentient.¹

The recognition of sentience is an acknowledgement that each animal is an individual with his or her own thoughts, desires, fears, pleasures, pains and so on.

They will avoid discomfort and search out pleasurable experiences.² A sentient animal is a being, just as humans are beings. They deserve our care, kindness and respect.

Rejecting Property Status

Another problematic notion that continues to plague other species is the idea that they are somehow the 'property' of humans. There is an overriding belief throughout the community that humans should have 'ownership' and 'possession' of other beings. This seems to be an almost total rejection of the concept of sentience, of recognising individuals as beings.

It is time we came to reject property status of individual animals. It is time we stopped thinking about animals as 'stock', as 'commodities', as 'possessions'. It is time we looked them in the eyes and saw them as the unique beings that they are.

Does Animal Welfare Work?

'Welfare improvements' in themselves are a contentious issue. They are essentially designed to lessen the suffering for the incarcerated beings, while at the same time bring economic benefits. They attempt to make the stress and suffering more bearable. Another way of looking at it is to say the incarcerated beings will experience a little less oppression and terror as a result of 'improvements'. The typical agricultural system is, by definition, based on fear and oppression.

No manner of 'welfare reforms' will change the fact that animals kept in systems of 'husbandry' are being exploited and are made to suffer needlessly. Products derived from non-human animals should be considered wholly unnecessary. This makes the systems that create the products unnecessary. And this makes any need for 'animal welfare' unnecessary.

Comments About Statements in Draft Report

The statement that "most Australians accept the rearing of animals for commercial purposes" is becoming an outdated idea. It appears to be an attempt to validate the act of incarcerating and exploiting other species purely for the benefit of humans. The 'acceptance' has derived from years of conditioning that begins in the home environment and continues through the school environment and into the work environment. But this is changing as awareness grows and more people ask questions.

Many more people each day are beginning to question if animals should be farmed for food and fibre. Very few people understand the true reality of where their food originates. The industries that profit from exploiting animals, for what they can provide in terms of flesh or fibre, would prefer that the truth remain hidden from the consuming masses.

Fortunately the truth of what is happening to the many millions who are exploited for their flesh, skin or other 'products' is becoming more widely known. Many people each day are waking up to the horrors of the suffering inflicted on millions of animals every day of their deprived miserable lives.

Animals may well be a "fundamental part of the livestock industry", but that comes from the definition of livestock. Livestock is taken to mean farmed animals, so they are fundamental in that the industry would not exist without them. Their 'outputs' may have been "basic elements" of a past food supply chain, but they do not need to comprise basic elements of our future food supply. Humans can and do live very healthfully with no animal products.

The notion of so-called "good animal management practices" serves to further entrench forms of animal exploitation. This is done by giving the impression of offering a 'cosy' life for the animals. This is merely what can be termed 'happy' exploitation and hides the reality of what is really happening. The term may also allude to the mythical concept of 'humane' slaughter. There is nothing humane about slaughter.

The notion that "evidence" should hold sway over "emotive reactions" is why many animals are currently suffering so despicably on farms. Humans often refuse to consider that other species might experience emotional and physical stress, discomfort, and pain. Yet the signs are there for anyone who cares to take a look and understand how to read them. Those who do will know that pigs contained in stalls and sheds are living a miserable life of severe deprivation. They know that hens shut in cages and sheds are deprived of almost all natural experiences and suffer deplorably. The large body of scientific literature that demonstrates the existence of emotions in non-human animals suggests the 'emotive' arguments are quite valid, so the evidence is there.²

Comments on Recommendations

5.1 Concept of Animal Welfare

The definition of 'animal welfare' makes reference to both physical and psychological aspects of well-being. In reality, how much account is actually made of both of these factors? Most agricultural producers seem content to ignore the compelling arguments for sentience of non-humans animals, and therefore deny much of the psychological and a large part of the physical. At this point the concept of 'animal welfare' (what we like to think of as 'animal well-being') is already starting to fail.

The very fact that the OIE definition talks about 'coping' suggests from the outset that it's not about doing what is best for these animals. They are not talking about them thriving, appearing contented, expressing behaviours that suggest pleasure or enjoyment. None of these things, just 'coping'. They are enduring the situation, and probably hoping for something better some day soon.

We would argue that most animals in agricultural systems are deprived of the ability to “express innate behaviour”, as used in the OIE definition of ‘animal welfare’. In the case of a pig, they would almost never be seen loping across an open paddock, or get a chance to build their own comfortable bed from grasses and other vegetation in their surrounds, or be able to roll around in a cooling wallow on a hot day. In the case of hens they would rarely be seen pecking at grubs in natural earth, scratching out a dust bath and then lying in it, or stretching their wings and flying up to roost in a tree. These are innate behaviours as noted by people who have taken the time to observe and understand these creatures. Most commercial agricultural systems seem to deny almost all innate behaviours.

Another problem with the OIE definition is the statement “indicated by scientific evidence”. This can be a problem where such ‘scientific evidence’ seeks to prove points about other species based on equivalent human traits. Clearly many species fail to match up with the human model in many respects (lack of speech, different response to stimuli, different pain thresholds, etc). This is why there is still a comfort among many farmers to keep other species in conditions that would be considered wholly unsuitable for the average dog or cat, let alone a human.

Many people have made the connection to other species and can recognise their ability to experience stress and to suffer mentally and physically. There is also ample scientific evidence to prove the existence of sentience in non-humans. To fully recognise the sentience of non-human beings and acknowledge their ability to not only suffer, but also to feel elation and pleasure, would bring into question the validity of most animal farming enterprises. Humans would no longer feel comfortable incarcerating others once they realise the harm they are causing.

There will never be good outcomes for animals while they are thought of as property. What will evolve over time is recognition of non-human animals as sentient beings in line with what is happening in other countries (e.g. New Zealand). We expect community attitudes to continue to change according to what is known of the sentient nature of farmed animals. This can only bring greater understanding of the need to move away from animal agriculture and towards plant-based agriculture.

5.2 A role for government in farm animal welfare?

Without regulations or standards, ‘animal welfare’ is only relevant to farming when it can be seen to improve profitability either through cost savings, higher yields, or better prices. Once the profitability declines it is no longer viable to increase welfare. This is where the OIE definition of ‘animal welfare’ would be abandoned. This is one role for government in the animal welfare argument. That role would be to set minimum standards that might otherwise be ignored because the profit margin suffers.

To regard mortality rate as a useful measure of ‘animal welfare’ proves that it is a concept designed to fit with human expectations, and not with the needs of the non-

humans. Assessing the rate of death as an indicator of well-being is not a measure that would be applied to humans. We are not going to allow humans to be exposed to something that causes them to start dying, at which time we decide to reduce the exposure so only a 'manageable' number of them die. However this is the approach taken with other species, because they are seen as 'lesser beings'. They are seen as 'sub-human' and their suffering is deemed to be less than ours as a result. Because they 'suffer less' they are then made to 'cope' with situations that are 'managed' so they are "not suffering from unpleasant states such as pain". This is far from ideal of course and it should be quite apparent that humans are inflicting these conditions on millions of animals every day.

The role of government should also be one of taking the position of role model and educator. They could be setting an example for the rest of society by advocating for food products that avoid harm to non-human animals and the earth, and are healthier for people. Animal products don't fit this description but most plant-based foods do. The government should be promoting food products that seek to eliminate animal suffering. At the same time they can be promoting products that offer a much more positive environmental outcome.³ The additional benefit of this approach is to reduce levels of ill health in the community by encouraging a diet that is proven to reduce risks of many chronic diseases.⁵ The role model component of this would be changing the menus in government institutions to reflect the new outlook. The educator component would be about providing a new range of literature and programs in schools and 'health' facilities to espouse the benefits of the new approach to eating.

5.3 Australia's animal welfare system

Many would argue that Australia's 'animal welfare' system is failing those it purports to 'protect'. Those who have been inside one of the many intensive farming operations and observed the routine abusive practices used will say the system is hugely inadequate. Dead and dying battery hens with barely a feather are trapped in cages, sick and injured pigs are locked in pens in filthy cold sheds, broilers with grotesquely deformed legs are unable to stand. These are familiar images for some people. These are routine examples of where the 'animal welfare' system is failing.

There is no logical sense to exclude "commercially farmed animals" from "over-arching anti-cruelty and duty of care standards" except for convenience and profit. The PCDR states: "The model codes of practice set different standards for the treatment of livestock compared with companion animals." They are all sentient beings, all with the ability to suffer, and to feel pleasure. Where is the evidence for why they should be treated differently? Clearly it all comes down to the 'use'. If there is money to be made then the standards are different. The status of animals as 'things' or 'possessions', enables this to happen. And clearly the status of a pig is way below that of a cat.

The animals that are commercially farmed are no less sentient than companion animals, or the many species of wildlife. To treat them differently because money

can be made from them is not sufficient reason. At least not for anyone who really cares about them.

A New Paradigm

We know from a recent Roy Morgan Research poll that the number of people moving to a plant-based diet in Australia is on the increase.⁴ The number of people who are almost or wholly vegetarian has risen from 9.7% to 11.2%, with predictions of further increases. This tells us something of what is happening with society as a whole. People are becoming more aware of the harmful effects of animal foods (for animal health, for human health, and for planetary health).

They are doing this because they find it abhorrent the way non-human animals are treated in agricultural systems and want to avoid further contributing to unnecessary harm. They have seen evidence of life inside factory farms and slaughterhouses and find it horrific. They realise by avoiding animal products that they also avoid the deaths of nearly 100 animals each year.

They are doing it because they are learning about the health values of a plant-based diet. The evidence is increasing about vegan diets being better for human health, and for avoiding chronic diseases like heart disease, cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure and more.⁵

The evidence of the damage humans have caused, and continue to cause, to our natural environment is getting through. The links between animal agriculture and global warming are too strong to ignore. The understanding is growing and many people now realise the need to do much more than change light-bulbs to 'save the planet'.³

So the new paradigm is upon us. We need to prepare for a future that recognises the place for plant-based foods in our lives. We can no longer ignore or deny the evidence that is telling us this is where we need to be heading. We all have a responsibility to 'think locally and act globally'. The new paradigm is one of respect for all life, and it values all creatures as equal.

References

1. Low, Philip '*The Cambridge Declaration on Consciousness*' (Paper presented at the Francis Crick Memorial Conference on Consciousness in Human and Non-Human Animals, Churchill College, July 7 2012)
2. Webster, John (2005) *Animal Welfare: Limping Towards Eden* (Universities Federation for Animal Welfare).
3. Goodland, R and Anhang, J (2009) *Livestock and Climate Change*, World Watch, www.worldwatch.org.
4. Roy Morgan Research (2016), *The slow but steady rise of vegetarianism in Australia*, Article No. 6923, <http://www.roymorgan.com/findings/vegetarianisms-slow-but-steady-rise-in-australia-201608151105>
5. Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (2005) *Vegetarian Foods: Powerful for Health*, Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, www.pcrm.org