

## SUPPLEMENTARY SUBMISSION

### REGULATION OF AGRICULTURE - PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION - DRAFT REPORT - AUGUST 2016

I thank the commission for considering my supplementary submission.

#### **Regulation of Farm Animal Welfare** (Chapter 5)

##### **Draft Recommendation 5.1**

*'Scientific principles' – industry should not fund research on animal welfare standards*

The draft report recommends that '... scientific principles [should] guide the development of farm animal welfare standards'. It is important that there is transparency in the funding arrangements for any scientific research on which those standards are based. There should be no bias.

Research therefore should not be funded by industry, but outsourced and independent. The dairy industry, for example, could then concentrate its research funds more usefully on sexed semen technology to avoid the slaughter of a million unwanted male bobby calves every year, and the egg industry could research how to sex male chicks before hatching so that countless millions aren't macerated live or gassed.

(SMH, 19.7.2016)

*My experience of dairy industry-funded research - time-off feed (TOF) standard for bobby calf transport*

Because of my 18 years' farm experience with bobby calves and their hunger before the twice-daily feed, I was very interested in this draft standard. In January 2011, I made a submission to Animal Health Australia on the Regulatory Impact Statement.

Below is an extract from my submission, where I contended that the 'science' was misleading. I wrote:

Dairy Australia commissioned a study by the University of Melbourne and the Animal Welfare Science Centre, which arrived at the 30 hour TOF - **but only by assuming good practice** in other areas of calf management. The RIS states:

This research indicates that the proposed standard is reasonable ... when combined with appropriate calf management and transport practices.

I argued that in real life you cannot assume that prior calf management on every farm and the calves' subsequent transport would always be 'appropriate'. To me it is not very 'scientific' to make the research conditional by having combined the result with 'uncertain' and variable management and transport practices. I further wrote:

Animals Australia commissioned the Centre for Animal Welfare and Ethics at the School of Veterinary Science at the University of Queensland to review the Melbourne University study.

The Animals Australia website states that the University of Queensland experts, Professor Clive Phillips and Dr Jim Hogan, pointed out serious methodological and interpretative flaws in the Melbourne university study: They concluded:

We do not agree with their conclusion that 30 h with good practice in other aspects of calf management and transport is defensible as an outer 'legal' limit for time off feed for bobby calves ... In particular we believe that the calves experienced hunger for the majority of the study and probably tiredness as well.

The RIS did not mention the University of Queensland review. The Animals Australia website at that time listed other problems with the Melbourne university study – amongst others that:

- The study is yet to be published and has thus not been 'peer reviewed'.
- There were only 50 calves in the study from a single well-run farm where the workers were aware an animal welfare study was occurring ... In commercial practice, transported bobby calves are likely to be more vulnerable than the ones in the study.

I was not alone in being very disappointed when the 30 hours TOF standard was established - based on 'science'. I have seen for myself how hungry young calves are after a few hours without milk. I do not see how community expectations or values were met in that case.

### **Information Request 5.1**

I have faith that the animal welfare groups that make submissions to the draft report will provide more expert feedback than I can on the governance structure, responsibilities and funding of a much-needed independent statutory office of animal welfare.

### **Processes to inform and gauge community values on farm animal welfare**

A key point in the draft report says that little is known about community expectations.

To some extent we can gauge community expectations by the way people are increasingly making donations to animal welfare organisations so that investigators can shine light into the dark corners of all facets of animal-based production, including in far-flung live export destinations. Without regular donations, these organisations would not be able to monitor and investigate. (This, of course, is something the government and industry have failed to honour as part of their 'social licence' to operate.)

So the above demonstrates that in the absence of government and industry action, the community is increasingly prepared to keep putting its hard-earned cash into animal organisations that are dedicated to the protection of animals.

Social media also provides a good insight into what people are talking about. For example, the Facebook pages of animal welfare organisations show how many people are keeping abreast with animal welfare.

For example, Animals Australia currently has 1,376,208 Facebook 'Likes'; RSPCA; 268,496; Voiceless, 38,248; and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals in Australia (PETA), 41,072, to name a few. (The US Facebook page for PETA has over 4.368 million likes.) These 'Likes' are all spiralling upwards.

The trend towards cruelty-free products is obvious

Large corporations (Coles, Woolworths, Subway, Hungry Jacks, et al) have taken note of this trend and of the community expectation that farm animals should have decent lives by phasing out cage eggs and sow stalls and seeking higher welfare animal products.

Industry and regulators are out of step with community expectations and with the advances in new plant-based food technologies that avoid all the welfare problems associated with the production of animals for food.

### **Biosecurity (Chapter 7) Shooting the messenger**

So while corporates respond to community expectations about cruelty-free food, the farming industry, some MPs, and government departments have a 'shoot the messenger' attitude to media revelations of animal cruelty or abusive practices.

As I said, the reason I (and myriad others) donate money for animal welfare organisations to investigate animal abuse is that the community has lost faith in the government to apply the same diligence to the task. The activities of animal advocates have brought about major improvements in animal welfare and enabled the community to make informed choices about the products they buy.

However, some parliaments have had bills introduced to thwart animal advocates from gathering information about animal abuse. These are termed 'ag-gag' laws.

For example, federally, Senator Back introduced the *Criminal Code Amendment (Animal Protection) Bill 2015*, which lapsed at the prorogation of parliament in April 2016. In February 2016 in South Australia the Surveillance Devices Bill passed both houses. A previous bill in 2014 was defeated following community outcry about animal welfare. In April 2016 the South Australian Greens introduced an amendment bill to protect animal advocates and clarify that animal welfare issues are within the public interest. I understand the amendment bill has yet to be debated.

The second-reading debates of these bills, which are available on SA and federal parliamentary websites, would provide a useful resource for the commission.

### **Information request 7.1**

I believe the existing laws on trespass are adequate and sufficiently enforced. The best strategy to discourage trespass is to remove the motivation and to have transparency in agricultural industries so that the community is confident that farm animals are treated humanely. If animals are well treated, industry should have nothing to hide.