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## **Submission to the National Food Plan**

### **Introduction**

Vegan Australia supports the concept of a National Food Plan and compliments the Minister on the initiative.

Vegan Australia is a non-profit national organisation that aims to promote veganism to the broader Australian public. Vegan Australia envisions a world where all animals live free from human use and ownership. Compassion is the foundation of Vegan Australia - compassion towards animals, people and the earth. Vegan Australia believes that the starting point for people to put this compassion into action is to become vegan and to encourage others to become vegan.

Vegan Australia notes that the Green Paper does not include any significant mention of animals and where it does it treats animals simply as resources to be exploited. Missing entirely from the paper is any acknowledgment of the rights of animals. There is now a growing body of scientific evidence indicating that animals feel emotions, such as pain and pleasure. Vegan Australia believes that the government has a responsibility to uphold the rights of all sentient beings, both humans and other animals.

We also note that the Green Paper emphasises the marketing opportunities for selling animal products, sugar and processed food to the growing Asian middle class. Vegan Australia urges the government not to promote the export of cruel and unhealthy foods to other countries. The focus of the National Food Plan should be on providing healthy, fresh, organic plant-based wholefoods to Australians and the world. The plan should put population health, environmental health, human and animal suffering above economic considerations.

We need a National Food Plan that presents to the Australian public a convincing vision of food and farming systems that both meets all the nutritional needs of humans and also respects other animals in allowing them to live free of human intervention. The Plan must recognise that animals are not simply commodities produced for export and profit and that humans do not have the right to own or use them in any way.

Vegan Australia has previously made the following submissions:

- National Food Plan, September 2011
- Australian Dietary Guidelines, February 2012,

Both of these are available here:

<http://www.vegansocietynsw.com/vs/html/submissions.html>

## **Background**

Vegan Australia submits that

- Sentient animals value their own life and body and have an interest in continuing their existence and avoiding suffering.
- Animals have the right to be treated with respect and justice and not to be treated as property.
- Production of animal products necessarily results in suffering or death of animals.
- Humans have no need for any animal products and in particular are able to live healthily on a vegan diet.
- Many people who adopt a nutritious vegan diet will enjoy significant health improvements by reducing the risk of major killers such as heart disease, stroke, cancer and diabetes.
- Raising and processing of animals for food is a major cause of environmental damage, including land degradation, water shortage, deforestation, ocean degradation, air pollution and climate change.
- Veganism is an ethical response to many urgent social justice issues. The negative consequences of animal production impact heavily on the poor, the disempowered and the hungry.
- Humans should reduce the harm caused indirectly to animals due to the extraction of natural resources, transportation, development and other human activities as much as possible including harm due to agriculture.

With regard to animals used for food, Vegan Australia argues that firstly, humans do not need to consume meat or any animal products to live an optimally healthy life and, secondly, any method for taking animal food products necessarily involves suffering of the individual animal and usually her early death. Animal production is both unnecessary and against the interests of animals and therefore Vegan Australia proposes that animal production be eliminated. The National Food Plan should support this by setting a goal of 20 years for the end the use of animal agriculture systems.

With proper education this scheme will gain widespread approval. Surveys show that currently 99% of Australians are against unnecessary cruelty to animals. Australians already have the basic belief that it is wrong to harm animals. Most Australians do not act on this belief because they have been led to believe that it is unhealthy, inconvenient or not acceptable to consume a vegan diet. With government education and support for a vegan food industry, Australians will be able to put into action this basic belief that it is wrong to inflict unnecessary suffering and death on animals.

### **Issues not covered in this submission**

Environmental and health benefits of a vegan agricultural system and a vegan diet are mentioned briefly here, but will be covered by other submissions and so will not be elaborated.

Animal agriculture is a disaster for the environment because it involves a most inefficient use of natural resources. It consumes many times more water than equivalent plant agriculture, is an inefficient use of land and causes soil erosion. Animal wastes pollute the oceans and rivers and create huge health risks. UN studies in 2006

show that the livestock sector generates more greenhouse gas emissions than transport. Later studies by the Worldwatch Institute estimate that over 50% of greenhouse gas emissions come from animal agriculture.

The negative impact on human health due to the consumption of animal products is huge. Some of the chronic and degenerative diseases that have been shown to be associated with animal products include obesity, heart disease, hypertension, diabetes, cancer, osteoporosis, Alzheimer's disease, high cholesterol, cataracts, arthritis, and inflammatory bowel syndrome. A vegan diet protects us from many of these diseases.

It's a widely held belief that people need animal products for survival and good health, even though there are many long-time vegans who are very often healthier than the meat-eating majority. Because our economy is largely based on animal exploitation, the large animal industry has been very successful in convincing people that animal products are a dietary necessity. However, we now know that eating a wide variety of food from the four food groups (grains, legumes, vegetables and fruit) leads to a much healthier outcome.

## **Social justice issues**

The production and consumption of animal products causes many social justice issues.

As Prime Minister Julia Gillard said "food security is one of the most difficult and pressing challenges facing the world." She also said that "population growth and scarce land and water are intensifying pressures on food security. The challenge is simply huge. Global production will need to increase by 70 per cent by 2050 to feed an expected global population of 9.3 billion people."

## **Human hunger and malnutrition**

*"Every day forty thousand children die in the world for lack of food. We who overeat in the West, who are feeding grains to animals to make meat, are eating the flesh of these children." - Thich Nhat Hanh*

Over 20 million people will die this year as a result of malnutrition and approximately one billion people, mostly rural women and children, suffer chronic hunger. A lot of food that is currently fed to animals could instead be used to feed the world's hungry people directly. To produce just one kilogram of beef protein, it takes at least seven kilograms of grain and other plant protein to be fed to a cow. Eighty percent of starving children live in countries that actually have food surpluses - the children remain hungry because farmers use the surplus grain to feed animals instead of people.

## **The environment and human rights**

Animal production is a major cause of environmental destruction, including global warming. In all countries, a healthy environment is a pre-condition for the enjoyment of many human rights, such as life, health, and wellbeing. Global warming will have most impact on countries which are already suffering in terms of human rights and hunger.

## **Lack of fresh water**

Fresh water is becoming a scarce resource and is used to excess for the production of animal products. The lack of fresh water is a major cause of disease transmission, especially amongst the poor.

## **The rights of indigenous people**

Major causes of deforestation are growing cattle for meat and growing crops to feed farmed animals. Deforestation is often in areas occupied by indigenous people and their rights are likely to be ignored.

## **Conflict**

As the environment degrades there will be more conflict between nations for access to natural resources such as fresh water and food. Those most affected by these resource wars will be the powerless and the poor.

## **Violence**

The effect of the normalising of violence towards non-human animals on acts of violence towards humans has been the subject of some scientific research. For example, the article *Vegan Diet Impacts California Prison*, says that the results of adopting a vegan diet were "amazing".

## **Working conditions**

Human Rights Watch states that working at a slaughterhouse is "the most dangerous factory job in America". Slaughterhouse workers suffer from illness or injury many times more than workers in other manufacturing jobs.

## **Animal rights**

The idea of animal rights is simple. The most basic right is the right to not be owned by someone else, not to be property.

This right should be conferred on all sentient beings. To be sentient is to be capable of perception or feeling. Sentient humans and non-humans feel sensations of pain, pleasure and so on. A sentient being has interests. For instance, the capacity for sentient beings to feel pain provides them with a clear interest in not feeling pain.

A property owner treats their property as a resource and, in most cases, can treat their property as they please. This right of the owner is sanctioned by law. The "owned" has no rights under law. This holds even when the property is a sentient being - they have no rights under law. The economic interests of the property owner always outweigh the interests of the property, even when this interest is to avoid suffering, to be free from exploitation or even, simply, to live.

We believe that the right of non-human animals not to be owned should be recognised by law. As long as animals are considered property both in law and mainstream opinion they will never be free from exploitation.

A further analysis of animal rights is given below, adapted from an article by the Boston Vegan Association.

Most people believe that it would be wrong for a person to maim or kill a cat out of anger. They would also be revolted by someone who burned a dog for the sake of enjoyment. Generally speaking, people agree that because harming these animals in such ways is unnecessary, the above actions are unjustified.

The belief that harming cats and dogs in these ways is unjustified stems from the understanding that they are sentient beings - that is, beings who feel pleasure and pain, and who have interests in avoiding suffering and in continuing to live. Most people agree that their interest in not being harmed should not be ignored merely to satisfy our comparatively trivial interests (such as our interest in pleasure).

This belief compels us reject the consumption of animal products because of the following three ideas, taken together:

1. *There is no morally significant difference between dogs and cats and other animals.*

It is wrong to harm a cat or dog without good reason because they are sentient beings whose interest in not being harmed should not be ignored merely to satisfy our trivial interests. This same reasoning applies equally to every sentient being, including cows, pigs, birds, and fish, all of whom also have an interest in not being harmed. So the belief about cats and dogs means that we should avoid harming any sentient animal merely for purposes of convenience or pleasure.

2. *Consuming animals and their products causes harm to animals.*

In all but the most extraordinary circumstances, animals cannot be used by humans without being harmed. An example (which is only one of many) will help make this point clear. To produce cows' milk for human consumption, it is standard to artificially inseminate cows, keeping them pregnant and lactating as continuously as possible. Within about 24 hours of being born, calves are separated from their mothers, a traumatizing experience for both the cows and their babies. Calves are often slaughtered for veal at around 3-18 weeks of age. After less than 4 years, after giving birth to three or four babies, the cows are no longer able to produce enough milk to be considered profitable and nearly all of them are slaughtered for consumption.

Harms like these are essentially unavoidable when animals are used for food production.

3. *Consuming animals and their products serves only our trivial interests.*

In order for it to be the case that consuming animal products does more than serve our trivial interests, we must have some need to consume them. For instance, from a health standpoint, it must be necessary to consume animals or animal products. But this is simply not the case. The American Dietetic Association states that appropriately planned vegan diets are "healthful, nutritionally adequate, and may provide health benefits in the prevention and treatment of certain diseases." Similar statements have been produced by Australian and Canadian dietetic associations. Humans simply do not need to consume animals. As such, the interests we serve by consuming them can be fairly described as trivial (such as the interest in experiencing pleasure).

Taken together, these three facts reveal that the basic belief held by most people compels them to reject the consumption of animal products. Consuming animals and their products harms animals merely to satisfy our trivial interests. If we agree that harming animals for our trivial interests is wrong, then we must seek to abolish the consumption of animals for food.

## **Transitioning to a vegan agricultural system**

Once we have accepted that the use and consumption of animals must be phased out, the question is then how best should we do this.

The green paper clearly states the government's intention to maintain a Research and Development system. Vegan Australia recommends that the government invests in research into large-scale vegan agricultural systems for Australian conditions. This should include research into pests, diseases, weed control and soil fertility in a fully stock free and organic agricultural system. There should also be research to develop the science of crop rotation and green manures to improve soil fertility and how this applies to all agricultural sectors, including vegetable production, cereals and fruit trees.

Stockfree farming is an agricultural system which uses no animal inputs, synthetic chemical pesticides, genetically modified organisms, and minimal fossil fuels. Apart from the fact that no animals are used in the process, stockfree farming has a number of other benefits. It reduces the reliance in external inputs. It makes more land available to grow food as well as allowing some land to be returned to native growth. It improves biodiversity and soil structure. It produces less pollution and is more sustainable.

Reduced tillage systems used in stockfree organic farming help to maintain potentially the greatest carbon reservoir on earth – the soil. Exposing the soil to air, usually when it is ploughed, results in organic matter being lost to the atmosphere as CO<sub>2</sub>. Undisturbed soil, sown with a green manure, and with a thriving microbial ecosystem, locks up CO<sub>2</sub> from the air, helping reduce atmospheric levels. Minimal cultivation reduces fossil fuel use.

A transition to a non-animal farming system is urgent, before resource-intensive agriculture fails due to the end of cheap oil and phosphates, limited water and arable soils, and climate change. Sustainable low-input farms are key to permanently and securely feeding us all.

## **Recommendations**

- The government should invest in research into large-scale vegan agricultural systems for Australian conditions. See section above "Transitioning to a vegan agricultural system".
- The government should ensure all Australians have equal access to affordable and adequate fresh fruits and vegetables and other plant foods irrespective of income, including those living in regional and remote communities.
- Health and medical authorities should educate the Australian public about the health benefits of vegan diets and support people in adopting vegan diets. Official dietary advice should reflect a sustainable balanced vegan diet e.g.

PCRM's Power Plate. They should also implement behaviour change campaigns to facilitate a rapid transition to a sustainable and compassionate vegan diet.

- Animal production industries in Australia receive millions of dollars of tax funded government subsidies. Governments should remove these subsidies and assist the farming industry to move towards stock-free, plant-based farming. The full realistic cost of meat and other animal products should be passed on to consumers, such as in Japan, where meat is not subsidised and yet health levels are high.
- The governments should set targets for the reduction and eventual elimination of the production of animal products on ethical and environmental grounds.
- Health and medical authorities should commit to targets for the reduction and eventual elimination of the consumption of animal products on health and disease risk grounds.
- Government should introduce a maximum greenhouse gas intensity of foods, with products in excess of the standard to be removed from sale and introduce taxes on the sale of the remaining greenhouse intensive foods.
- Government should include agriculture in greenhouse gas emission schemes. This would have the effect of penalising the animal industries for excessive production of global-warming gasses.

Thank you for considering this submission.

Yours sincerely,

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