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Submission to the Productivity Commission public inquiry into the regulation of Australian agriculture

Vegan Australia is pleased to have the opportunity to provide a submission to the Productivity Commission public inquiry into regulations that have an impact on the productivity of agriculture.

Vegan Australia is a national organisation that educates the public about animal rights and veganism and also presents a strong voice for veganism to government, institutions, corporations and the media. Vegan Australia envisions a world where all animals live free from human use and ownership. The foundation of Vegan Australia is justice and compassion, for animals as well as for people and the planet. The first step each of us should take to put this compassion into action is to become vegan and to encourage others to do the same.

Vegan Australia believes that this inquiry into the regulation of agriculture is an opportunity to reflect on our use of animals in the agriculture industry. It is an opportunity to consider alternative ways that land can be used, putting an end to the unnecessary suffering and killing of farmed animals.

It is important to emphasise that farmed animals suffer pain and their lives extinguished to produce products that are not necessary for human wellbeing. All these products, including those for food and clothing, can be replaced by plant-based products.

Concerns about the terms of reference

The agriculture sector is an important part of the Australian economy and Vegan Australia supports the goals of reducing unnecessary regulatory burdens and pursuing regulatory objectives in more efficient ways. However, Vegan Australia is concerned that the terms of reference of this inquiry put undue emphasis on economic considerations to the expense of other factors, such as environmental benefits and human and animal welfare. Short term productivity gains to farm businesses must not override long term benefits to the wellbeing of the community as a whole.

We note that in general the Productivity Commission works in the long term interest of the Australian community and looks at economic, social and environmental issues affecting the welfare of Australians. This perspective must also be applied to the current inquiry, taking into account concerns of public interest, justice and compassion and not just economic efficiency.

Animal welfare

Animal welfare legislation came about in Victorian era England when forward-thinkers concluded that animals should not be treated as mere property. The understanding that animals can think and feel and suffer was codified into law. This understanding has been held by most people since the dawn of humanity and is reinforced by scientific evidence of the emotional lives of animals. Since that time, there has been remarkably little progress. Farmed animals are still treated as mere property, not as individual sentient beings, and the lives of most farmed animals are worse today than were the lives of the animals that inspired early animal welfare laws.

Meanwhile we have seen rapid improvements in the lives of companion animals; they are, now more than ever, considered as members of the family. This disparity, not only in attitudes, but also in law, is troubling. What makes the life of a dog more valuable than that of a pig? What makes the life of a cat more valuable than that of a cow? The answers to these questions are usually found in culture, but is it really reasonable that sentient, emotional animals suffer and die because of our cultural inconsistencies?

Many of our answers to the below questions raised by the inquiry reject the underlying assumption of the question. We believe that animal protection legislation should do just that: protect animals. Only considering the benefits to the (human) community or industry misses that point. The fact that legislation allows heinous cruelty in the name of productivity demonstrates the power of animal agriculture industries, and the insufficiency of the animal welfare paradigm for farmed animals.

Do existing animal welfare regulations (at the Australian and state and territory government levels) efficiently and effectively meet community expectations about the humane treatment of animals used in agriculture production?

Animal welfare regulations are in place to ensure that community expectations for the humane treatment of animals are met. Vegan Australia represents a growing number of Australians who believe that the use of animals in agriculture is not justified at all. We have observed the failure of animal welfare regulation to protect farmed animals from even the most extreme forms of cruelty.

The documentary *Lucent*, produced by the organisation Aussie Farms, shows the horrendous conditions in which pigs are kept in this country. Every stage of the life cycle of these animals is dominated by tremendous suffering; and yet, all of the conditions shown in the documentary are common legal practice. We urge any reader of this document to watch *Lucent*, available for free on Youtube, to learn the reality of pork and bacon, and understand the failures of animal welfare regulation.

Pigs are not alone in their mistreatment. Every species of farmed animal undergoes unnecessary cruelty and suffering.

- Restriction of movement is common for all farmed animals, and a permanent state for many.
- Routine mutilations, often performed without anaesthetic, are standard practice in all animal agriculture contexts; despite what is commonly argued by defenders of the industries, these mutilations are not for the benefit of the animals, but to

- allow for increased profitability.
- Many animals endure forced separation of mother and child; dairy cows, in particular, form very strong bonds with their children, but their calves are taken from them as it is unprofitable to allow the calf to suckle the cow's milk.
- Animals sent to slaughter are crammed onto trucks and spend extended periods of time without food and water; the problems are compounded in the summer heat. Pregnant animals in these conditions often give birth due to the stress; as slaughterhouses cannot take the very young, it falls upon the truck drivers to humanely kill the newborns. As is understandable, these truck drivers are often reticent to do so; as a result, many newborn animals are dumped on the side of the road and left to die from dehydration or predation.
- Stunning is not always effective, particularly at the high speed that slaughterhouse workers are expected to work at. As a result it is not uncommon for animals to be slaughtered while partly or fully conscious.

It is the sincere view of Vegan Australia that, if community expectations were met, none of these practices would occur, let alone be commonplace. Instead the industry makes efforts to conceal the reality of the life of Australian farmed animals, projecting images of happy animals that just can't wait to be killed and eaten. While this fantasy is thinly veiled, it is enough to maintain the harmful norm of the consumption of animal products in our society.

Do animal welfare regulations materially affect the competitiveness of livestock industries, and, if so, how?

Vegan Australia believes that animal protection legislation should not be focused on the competitiveness of livestock industries; rather the primary concern should, tautologically, be the protection of animals. Current animal welfare legislation fails to protect farmed animals from cruelty, except in those cases where the cruelty would also substantially diminish productivity.

The abolition of livestock industries in Australia need not hamper Australia's overall agricultural productivity. Vegan Australia is conducting research into what would be required to shift Australia to a vegan agricultural system. See Reference 10.

What are the reform priorities for animal welfare regulations, if any, and have recent reforms, for example in relation to the ESCAS, delivered net benefits to the community?

Vegan Australia rejects the framing of this question. By focusing solely on the net benefits to the community, this inquiry entirely misses the *raison d'être* of animal protection legislation. While this legislation is written as a result of pressure by the community (and often opposed by industry groups), it comes as the result of an understanding, within the community, that animals should not be subjected to undue suffering. Therefore we submit that the measure of success of animal protection legislation is the delivery of net benefits to animals, rather than the community.

Given this understanding we can see that animal protection legislation, particularly in the context of farmed animals, is failing, and ESCAS is a prime example of this.

ESCAS requires the tracking of animals subject to live export, and slaughter in approved

facilities, but this does not prevent significant cruelties from occurring. The live export process, even under perfect conditions, is unfathomably stressful to the animals, so much so that animals frequently die in transit.

The live export industry does not, however, exist under perfect conditions. As such, the horrific experiences of animals enduring live exported are compounded by human error and mechanical failure. Vegan Australia does not support ESCAS and urges the termination of the cruel and unnecessary live export trade.

What are the costs and benefits of national animal welfare standards? Are there any barriers to implementing national standards?

Vegan Australia fears that, while the political power of the animal agriculture industry remains high, national animal welfare standards will do little to improve the plight of animals in Australia. Under the current system, the ACT government has passed legislation to improve farmed animal welfare in that state. While this still falls well short of the real animal protection legislation that Vegan Australia believes is necessary, it serves as a demonstration of improvements that would likely not take place under national welfare standards.

As has been repeatedly made clear, the current federal government, through its Agriculture Minister Barnaby Joyce, has very little regard for calls to improve the lives of farmed animals. While animal protection legislation remains under the purview of the Department of Agriculture, it remains very unlikely that improvements to the lives of animals would result if national standards were adopted.

As such, we believe that any animal protection legislation enacted at a national level must be a minimum standard only. Any national standard that would reduce the already weak standards of animal protection, in any state or territory, would be unacceptable.

Are animal welfare regulations appropriately enforced?

No. We have seen sufficient evidence that all enforcement agencies, in all states, fail to enforce animal welfare regulations -- even at their current, weak level.

One glaring example of this is the case of Wally's Piggery in 2012. After activists filmed extreme cruelty at the piggery, it was subject to a raid by police and RSPCA officials. 53 charges were laid against the owners of the piggery, however, despite having substantial evidence of many breaches of law, these charges were later dropped. To make matters worse, while these charges were before the courts, Wally's Piggery was allowed to continue operations, during which time activists filmed evidence that this cruelty was continuing.

This case, a rare case where charges are laid for cruelty instead of cruelty being ignored, demonstrates the shocking disregard for farmed animals in our justice system. Animal welfare legislation is not only unbelievably weak, it is also rarely enforced by our police and the RSPCA, and when it is, it is very rare for a perpetrator to be punished appropriately for their crime.

The environment and land use

One of the goals of regulation is the protection of the environment. In this case, we believe that regulations should be strengthened to protect the environment for future generations. One of the best ways to do this is to phase out of animal agriculture. Some of the impacts on the environment of doing this would be:

- reducing and reversing Australia's contribution to global warming
- revegetation of large area, including forest regrowth
- restoring habitat, increasing biodiversity and reducing species extinctions
- reducing water use, making more water available for crops and allowing river systems to recover
- reducing soil loss and degradation
- reducing pollution from intensive feeding operations
- reducing pressure on native forests
- restoration of marine environment
- helping save the Great Barrier Reef

See Reference 11 for more on the impact of an animal-free agricultural system on the environment and land use.

One specific recommendation we propose is to alter the conditions of pastoral leases to remove restrictions on alternative activities such as tourism, horticulture and carbon sequestration. This is to allow for the permanent removal of grazing animals from the land and the restoration of vegetation.

Finally, we must improve regulations protecting plant agriculture from urban expansion around cities.

Justification for phasing out animal agriculture

Production of animal products necessarily results in the suffering and/or death of individual animals. Humans have no need for any products from animals, including for meat, milk or leather. Since there are non-animal based alternatives to all these products, the breeding, raising, using and killing of animals is not necessary for humans to live.

Vegan Australia believes that the pleasure of taste of the flesh or milk of a animal and the utility of other animal products do not outweigh the pain, suffering and death caused to individual animals that is part of the production of these products. No reforms to regulations will be enough to change this.

We base this view on the well accepted scientific principles that animals are sentient, that humans have no need for any animal products and that the animal industries are having a significant negative impact on the environment.

First, animals are sentient, emotional and social beings. Sentience means they are aware of their physical and social environment, they are able to feel fear, pain and distress as well as happiness and pleasure.

Farmed animals have emotions and needs just as human beings do. They react emotionally to their own achievements and are self-aware. Many are capable of using the same system as humans to remember and respond emotionally to individuals in their absence.

The Victorian Department of Primary Industries states that "all livestock species (and fish) have the necessary brain structures and nervous system to allow them to feel pain and suffer". In addition "all livestock species are capable of comprehending and desiring pleasurable experiences."

Second, humans have no need for any animal foods and are able to live healthily on a vegan diet. There is clear evidence of not only the health benefits of a well-balanced vegan diet, but of the significant health costs of consuming animal products. 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.

Third, 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. The standard ignores the costs to the environment of this industry, including to soils, waterways, forests and native vegetation.

Together these principles suggest that the regulations should give guidance on how to eliminate the animal agriculture industry and replace it with an industry based on compassion for animals, people and the earth.

Summary

The aims of Vegan Australia are to help bring about a world where all animals live free from human use and ownership. In the context of this inquiry, we propose that regulations be modified so that animal farming is phased out over the next 10 years and plant farming and alternative industries are encouraged.

We are aware that the phasing out of animal agriculture may impact the economy, employment, land use, food security, environment and other areas. We have begun research into how any negative impacts can be minimised and alternatives investigated. This research can be found [in Reference 10](#).

Here is a quote from the research into the economy and employment: "In summary, we have determined that the production value of the animal agriculture industry is about 1.2% of GDP, it exports about 7% of total exports, and employs 1-2% of the Australian workforce. As can be seen from these three measures, animal agriculture is a relatively small part of the modern Australian economy."

We would be happy to provide more details, should the Commission request this.

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Vegan Australia

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