

1 October 2019

Chair
Legislative Council Portfolio Committee No.4 - Industry
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Via email: portfoliocommittee4@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Committee Members

Right to Farm Bill 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the *Right to Farm Bill 2019*.

The RSPCA does not support any kind of illegal activity in the pursuit of animal welfare objectives. We believe such activities are divisive and ultimately counterproductive to the mission of securing better protections for animals.

While law and order responses may be necessary to curb the excesses of activist behaviour, we believe sufficient laws already exist in NSW for this purpose. We also believe it is necessary to look beyond law and order measures and consider what is driving such behaviour in the first place.

Activism does not occur in a vacuum. Increasing incidents of protests of various forms against the treatment of animals in farming is a growing trend witnessed throughout the developed world and it is showing no signs of slowing. There are broader social and cultural issues at play here that must be acknowledged if we are to develop a truly effective strategy for protecting the future of animal agriculture.

Recent research commissioned by the federal Department of Agriculture - [Australia's Shifting Mindset on Farm Animal Welfare](#) - found that 95% of Australians are concerned about farm animal welfare and 91% want to see reform to address it. The report found that failing to respond to these concerns will accelerate eroding levels of community trust and confidence in animal agriculture and the Australian Government's performance in regulating acceptable welfare standards. Low levels of trust also give rise to increasing levels of protest and activism as we have seen recently. This was foreshadowed by rural sociologists Parbery and Wilkinson in their 2012 report for Agriculture Victoria - *Victorians' Attitudes to Farming*.¹

Governments across Australia must look more broadly at initiatives designed to build community trust and confidence in animal agriculture. Evidence shows that investment in

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¹ P Parbery and R Wilkinson (2012) *Victorians' Attitudes to Farming*, Department of Primary Industries, Victoria.



improving livestock welfare standards and transparency in production practices is an effective means of achieving this.

The study 'Opening the Doors to Agriculture: The Effect of Transparent Communication on Attitude', suggested that transparent communication between the livestock industry and the wider community was likely to result in more favourable attitudes towards farming, especially amongst the millennial generation.² By contrast, another study found that community awareness about laws that endeavour to restrict information about animal agricultural practices have been found to erode trust in farmers.³ The reduction in trust observed was as pronounced amongst initially trusting demographic categories (i.e. rural, omnivores) as it was among least trusting groups (i.e. urban, vegetarians) and was found to ultimately increase support for regulations aimed at protecting farm animal welfare.

Government has a significant role to play in promoting transparency and building trust by ensuring robust animal welfare compliance monitoring systems are in place and that there is public reporting on compliance activities to provide assurances to the community that appropriate standards are being met.

Improving animal welfare standards in line with community expectations and stronger compliance monitoring should be embraced by Government and seen as an investment in future-proofing livestock and other animal industries against changing community expectations and the increasing levels of scrutiny that follows.

We encourage Committee Members to look beyond the provisions of the Bill in this inquiry and to investigate the broader context for why the Bill is deemed necessary. Why is there an increase in the levels of animal activism in Australia? What is the state of animal welfare in livestock agriculture? To what extent do our standards of livestock husbandry meet mainstream community expectations about animal welfare? How much are State, Territory, and Federal Governments actually investing in improving animal welfare standards and compliance monitoring to ensure appropriate standards are being met, and to what extent is this being communicated to the Australian public to provide assurances?

We hope our submission has been of assistance to the inquiry. Please do not hesitate to contact our office should you require any further information.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Bidda Jones'.

Dr Bidda Jones
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² J.N Rumble & T Irani, '[Opening the Doors to Agriculture: The Effect of Transparent Communication on Attitude](#)', *Journal of Applied Communications*, 100, 2, (2016), 57-72.

³ J.A Robbins, B Franks, D.M Weary, M.A.G von Keyserlingk, '[Awareness of ag-gag laws erodes trust in farmers and increases support for animal welfare regulations](#)', *Food Policy*, 61, 1, 121-125.