



ALPA

Submission

Inquiry into the Impact of Animal Rights Activism on Victorian Agriculture

To:

The Secretary
Legislative Council, Economy and Infrastructure Committee
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2/8/19

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ALPA is a proud member of



Australian Livestock & Property Agents Association (ALPA)

ALPA is the national peak industry body for livestock and property agents.

ALPA represents more than 1,200 agency businesses across Australia. Collectively this group plays an important role in livestock, wool, merchandise and rural property sales and marketing.

ALPA members handle in excess of 97% of rural agency business Australia wide.

ALPA is one of the largest national organisations of small rural business men and women, relied on to protect the interests of agents and producers nationally.

ALPA national membership includes Elders, Landmark, Ruralco and private livestock agencies across Australia.

ALPA appreciates the opportunity to participate in this inquiry.

ALPA GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Australian Livestock & Property Agents Association Ltd (**ALPA**) submission is in response to Victorian Legislative Council's Economy and Infrastructure Committee's **Inquiry into the Impact of Animal Rights Activism on Victorian Agriculture.**

Livestock Agents play a pivotal role in the Victorian agricultural sector. Agents are considered trusted advisors to livestock producers. It is disappointing that both agents and their vendor clients have been impacted by recent animal activist activity and ALPA believes that this inquiry is justified, timely and important.

ALPA welcomes the opportunity to discuss this submission further when we address the committee in Warragul on Wednesday 21st August.



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ALPA membership is a signature of professionalism in the industry

ALPA COMMENTS

ALPA members and Victorian producers have been severely impacted by animal activists. This type of vigilante behaviour cannot be allowed to go on. It appears that the criminal offences of breaking and entering, trespass or invading a residential home or an urban business is treated differently if these same criminal offences were committed in rural areas.

It is inequitable for individuals in rural communities to be victimised in their workplace or on their farms which is also the family home. This is simply not acceptable. The mental health and safety impacts of those affected will only increase if the laws do not change.

ALPA is aware that animal activists have attended Victorian saleyards over the years both in groups and as individuals. We are also aware of numerous social media sites that actively attack our members and farmers on matters which are unfounded.

In September last year, there was a serious animal activist demonstration at the Victorian Livestock Exchange (VLE) at Pakenham. Up to one hundred activists stormed the facility creating distress to all in attendance. The demonstration which could have turned violent had rippling effects and went beyond disrupting the livestock sale which included but was not limited to: staff were threatened and intimidated, livestock were held longer than necessary, truck drivers were held up which had log book implication and police were called and one officer made the comment "they had more urgent issues to attend".

ALPA member, Jarrod Bennetts, whose business operates at the VLE has highlighted in submission 105 to this committee the impacts of the demonstration.¹

Since the demonstration, local agents and saleyard management have completed an entire review of their operations and updated relevant policies and procedures. In the event of future activist invasions, the revised systems will ensure the safety and welfare of staff, welfare of livestock and general biosecurity is not put in jeopardy.

ALPA is also aware of another serious saleyard demonstration that took place earlier this year in Muchea, Western Australia.

The increase of animal activism may force some saleyards to implement changes to their operating procedures which will come at a cost. This is already evident in the VLE example which has incurred additional unnecessary costs. This will be particularly detrimental to smaller saleyards, which will be unable to absorb these increased costs resulting in their closure. This will directly impact the rural communities who rely heavily on selling centres for the associated economic benefits and intangible social and community benefits. There are also potential animal welfare implications if livestock need to be transported longer distances for sale.

¹ https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/SCEI/Animal_rights_activism/Submissions/S105_-_Jarrod_Bennetts_Redacted.pdf

There is no doubt that agriculture is vitally important to the Victorian economy and regional Victoria. The agency sector contributes to the Victorian economy via public auctions and on property livestock sales which are not limited to cattle and sheep however our statistics below focus on these two species.

Victorian saleyards facilitate both cattle and sheep sales by public auctions and many Victorian producers rely on saleyards to sell their livestock. In some cases, this is their only source of annual income.

Victorian saleyards traded approximately 4.6 million sheep and nearly one million cattle in the 2017/18 financial year.² An estimate of livestock traded for the 2017/18 financial year is in excess of \$2 billion (based upon average saleyard prices) and the majority of this money stays within rural and regional Victoria.

Outside the saleyard auction system, agents assist producers with on farm livestock sales. AuctionsPlus, an online auction selling platform that many ALPA members use for facilitating such sales advised that Victorian livestock sales in the previous financial year was in excess of \$79 million dollars.

In addition, there are also sales which are not conducted either in the saleyard or via AuctionsPlus. ALPA members facilitate other types of livestock sales for their vendor clients including stud sales (bulls, rams, breeding stock), direct to feedlots, direct to meat processing plants, live export depots and to other farmers. These are predominantly private treaty transactions.

ALPA would like to emphasise that livestock agencies and saleyards employ vast numbers of people who work directly and indirectly in the various livestock sales processes. All are responsible for contributing to their rural economies. Without these employment opportunities, many small towns will find it difficult to stay viable should the animal activists be allowed to continue with their extreme malicious views and activities which could potentially result in the closure of overseas markets due to biosecurity breaches.

Biosecurity is extremely important in ensuring agricultural and economic success. In Victoria, we are heavily reliant on exports and we need a robust biosecurity system which can be demonstrated to our overseas trading partners to maintain our reputation of producing high-quality safe food products.

Government and industry are constantly working together to ensure effective biosecurity systems, but there are huge biosecurity risks and concerns with the increasing presence of trespassing animal activists in the agricultural supply chain. Animal activists have exhibited total disregard for biosecurity, animal welfare and people's lives when they demonstrate and invade farms, saleyards and meat processing plants.

We are very concerned that the courts are not in tune to the numerous dangers that the activists present, including but not limited to personal safety and wellbeing, animal welfare and biosecurity. The recent situation where activists were fined \$1 for

² <https://www.mla.com.au/globalassets/mla-corporate/prices--markets/documents/saleyard-surveys/mla-2017-18-saleyard-survey-report.pdf>

breaching the Livestock Disease Control Act is proof that it is not seen by the courts as a serious issue.

We were very troubled to read Hansard from the 1st May 2019, page 1149 where the magistrate was stated as saying, "Keep doing what you are doing, but don't get caught by the police".³

It is imperative that the courts also understand the serious nature of the offences and start to enforce the maximum penalties available and to record convictions so that the offenders may begin to understand the ramifications of their actions.

The Victorian government needs to ensure that this Act is updated as well as increasing and enforcing the penalties for breaching the Act.

The increase of animal activists has given rise to mental health implications. All agricultural workers and their families deserve the right to go about their daily work and not be in fear of being invaded, harassed or have their workplaces inundated by animal activists.

While we understand that people have the right to protest peacefully and respectfully, the agricultural industry has had enough of the radical activists enforcing their ill-informed views and beliefs on others.

ALPA is fearful that if laws are not changed, it is only a matter of time before a demonstration or trespass will result in physical harm or a fatality which would be the worst possible outcome.

ALPA RECOMMENDATIONS

ALPA understands that there is a serious disconnect between the city and the country. There are many urban based people through no fault of their own have no connection to agriculture. It is extremely concerning that these individual's sole agricultural perspective maybe founded on the opinions of a radical minority who have no tolerance for the livestock industry and are determined to see the end of all livestock production industries.

ALPA welcomes the recent announcement from Minister Symes at the Victorian Farmer's Federation, (VFF) Conference in Bendigo to inject funds for a public campaign to kerb untruths and negative sentiments about the Victorian agricultural industry. The National Farmers' Federation have also announced their intent to share the important story of agriculture to consumers.⁴

ALPA recommends that the Victorian Government builds upon these campaigns. It is vitally important to have a successful agricultural educational and promotional program, so the wider audience understands and appreciates where food and fibre comes from.

³ https://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/daily-hansard/Council_2019/Legislative_Council_2019-05-01.pdf

⁴ <https://www.nff.org.au/read/6496/big-names-join-forces-better-connect.html>

ALPA commends the NSW government with their recent announcement which will come into effect on the 1st August 2019 to introduce \$1,000 on the spot fines with potential jail time and fines of up to \$220,000 for individuals and \$440,000 for groups or corporations who breach the Biosecurity Act.

ALPA recommends the Victorian government follow the lead of the NSW government and impose harsher penalties.

ALPA recommends the Victorian government provide educational resources to prosecutors and judges that highlights the value of agricultural industries and the severity of biosecurity breaches. The \$1 Gippy Goat fine was a mockery of the value of the industry and the possible biosecurity implications.

We believe it is imperative to send a serious message to those who continue to treat the agricultural industry with disdain. We would encourage that fines and convictions be applicable for any animal activism activities across the entire agricultural supply chain including farms, saleyards and meat processing facilities.

ALPA believes there should be national consistency in legislation to protect the rural community and families in the agricultural sector from the increased animal activist activity and to ensure those who work tirelessly to produce the food and fibre in Australia are protected.

ALPA recommends the Victorian government support those who have been directly impacted by the malicious activities of activists. Mental health support for those who have endured continuous bombardment from activists is a priority. Financial restitution should also be considered for those who have been forced to abandon their businesses due to the inability to endure the abuse and confrontations.

ALPA has provided a submission to the Federal Inquiry into the Criminal Code Amendment (Agricultural Protection) Bill 2019.

ALPA looks forward to new reforms being implemented to ensure that the entire supply chain is protected, thereby ensuring the viability of those who produce food and fibre in Victoria for the world.

[END]