



Animal Care and Protection Bill

Submission

To Whom It May Concern,

Thank you for this opportunity to give feedback on the proposed Animal Care and Protection bill. I am the current acting executive officer for the Victorian Chicken Group Council, we represent approx. 80% of the meat chicken growers in Victoria. The chicken meat industry along with other intense farm groups are highly regulated and have very strict practices to ensure the highest welfare standards for their animals, hence not sure why this bill is necessary in such industries and should be exempt from this bill. Please take in account how important our feedback to your bill is in keeping agriculture alive. Agriculture is a very important in keeping Australians feed, without us the cost of poultry will be expensive and quality compromised as farmers will walk away.

I understand the main purpose of this act is to provide animal care and protection, even though your intent may be in the right place this bill is an over reach and should have never been drafted.

The points in this bill which are the most concerning are as follow:

1. Authorised Officer

Even though you state they will be trained they could be absolutely anyone that doesn't understand the industry or the bird (chickens) behaviour. The fact they can enter a property and search, inspect, seize evidence, euthanize animals and the right to detain a person without a warrant is a major issue and biosecurity risk.

In the meat chicken industry, we are audited by RSPCA, FREPA, the processor and qualified veterinarian that visits farms on a regular basis to ensure high welfare standards. How can this Authorised Officer be more qualified and have the knowledge to overrule what is already in place to ensure the welfare of the birds? The fact that the AO can enter our farm at any time, which should not be allowed without consent due to the fact this is a major bio-security risk, where have they been prior? Have they quarantined for 14 days from farm to farm to ensure disease control from bird to bird, as ILT is a very transmittable disease and if Avian Influenza hits our shores and we have people going from farm to farm it will be a disaster. The industry has already a National Code of Practice for Animal Welfare and practices to ensure high welfare standards and to lower any bio-security risks for all farms, highly qualified people ensure the practices are met at all times.



This Bill heightens risk for all meat chicken farms no one should be allowed to enter a farm without consent.

The Bill fails to state in what circumstances is the Authorised Officers is allowed on your property. What enacts their visit? How and why? There has to be something in place in its current state there is zero clarification and is unjustifiable.

Another issue is, what is the likelihood for the officer that has trained are actually uncover animal activist? How would this work with the new trespassing laws, who is liable? What happens to the farmer and their wellbeing?

Also to allow an someone who is not a qualified veterinarian and understands the animal behaviour to seize and euthanize animal is unjustifiable. The only person allowed to uptake such extreme measures should only be a qualified veterinarian. How will the Authorised Officer euthanize the animals? Will they have weapons on them just in case, this is a safety issue as no one expect trained police officers are to obtain any weapons of any sort, this is an over reach of power and control to be able to seize or euthanize. The Bill states, they act on a “likely” to commit an offence or to minimise, anxiety, fear, pain or distress, which is just a feeling not factual. If found after the fact the AO was incorrect by the courts it a little too late, hence should never get to this point.

What happens to the euthanized animals, who disposes of them and who bears the cost? The farmer? The Authorised Officer who could euthanizes on a it could likely scenario? Meat poultry farm can contain approximately 300,000 birds at any moment, will the AO be euthanise all these individually?

The same with detaining a person or vehicle, how can someone who isn't a trained police officer have the right and the knowledge to detain and diffuse a situation? If it gets to a point where it is escalating the police should be call and not by the Authorised Officer.

To Allow the Authorised Officer the same power as the police when it comes to warrants is catastrophe as police officers have extensive training. This is an over reach of power therefore the only person allowed to enter your property under warrant conditions is a police officer not an authorised officer.



2. Minister's Power

The Minister's has power with have no accountability as they can close a business at any time without allowing the farmer to redeem their actions if the AO feels they have done something wrong or are likely to do something hence can be shut down. There is no clarity in the Bill that states how the Minister's power can be applied, how, why and when? Therefore, if a farm is closed down and found not guilty from the courts where does it leave them? There needs to be a strict oversight committee and the one outlined is vague and stricter conditions and how the minister can enact their power and only in very extreme situations, must be clear and fair guidelines!

3. Licencing

Farming practices should be encouraged and by placing an extra unnecessary cost and is a money grab and over reach, this needs to be removed as farmers do a lot for our nation and to penalise them for feeding Australia is un-Australian. The concerning part of this licence, is that if licencing is not paid in time according to the Bill, it allows the minister to close them down if not paid in time.

The VCGC is opposed to this bill as we already have industry standards and are highly regulated and must be exempt from this bill. The Bill is a great way to losing all agriculture thus revenue to the state, as our population is growing where do you think our food is going to come from? Another country with low standards and highly diseased when we can eat from our own back yard and know that it is a high quality and standard.

The bill demonstrates a lack of understanding of the agricultural sector as it is vague on how things are applied and the powers of the Authorised Officer who in my view are under qualified and the only person to enter a farm should be a qualified veterinarian that specialises in the specific species that understands all aspects of the bird so they can make a professional judgement not a judgement made on feelings. The Minister powers and incurring an unnecessary licencing fee is a total over reach as we already have legislation in place not sure what the need of re-writing it is for as this bill offer no solution that added value or is better than what is already in place as there has been no consultation with the industry it affects the most which should have been the priority.

Thank you and I hope you take on board our concerns in relational to this Bill. Please feel free to contact the office at any time to discuss.

Regards

Anna Fedele

VCGC Manager