

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Pig Welfare in Victoria

Melbourne – Wednesday 13 March 2024

MEMBERS

Georgie Purcell – Chair

David Davis – Deputy Chair

John Berger

Katherine Copsy

Bev McArthur

Tom McIntosh

Evan Mulholland

Sonja Terpstra

PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Gaelle Broad

Georgie Crozier

David Ettershank

Michael Galea

Renee Heath

Sarah Mansfield

Rachel Payne

WITNESSES

Judy Croagh, Chief Executive Officer, (*via videoconference*), Western Plains Pork; and
Martin Clark, Murnong Farming.

The CHAIR: I declare open the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into Pig Welfare in Victoria. Please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised.

I would like to begin this hearing by respectfully acknowledging the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of the various lands we are gathered on today, and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and families. I particularly welcome any elders or community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the committee or who are watching the broadcast of these proceedings. I also welcome members of the public watching via the live broadcast or in the public gallery.

To kick off, we will get committee members to introduce themselves, starting with Ms Broad.

Gaëlle BROAD: Hi, I am Gaëlle Broad, Member for Northern Victoria.

Bev McARTHUR: Bev McArthur, Western Victoria Region.

Renee HEATH: Renee Heath, Eastern Victoria Region.

The CHAIR: Georgie Purcell, Northern Victoria Region.

Katherine COPSEY: Katherine Copsey, Southern Metropolitan Region.

John BERGER: And John Berger, Southern Metropolitan Region.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for appearing today, Judy and Martin.

All evidence taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and further subject to the provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during this hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded today, and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following this hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

For the Hansard record, could you both please state your full names and any organisation you are appearing on behalf of.

Martin CLARK: Martin Clark. I am a pork producer, Murnong Farming.

Judy CROAGH: Judy Croagh, from Western Plains Pork in the Western District of Victoria.

The CHAIR: Beautiful. Thank you. We now welcome your opening comments but ask that they are kept to around 10 to 15 minutes maximum to ensure we have plenty of time for discussion and questions. Feel free to do it however you like, whether it be individually or together.

Martin CLARK: You can start, Judy.

Judy CROAGH: Thank you. Honourable members of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, thank you for having me here today. My name is Judy Croagh, and I am here today representing Western Plains Pork, which is located in the Western District of Victoria.

When we first started the business 27 years ago our area had very high unemployment. Today we employ over 50 people, some local and some from overseas. This includes a family from the Ukraine who fled back to Australia. Western Plains Pork is proud of providing employment and accommodation to this family in their time of need.

Every day I come to the farm to work alongside some amazing people who care deeply about the pigs, the environment and the community we work with. We are an outdoor pig production company who leases land from farmers in the area, becoming part of their whole farm plan. Pigs are in an area for two to three years, with soil testing conducted along the way to comply with our APIQ accreditation. We then move to a fresh site and hand back the land to our farmer, who utilises the organic matter and the nutrients the pigs have left behind to fertilise their crops. We do not return to that area for another six years. All our sows live in outside paddocks with ample shelter, water, wallows and feed. At weaning, some of the piglets grow in a free-range environment and others grow in ecoshelters, which are all straw-based. The spent bedding from these ecoshelters we give to local farmers, who use this on their paddocks as fertiliser.

We are proud of what we do. The care of our pigs is of greatest importance. We are continually working with our vet, who is onsite at least twice a month, monitoring all areas of the business as we look to ways to improve what we do. He is always available to answer emails or phone calls whenever we are seeking advice.

We have been trialling different farrowing huts we purchased from the UK, gathering information through farrowing production data and data loggers to understand if there are better ways or if these are a better fit for our pigs. We are trialling a single-farrowing paddock for our gilts. She can still interact with her neighbours, but we are working with the gilt to help her be the best possible mum she can be. We are always, always trying to improve our practices. We work with nutritionists. We work with our environmental planner. We are always developing. There is a whole community supporting what we do. We support them. We are all invested in our farming operation. We donate pork to our local community organisations, along with weekly donations to the Salvation Army, Ozanam House and a couple of small drug rehabilitation centres. We produce great produce and love sharing this.

Training is vital. Everyone is inducted into the business. Part of the induction process is all of the APL courses, which include the ProHand pig course and safety training. The staff must also learn about our business mission, vision and values, our employment assistance program and our whistleblower policy. Every two years everyone retakes all the APL courses, and that is actually why I am sitting at home today, because our office is full of people doing the retraining. This highlights the importance of animal welfare, safety of people and the values of the business. One of the best things we have done in the last couple of years is a mental health workshop with the managers so we are more aware of each other and have more empathy.

Biosecurity is also of the utmost importance. Because of the way we produce our pigs alongside farms with sheep and cattle we are mindful of protecting not only our pigs but the other animals farmed in the area. When any of us travel overseas, we are not allowed back onsite for five to seven days, with all clothing, footwear and suitcases cleaned with disinfectant, which the company provides. If anyone is coming onto the farm we use a biosecurity app, ExoFlare. ExoFlare was introduced to Western Plains Pork through Australian Pork Limited, or APL. It is a very simple app to use, asking questions to help us decide who can enter the farm and when.

APL is always there to help and guide producers, offering training and education. I know that we farm differently from a lot of others, and I have only been on one indoor pig farm, on which I did not even enter the shed. While I cannot comment or compare farming practices, I do know that every pig farmer I have ever met cares deeply about their pigs and is dedicated to what they do. Like the other people I have heard speak this morning, I am very passionate about the pig industry. It is just a wonderful industry to be involved in. Thank you for listening to me today.

Martin CLARK: I am the principal owner of our particular piggery down in the Western District called Murnong Farming. We operate a mixed farming business where we have about a thousand hectares of crop. We run about 8500 sheep, have three sheep studs and we have had a piggery since 1996. We run about 850 sows. We turn off about 400 pigs a week. We have a grow out at Bridgewater where we have about 4800 pigs before they go through to slaughter. So we are just a breeder and producer, and then we sell into the wholesale market.

Our system is the same as Judy's. Everything Judy does, we do. We have the same qualifications as far as our compliance, our training. We are an outdoor piggery; the sows are outdoors and they are bred outdoors. I note she is trying single-gilt farrowing. We are currently doing a similar thing, but we have got two in a thing. A gilt is a young sow, first litter, so they have a few issues learning where they go and they lose their piglets in a bit of grass and all that sort of stuff.

Without us having healthy pigs and us looking after our pigs we do not have a business – I do not have a business – so it is vital for us that we are best practice at what we do, we are sustainable in what we do and our people are trained so we get the full benefit of the knowledge and making sure we are best practice. We rely heavily on APL's research, their compliance systems and the audits. We have to do a full audit – and I am sure you people have had a look at the audit criteria – internally every six months; 12-monthly externally they come in and do that. We rely on the nutritionist. Our vet is there every two months. Any issues, they are there within a day. Pigs are much like us as humans. They get a cold, they get viruses, all that sort of stuff, so it is utmost that we look after the health of them. I heard earlier about nipping teeth and tails. We do not do any of that. Our pigs are bred free range. They are out in the mud. We take them at 21 days, 22 days old into a straw-based ecoshelter where they are fed and looked after, and from there when they get to about 10 weeks of age we then take them up to a bigger grow-out at Bridgewater where they have got more space. These are straw-based systems where we sell the compost or we reuse it on the rest of our farm. We have got 4000 acres. Generally, unlike Judy, where they lease the land, we own the land, so it is to our benefit to make sure that we are getting the best practice and we are putting nutrition back where we need to to help our other crops and the wellbeing of the animals.

I am here today as a small producer, probably one of the smallest you have spoken to, on how we go about it. We have four people on our breeding unit, then we have two people on our grow-out unit, so six people. They are trained. We have a whole lot of audit systems, thermometers, weather gauges and all this sort of stuff to monitor the health and the wellbeing of the animals. On hot days we are there all day, three times a day, making sure they get their water and they are able to get in the mud and cool themselves down. As you know, most pigs cannot sweat. They are like us, but they need to be able to cover themselves up and keep themselves cool. So that is an important part of the welfare program.

Biosecurity is a big thing for us, and it is getting bigger. We are going to a system where we will bring in semen and genetics, more so than bringing in live pigs, which we actually get from PIC, whom I heard before, so we can stop the risk of foot-and-mouth or whatever that comes to Australia, so eventually we can protect ourselves from that risk, have a closed herd and breed our own breeders, so to speak. So we are just in the process of starting that process. The first 40 of those grandfather herd gilts turn up from PIC next week. So we are trying to ensure that we have got a sustainable business, our staff and everything are well trained and we manage the biosecurity. We use ExoFlare, as Judy does. We have barriers where any transport trucks coming or going do not actually enter the piggery. It is all quarantined. The truck will pull up to one side of the fence and hook his hose up to fill the silo. The workers and that are on the other side. We have got showers and toilets and all that, so there is no risk of diseases or them catching a cold, so to speak, where we can keep best practice.

We are a small producer. The industry is very important to us. I think it is a personal choice whether people want to eat meat or not eat meat, traditionally, whether it is red meat or white meat – chicken. We want to do it in a humane way. We want to make sure the welfare of the animals is looked after. That is basically where we come from. We have seen some of the videos and that over time, which disappoint me. Whether they are fact I do not know, but they look horrific. Those sorts of people, if that is the case, need to be brought in line. Everyone has got a bad apple somewhere, whether it is a thug on the football field or whatever. But they need to be penalised, and I do not think the penalties are harsh enough, to be honest, to keep our industry at best practice. That is basically where I come from. We are down on the edge of the Western District, not far from Judy. She is a little bit further down.

The CHAIR: Inverleigh, right?

Martin CLARK: Yes.

The CHAIR: Where I am from. I probably poured you a beer at the pub or served you at the general store when I was younger.

Martin CLARK: Yes, maybe. I actually live in Melbourne, so I am giving it away there. But you are right: it is a small world. We are just over the river on the Surf Coast side of Inverleigh. We have had that property since 1996, and we have got a few there now. I run the business. I am a strategist, I have got managers and I have got staff. My real day job on most days is as a builder and developer in Melbourne, and I have a number of different business interests. I am at the farm weekly. We have a manager and we have a hierarchy, and I would say I have probably had eight phone calls today about various little things. We are shipping out 400 sheep today. We run three sheep studs, which are all AI, all genetics. We are probably number 10 in Australia for what we do with the sheep genetics, and what we do is a maternal line of meat-producing sheep. So we have the same issues there with animal welfare and making sure we are best practice and all that sort of stuff. I have heard what SunPork and Rivalea had to say. Everyone knows what everyone is doing within the industry. Within reason we want to be best practice; we want a sustainable business. Without healthy animals we do not have a business, so it is paramount for us that we are best practice and that they are all humanely treated and looked after the best they can be. Just for your information, they basically have six or seven diets between mum – the first drink, so to speak – and before they go to slaughter. Our pigs are part of the Otway Pork brand, which you would have seen, and they go through various different places – Benalla, over to South Australia, Diamond Valley Pork or whatever. I am happy for any questions.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Martin. We are going to start with Ms Copsey, just because she is on a time restraint.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you – and also excuse me turning my camera off so I do not have connection issues. I wanted to delve into a couple of practices that you have just mentioned. I wanted to check with Judy: given your operation, does tail docking, teeth clipping or ear notching happen in your operation?

Martin CLARK: No. None of those happen.

Judy CROAGH: We do not teeth clip. We do a small amount of tail docking for animal welfare reasons. Some of the females we keep for breeding reasons we do dock their tails due to the automatic feeder that they use – sometimes not all but some get mud balls on them, and we do not want them to get caught. So there are only a handful that get tail docked, and there is no teeth clipping at all and minimal ear notching as well. Again, that is just so we know which piglets to keep for breeding reasons.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. We have had some discussion around the inability of operators to accommodate pain relief or anaesthetic for those procedures. Given the small number that you undertake, do you consider that that is something that could be incorporated into your practice?

Judy CROAGH: Absolutely we would consider incorporating it. But I was listening to what Dr Richards said and the other people in that last presentation, and again it is just minimising the stress for the animal all the time. So minimal handling is really important. If there was something that was very effective and there is some research done that is science backed, we would definitely consider it, because again, we are so into animal welfare and what is best practice for our pigs.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. Given the state of your operations, would you be opposed to the elimination of docking, teeth clipping and ear notching?

Martin CLARK: We do not do any of those things. The only thing we do is put an electronic tag in both their ears for identification purposes.

Judy CROAGH: Again, the only reason we do some tail docking is for their welfare reasons – we do not want mud balls on their tails, and again it only happens to a few of them, but we do not like to see that, so it is with our vet advice that we do that, but if there is a better way or another way that we can look at then absolutely we would look at it.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. Yes, I hear that distinction between something that is for a specific issue that a pig is having as opposed to a routine practice, so that is interesting to me. Apologies to go there, but when a pig does have to be euthanised on your farms, what method do you use?

Judy CROAGH: Yes, we do use blunt force trauma. Again, it is just the fastest, quickest practice and, again, listening to the others present this morning or today, it is very, very similar: minimal trauma and it is fast and effective. That is what we have to do. Again, if there was some better way of doing it, we would adopt it.

Martin CLARK: We are the same. We use a bolt gun, which does the same thing.

Katherine COPSEY: I am interested, given the social nature of pigs, in your observations about how the other pigs react when that procedure is going on. Do sows recognise it? Is there any attempt made to shield the other pigs from seeing that?

Judy CROAGH: In our situation, with piglets, we actually do take them away.

Martin CLARK: We do the same.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. One tiny little follow-up: do you think that that is unusual in the industry, that practice of removing the piglet before euthanising it?

Judy CROAGH: I cannot comment on that because I do not really know how anyone else operates, I am sorry.

Martin CLARK: We are the same. We have a cage that, if there is something that is not right, we will put it in a cage and take it away.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Katherine COPSEY: Thanks very much.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Copsey. I will stay on the screen and go to you, Mr Berger.

John BERGER: Thank you, Chair. And thank you both for your attendance today. I have only got a small question for you both, and that is: how do you guys keep up with the current thinking, if you like, or the current practices that some of these big operators might engage themselves in that might enhance your business or keep you into a standard that you think is transparent and in line with what everybody else is doing?

Judy CROAGH: Can I answer that one? Over the years we have done other farming – we have been sheep farmers, cattle farmers – and I actually think that the pig industry is exceptionally good at sharing their research and their development. Because we have a vet that does not just work for us, he works for other people, he shares a lot of knowledge. This industry shares a lot of knowledge. I also think that APL are really good at passing on new practices and new information the whole time, so it is there for us to keep up to date with. This industry is amazing at sharing. This morning, listening to people, a lot of those people I have met before and been involved with. So, yes, everyone is excellent at sharing the latest research.

John BERGER: All right, that is all I have. Thanks, Chair.

Martin CLARK: I would support Judy in everything she is saying there. It is interesting to say, like – our relationship with PIC, because that is where our breeders come from, they are all over any little thing that changes. Our relationship with APIQ and all that, we are pretty up to date. Everyone is talking all the time. We have got a benchmarking meeting next week with PIC just about where we are, and all the producers get together. We are all about welfare and best practice and what we are doing.

Judy's and our business and a couple of the other ones, we are free-range pigs. We do not have them in sheds as breeders and we do not use sow stalls, so our pigs are open to the elements a lot more. We have other risks, like feral animals, foxes. It is nothing more than you turn up in the morning and you have got an agitated sow that has given birth and there are only six piglets, and you wonder where the other five have gone, and there is a mother fox teaching her kits how to grab them as they are born. Then you find the carcasses laying in a gutter with just a mouthful out of them. So we are free-range, and that is one of the things with – you know, it is disappointing, but that is the law of the jungle in that situation. We try to eliminate that. We have pest management systems for fox control and all those sorts of things. We are only a few k's out of town. We have posted back three or four dog collars to owners that think their little pooches sit on the back step all night, but they have come out and had a feed of our lambs and we have caught them, so we put the collars in the envelope

and post them back after they have been shot. So there are a lot of issues around that and people not understanding to protect their animals.

John BERGER: All right. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Mr Berger. Mrs McArthur.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you, Chair. I declare I know Martin very well. He is a very fine enterprising farmer in my electorate. We are very proud to have you there, Martin. You do a fantastic job. Now, I have heard animal activists before suggesting that all farmed animals should be under cover. I am sort of boggled at the thought of how we might give an umbrella to 10,000 sheep out in a paddock or whatever, but you are farming pigs out in the open and you have illustrated the problems with feral foxes and pet dogs, maybe even feral wild dogs in some cases.

Martin CLARK: Cats are the biggest issue, because they spread disease, and they are the worst. I think last year we trapped 67 black and white cats. That is the trouble.

Bev McARTHUR: Yes.

Martin CLARK: It is not just my animals they cause disease in, but it is also our native animals, and I do not like that at all.

Bev McARTHUR: Yes. So your pigs: they are out in the open, they are not under cover in a big shed and their welfare is put at risk sometimes – or the piglets' welfare is put at risk – by wild animals, but you still think it is a good idea to have them ranging free?

Martin CLARK: To us that is more natural, and we can see the health of the animals firsthand. We feed them with a blower cart. We have ad-lib feeders, which are automatic feeders. When I say automatic, it is not controlled, it is just a help yourself sort of thing. With a blower cart we blow large pellets into an open area so they have got to get out and forage for them. So we can see how they are, if there are any issues or if one is missing and is sleeping in the back of one of the shelters. We have a number of different shelters which hold – well, it depends how they want to stack up, but you can get 15 to 20 pigs in a straw-based shelter. Early in the morning they are all up and about. If it gets a bit hot and you cannot find them, they may all be in there, hiding under the straw or whatever they are doing, or you are just looking at the snout and the eyes out of the wallow. A wallow is a big puddle with a dripper on it which they get into and cover themselves in mud. They get sunburnt like we do, but we cannot use factor 50 on them.

Most of our farrowing huts are about an 8 by 8 by 4-foot high polystyrene Bondor panel hut, and every sow gets one of those to farrow in. They soon learn that that is what they do. We have a fender out the front which stops the piglets getting out so we can get the mother to mate with them and join them early on. We have a door on it to let the hot air out, and they are open on the front. So that is what we call a farrowing hut. We do not have sow stalls or anything like that. We think that is our brand, that is where we are and that is what we do. It is good to see. You see the little piglets all socialising with each other. Because we AI most of the time – and we have boars as well – they all seem to be born on a weekend, and you can see 150 little piglets a week old, running around. They are all kept in by one single wire and they all go underneath it, but when they get a little bit bigger, they hit it, and then they get back and have a run at it. And the little squealers, they run under the wire, knowing that they are going to get a bit of a shock, but it is game on for them. And then they all know where to go home. Then we wean them at 21 days.

So we have a higher mortality rate because they are out in the open and that is what happens. Our other animals – when you are talking around the farm, we have a mountain of trees and shelter belts, and like with anything, protection from the elements is important for the wellbeing of the sheep, the cattle and whatever. They are a roaming animal and they live in the open, but in the heat of the day they are looking for a spot to keep out of the weather. It is no different to what we do, I understand, unless you want a suntan.

Bev McARTHUR: Thanks, Martin.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Mrs McArthur. I will pick up from there. Martin, I am really interested in hearing about why you have chosen to use the captive bolt over blunt force trauma.

Martin CLARK: We have used blunt force trauma, and a lot of it comes down to the person that is administering it and where it is and the size of the piglet and whatever it is. There is an issue using the captive bolt on the large pigs. You cannot get close enough, and that puts you at risk. They are not in a cage, we are in a paddock, and most of them will come up to you. You are always a bit careful with them because you do not trust them, if you know what I mean. But most of them, if you have got a bucket, will come over and want to stick their head in the bucket, because we do hand feed at times, only for special reasons. But most of it is that they know where the food has come from, and they soon learn.

The CHAIR: Would you say it is a more humane option if the pig is the right size – using the captive bolt?

Martin CLARK: I think there is probably not a lot of difference. Captive bolt is right on the spot, but then you have got to administer it the right way and hit at the right place.

The CHAIR: Less room for error, though?

Martin CLARK: Yes. And to be honest, for a large pig – a large boar or a sow – the gun is the best method, because you do not get too close, and you walk away with your leg if they are angry. The only reason you are putting them down is because they have had an injury of some sort or they are sick, so you do not want to get too close.

The CHAIR: Could you tell us a little bit more about the benefits of pigs having enrichment and access to the outdoors and their surroundings and the behaviours that they display as a result of that?

Martin CLARK: That is part of our Otway brand. Otway is fresh meat primarily. It was an elected decision to go that way, and for that reason we think it is deemed to be – I do not think it is any healthier and I do not think there is any difference – that way by some people, because they are bred outside. But they also run the risk of other diseases and bits and pieces as well and, you know, getting caught on a bit of wire or that sort of thing. But that is the choice we made many years ago, and that is the way our brand has gone. I do not think there is much difference. We probably do not get the same support in litter sizes and those sorts of things because of it, and hopefully we pick it up in the branding of our product as it goes through the supermarket.

The CHAIR: But removing, I guess, the other risks which we have spoken about, would you say that pigs, when they have access to display their natural instincts, have a better quality of life up until their slaughter?

Martin CLARK: I would think so. I am not a pig, but to get into a wallow and have a muck around surely is a bit more fun.

The CHAIR: Do your pigs nest? Do they have access to nesting materials?

Martin CLARK: Well, that is what is in the farrowing hut. Just to explain, the farrowing hut is eight foot by eight foot, roughly, and three foot high. We put straw in, and she will get in there and make a nest to farrow. We have rollovers. In other words, she will roll on them, and that is one of our methods of identifying which are better mothers, no different to measuring with our sheep. With our sheep, with our genetics, we measure the mothering skill of the sheep. When she has got a lamb, we want to tag the lamb at birth and we weigh the lamb at birth, because it is a stud. We want to know the growth rates and all of that. But we measure how far she flights. Now, a good mother will come and knock you over if you are trying to put an eartag in her lamb, and other ones will stand 20 metres away. So we score them, and we breed for ones that want to be good mothers. And it is no different with the pigs.

The CHAIR: Thank you for sharing. They are obviously just instincts that cannot be displayed in confinement settings, so it is good to hear about the alternatives.

Martin CLARK: Yes, well, see, when they go in to the grow-out later on, they are smaller, but they are social animals. When you walk up to the front of the pen, they all run and then they turn around and look at you, and then they all come back up, almost so that you can touch them. You know, they are social animals.

The CHAIR: Yes, incredible.

Martin CLARK: I can tell you a story. It is a little bit funny. My daughter is now 36, but when she was at primary school they did ‘the 1000 days of Christmas’ – the song or whatever it is, about the animals. We

brought a piglet home, and she had it in a container – a little one in the backyard. And he lived in our backyard and chewed our shoes and did all that for a little while. In ‘so many days of Christmas’ there is ‘one squealing pig’ – she would lift the lid and the thing would squeal. You know, they are a social animal. We had a pet in the backyard for a while when they were little and whatever, but for quarantine reasons we do not take them back to the piggery. They went to my uncle’s farm.

The CHAIR: One of the most intelligent animals on the planet in fact. We will go to Dr Heath.

Renee HEATH: Thank you so much for your submission and for your inquiry. Just a couple of questions: you mentioned – I cannot remember which one of you, I am terribly sorry – that biosecurity is of the highest important and that if any of your staff travel overseas, they do not come back onto the farm for five to seven days. That I guess made me think –

Martin CLARK: Right down to no ham sandwiches.

Renee HEATH: Really?

Martin CLARK: Yes.

Renee HEATH: There you go. That brings up biosecurity and trespassers. Are you aware of any trespassing incidents in your area and what the outcomes or results of that are?

Martin CLARK: I am not aware of anyone – an activist-type trespasser – on our property, but we have had people try to pinch piglets –

Renee HEATH: Oh, okay.

Martin CLARK: which is very similar. We are aware that a couple of piggeries near us have, a few years ago. Our biosecurity – we have got wheel washers, so if you drive in, you have got to drive through a wheel wash to clean the mud off the wheels. We do all those things, and we are setting ourselves up. If Australia has an outbreak at some stage, it is going to decimate not only our native animals but the country as a whole – if they do not stop these Indonesian hamburgers or whatever it is that is bringing in those diseases. It is my view that we do not do anywhere near enough to stop that.

Renee HEATH: Okay. Thank you.

Judy CROAGH: Biosecurity, as I said, is of the utmost importance. We share land, or neighbour people, with sheep and cattle running on the same place but in a different area of that particular farm. Yes, I would hate any disease outbreaks to happen because of a breach of biosecurity from anyone coming on site. It is intimidating. We have made all staff aware, or they have watched the 7.30 report. They see what has happened, and that just heightens their awareness and makes them a little bit more anxious. As I said, the people I work with every day – or the people we work with – are extremely passionate about animals, and especially about the pigs. So to think that somebody may be trespassing into their area – it does make them anxious. One of the guys the other day was saying he was looking around everywhere to see where there might be a camera. There are not too many places to put cameras to see, besides some trees and maybe in some of the ecos. But a lot of our growers are totally free range, so they grow outside as well. It is so important that we keep our biosecurity strict.

Renee HEATH: Thank you. I think it was you that –

Martin CLARK: Just a little thing – we have changed our farm layout so you do not drive through the piggery to go around the farm. The piggery is isolated in its own area from other people that come to our farm. We have got a vehicle designated on farm for taking visitors around, so no-one is allowed to drive around in their own vehicles – and not through the piggery. The rest of the farming enterprises have got their own tracks to keep away.

Renee HEATH: Right. Yes, that is really fascinating.

Martin CLARK: That is the level or the degree we are going to.

Renee HEATH: Yes. You mentioned I think something about the pigs putting nutrients back in the crops. Does that mean that, for instance, there would be more nutrients even if you had a plant-based diet because of the pork industry?

Martin CLARK: Yes. We have –

Judy CROAGH: I think that was me anyway.

Renee HEATH: Okay, sorry.

Martin CLARK: No, we are on the same plain here.

Renee HEATH: You are on a unity ticket here.

Martin CLARK: We did the same thing. Yes, we have an agronomist for our pastures, because we are growing pastures for sheep and all that. When you put the manure on – and there are different levels for different reasons – it is not allowed to be on a waterway and not allowed to do this. In doing all that, no stock is allowed to be on it for 30 days. That is so there is no bug transfer, worm transfer and whatever. We did not mention it, but with the farrowing, after they have farrowed and they have moved into the next hut, we pick the hut up and shift it along. If it is permissible, we burn the old straw. It has got afterbirth, and it has got other things in there – bugs and whatever. If we cannot, we will compost it. With our dead animals, we basically compost now. They go into a system where the old manure turns them over, and after certain days it is gone. Then when that has broken down to the right thing, we will then spread it on the paddocks. We get a higher yield with our crops, so it does help. I would not say it is a fertiliser; I would say it is a ground conditioner if you understand what I mean. It is not like putting urea or one of those high-input fertilisers on, it is more of a conditioner that improves the balance and the microscopic action of the soil. So it is very good from that point of view.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Dr Heath. We will finish with Ms Broad.

Gaëlle BROAD: Thank you both for appearing today and for the submission. We appreciate your input in this inquiry. I guess you have talked a bit about trespassing and the impact of staff, but do you fear being invaded by extremists?

Martin CLARK: I think they have got bigger fish to fry, but in saying that, yes. Why do we go to all this trouble and expense of biosecurity and these people can blatantly get away with it? To me, it is like a home invasion, and that should not be allowed and that should be punishable. Personally, I do not have a problem with cameras and all that from our perspective. If people want to see that we are doing the wrong thing, we are not. That is not to say that someone lets the guard down at some stage, but we have got enough processes and that in place that if someone needs a kick in the butt to do the right thing, they will get a kick in the butt.

But welfare is important. I have seen some horrific stuff on TV and that, and I do not condone any of that at all. I think that is just so bad and those people should be punished. They give us a bad reputation. What Judy is doing and what we are doing is different to what SunPork and Rivalea have done. They have come from a different base. We have got our market, and they have got their market. You will see our product in a lot more restaurants than you will theirs because of that more natural approach. The fresh meat market is where we have targeted, and you will see in the restaurants all that sort of stuff more.

Gaëlle BROAD: You mentioned earlier that the penalties are not harsh enough. What would you like to see?

Martin CLARK: Well, it is hard to say what is probably a fair thing here, but if someone broke into your house and did something to you, what would you like to see the penalty be? In the personal view, it is probably never enough. It needs to be enough (a) to deter them and (b) to make it honest. Now, if they have got a belief, that is fine. They should not force it on to others. That goes on not just in this environment but in everyone else's environment. Whether you are a he, she or whatever, it does not matter, everyone to their own, but you should not be forcing it on to somebody else. Everyone is entitled to their own view. It is a democratic society.

Gaëlle BROAD: Judy, did you have anything you wanted to add?

Judy CROAGH: Not really. No. I agree. It would be great to have people accountable for breaking in. It is intimidating if you have got people coming into your backyard, because we all see it as our home. We all spend a lot of time there, and we deeply care about what we do. So yes, I think it would be important that people are made more accountable for their actions.

Gaëlle BROAD: We did have people appear at the inquiry yesterday that do not have any particular training but took it upon themselves to do some investigating. I guess you mentioned audits, that that is undertaken. What types of things are you proactively doing, and what are you looking at to ensure animal welfare?

Judy CROAGH: For us, it is all about our training. Our staff training is so important to caring for the animals. We also have a wonderful person who is our compliance officer, and she gets out and about checking things all the time, making sure that people are doing what they say they should be doing. She has also worked with her SOPs and work instructions so that people are following the daily routine. There are checklists that we make people tick off every day, which is important for us to make sure all the procedures are followed to the letter. We continually try to improve. As I said, we have got training happening today and there will be training happening every week of the year really. And we are working with our vets all the time. When he is onsite, he is out there checking on the strawing levels or the general health of the pigs. It is important to make sure that everything is happening properly.

Martin CLARK: There is an auditing system. For us to sell pig meat we have to be certified, and to do that there is a really detailed auditing system. Coles have another level, if you are selling into Coles, on top of that as well. It is right down to the temperature of the medication in the fridges. The feed has to have samples kept in case there is a problem. Water samples are taken. Salt levels are taken. We weigh the pigs in and out so we know exactly if something is going wrong. There is a whole lot of check work and a whole lot of paperwork that needs to be done as part of that. Now, we do a six-monthly audit ourselves, and I do that on my guys, and then we have the industry come in and do the same audit to see that I am auditing it right. If we do not pass that audit, we cannot sell our meat, so we do not have a business. That is how strong that is, and I support that 100 per cent. Every day on the fridges with a different medication or whether it is semen in a fridge, the temperature is written down on a checklist. So if something goes wrong we know exactly where it goes wrong. The audit process I think is very robust, and you cannot cheat it – it is independently certified, and I think that is a fantastic thing for the industry. So I have no issues with that type of process at all. And training is part of that audit; we have to show that we have trained the people. We have to record losses. We record if we have seen any foxes. We have an automatic weather station now, because it just makes it easy, where you can log on to a link and it tells you everything that is happening on our farm. It has got a probe with moisture and rain and temperature and wind – that is all automated. That is all part of the audit system, so it is pretty thorough. We are outdoors, so we need to make sure we know exactly what is going on.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Thanks, Ms Broad. Thank you, Martin and Judy, for appearing before us today. That concludes our time. If members have any further questions for you, are you happy to take them on notice?

Martin CLARK: Yes.

The CHAIR: Great.

Judy CROAGH: Absolutely.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much. We really appreciate the time and effort you have put into appearing here today and making a submission. That concludes the hearing.

Witnesses withdrew.