

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into Pig Welfare in Victoria

Melbourne – Tuesday 12 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**

Chris Delforce, Founder and Executive Director, and

Harley McDonald-Eckersall, Strategy and Campaigns Director, Farm Transparency Project.

**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 in the public gallery or via the live broadcast.

We will get committee members to now introduce themselves quickly, starting with Ms Broad.

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

**Bev McARTHUR:** Bev McArthur, Member for Western Victoria.

**Renee HEATH:** Renee Heath, Eastern Victoria Region.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Katherine Copsey, Member for Southern Metropolitan Region.

**The CHAIR:** Georgie Purcell, Northern Victoria.

**John BERGER:** John Berger, Member for Southern Metro.

**Tom McINTOSH:** Tom McIntosh, Member for Eastern Victoria.

**The CHAIR:** Witnesses, 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. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing, and transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

For the Hansard record, can you please state your name and any organisation you are appearing on behalf of.

**Chris DELFORCE:** Chris Delforce, Farm Transparency Project.

**Harley McDONALD-ECKERSALL:** Harley McDonald-Eckersall, Farm Transparency Project.

**The CHAIR:** Wonderful. We now welcome you to make your opening comments and presentation, but I ask that they are kept at around 10 minutes maximum.

I want to now issue a warning to anyone in the public gallery or watching via the live broadcast that the following opening remarks could have some confronting footage. You are welcome to turn off now or leave the room if you wish.

**Bev McARTHUR:** On a point of order, Chair, is the footage going to be presented now or after Mr Delforce's presentation?

**The CHAIR:** It is part of the opening remarks.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Okay. Thank you. Then I am going to leave the room because I think it is outrageous that we are presenting this material and I do not want to be here to condone it.

**The CHAIR:** That is fine, Mrs McArthur. We still have a quorum, that is fine.

**Gaelle BROAD:** I will leave too, thank you.

**The CHAIR:** We are a subcommittee, that is fine. All good, we have got a quorum.

**Chris DELFORCE:** Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today. Twelve years ago I entered a piggery for the first time, a place called Wally's just outside Canberra. It was the most horrific thing I have ever seen. Over a period of two months I returned with a small team of amateur investigators, documenting what we were seeing each night, our presence unknown to the operators. When we were finished building the strongest possible case, we reported it to the authorities and published our findings for the world to see. The news coverage was enormous, and for most of the people who saw our footage or photographs, it was their first ever exposure to the reality of Australian pig farming. They were understandably outraged. The Australian pork industry distanced itself, claiming that this piggery was not representative – Wally was just a rogue operator, one bad apple. Even then I knew that they were lying. In the 12 years since, I have entered 91 active pig farms, 37 of them here in Victoria, and I have seen unacceptable cruelty in every single one.

Sow stalls are small metal cages in which mother pigs are confined while pregnant, for weeks at a time. In these cages pigs are unable to turn around or take more than one or two steps forwards or backwards. I am going to start the first video.

#### **Video shown.**

**Chris DELFORCE:** Australian Pork Limited made a commitment to phase out sow stalls by 2017, seven years ago, yet they are still in use today in Victorian piggeries. The most recent data published by APL, in their 2020–21 annual report, reveals that almost a quarter of piggeries still use these archaic devices. They stopped publishing data on the phase-out after that, but they still love to boast about this failed initiative. Meanwhile they have made no commitment at all to end the use of farrowing crates, small pens containing even smaller cages where sows are confined for up to six weeks while they give birth to and nurse their piglets. Every intensive breeding piggery in Victoria still uses farrowing crates.

**Harley McDONALD-ECKERSALL:** In these crates newborn piglets are subjected to a series of painful surgical mutilations without any kind of anaesthetic or pain relief. Their tails are cut with scissors, their teeth are cut back and chunks are cut out of their ears as a method of identification. These unnecessary procedures are performed not by qualified veterinarians but by untrained farmhands. The runts of the litter and any piglets who seem sick or weak are not given treatment or care because that would cost more time and money than pig farms can be bothered investing. Instead these piglets are picked up by their back legs and slammed headfirst onto the floor not a metre away from their mothers, who watch on helplessly. In large piggeries, like Midland Bacon near Stanhope, this happens every morning.

Sows endure a repeated cycle of forced impregnation, giving birth and having their piglets taken away from them. This forced impregnation is done through artificial insemination, which the Queensland government outlines as follows: workers first clean the sow's vulva with a cloth or paper towel. They then manually stimulate her by applying pressure between her shoulder and midback, applying knee pressure to her flanks and massaging her vulva and udder. A tube of boar semen, collected by masturbating boars by hand, is attached to a catheter, which is then inserted into the sow's vagina and the semen pushed into her uterus. This kind of sexual abuse and exploitation in any other context would be considered bestiality, but the pig farming industry is granted an exemption because it relies on bestiality for this everyday procedure.

When our investigators installed hidden cameras at Midland Bacon to capture the mutilation and killing of piglets, they also captured the sickening, inevitable outcome of the normalisation of sexual abuse. After the lights have gone off in the farrowing shed for the day, a male worker is seen approaching a caged sow from behind, lowering his pants and raping her for several minutes. Confined to a farrowing crate, she has no way to escape. This is the kind of thing that you hear rumours about all the time. You have to wonder how many times he has done this when our cameras were not watching, how often this happens in piggeries all over this state and this country, the perpetrators so comforted by the secrecy this industry fights so hard to protect. This

Parliament has been debating new laws aimed at quashing the exposure of cruelty and abuse in farms and slaughterhouses under the thin guise of biosecurity. Surely workers raping sows is the greater threat to biosecurity.

**Chris DELFORCE:** When pigs reach six months of age or sows become less productive after a couple of years of repeated impregnation and farrowing, they are sent to slaughter. In 1992, 32 years ago, the pig farming industry quietly installed its first carbon dioxide gas chamber at a slaughterhouse in Corowa, New South Wales. Today these chambers are used in all major pig slaughterhouses as a way to render pigs unconscious or dead before their throats are cut open. Anyone who wanted to know what this looks like was told that it is the most humane method of stunning pigs before slaughter, that pigs just gently fall asleep. In 2014 we managed to install hidden cameras in that Corowa slaughterhouse, capturing and publicly exposing for the first time in the world what really happens inside those chambers. Subsequent investigations here in Victoria and in South Australia showed the exact same thing: that every pig who enters those chambers screams and thrashes as they slowly suffocate, desperately trying to escape until their last agonising breath. It was 10 years ago that the inherent unjustifiable cruelty of these chambers was first exposed, and yet Australian Pork Limited continues to spout this utter nonsense about pigs gently falling asleep.

Last year we re-exposed all three gas chamber slaughterhouses in Victoria. We had to climb down into those chambers to retrieve our hidden cameras, and we felt the merciless, terrifying burning of the gas as it infiltrated our eyes, nostrils and lungs.

#### **Video shown.**

**Chris DELFORCE:** The video seems to have been cut short.

I hid above one of these chambers with a camera for over 9 hours and saw firsthand as the life was drained from pig after pig in the most excruciating of ways. Those images and those haunting screams fading to silent gasps will never leave me. This is the price we pay to reveal to consumers what they are paying for when they purchase pork, bacon and ham. We do not want to do this. We do not want to risk our lives, our safety, our freedom, our psychological wellbeing to enter these places and document these awful things, but if we do not, nobody will. We believe that an industry so utterly dependent on secrecy and legal loopholes has no right to exist at all. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Invite them back in. We will start with members on the screen. Although I cannot see you, I presume I can probably hear you. Mr McIntosh?

**Tom McINTOSH:** Yes, I am here. Thank you both for attending. I just wanted to ask: given your sort of long history in this space, as far as the way abattoirs and the husbandry process are working, do you see there are farmers who work in this space who are trying to achieve, and are there ways they can be helped to achieve, better? Do you see common ground that can be worked on from what you think are better practices that industry is trying to achieve or want to achieve, and how they could be assisted to do so?

**Chris DELFORCE:** Ultimately, we do not believe that pigs should be bred, raised and killed for food. We do not believe it is necessary. We think that the government needs to be investing in plant-based alternatives. We think they need to be assisting farmers who want to get out of this industry. I think the farmers who are putting in those efforts to improve their practices are doing so because they care about pigs, but ultimately welfare is incompatible with this industry fundamentally. The two cannot go hand in hand, and I think those farmers ultimately are going to want to get out of that industry and they need to be helped to do that. At the end of the day all these pigs, no matter how well they are treated on the farm, are ending up in slaughterhouses, and most of those are using these gas chambers, which are apparently the most humane method of doing it. We have seen how very far from humane that is. There is no way to do this in a humane way. There is always fear and suffering and pain, and when we exposed those chambers last year even farmers were coming out and saying, 'This is horrific.' They do not want to support this anymore, but there is no alternative. There is no alternative that is good. The only answer is to help people get out of this industry and into more sustainable, ethical lines of work.

**Tom McINTOSH:** I suppose you are saying you do not think there are any. When you say you do not think there are more humane methods, is there a scale? Are there some that are doing better than others in that treatment or coming to end of life – that side of things?

**Chris DELFORCE:** Well, we have investigated all the different types. As well as the gas chambers, we have investigated electrical stunning, bolt gun stunning and rifle stunning, and every time we have seen it it is pretty horrific. A lot of the time the stunning fails and animals are conscious or partly conscious when they are being killed, and there is a lot more rough handling involved in getting those animals to the point of being killed. Often it is done in front of each other, so they are able to see their friends or their siblings dying before them. So we have not seen any way that is being done that is better or good, and the industry itself acknowledges that these other methods are even worse than gas chambers.

**Harley McDONALD-ECKERSALL:** I think when most people imagine humane slaughter, they imagine something that is not possible or realistic or happening anywhere, which is an animal leading a good life and then experiencing a death without pain, without fear and without suffering. We have investigated 13 slaughterhouses in the last year alone. Not one time have we seen a death that is without pain, without fear or without suffering. Not only that, at every single one of those slaughterhouses we have seen multiple violations of state and federal regulation. I think your question was about farmers and asking whether there is kind of a scale of farmers who treat pigs better maybe. You know, there is definitely a long way between farmers such as the one we saw in that video sexually violating a pig and a farmer who is maybe running a free-range pig farm, but ultimately, no matter what, all those pigs are being sent to the gas chamber – or 90 per cent of pigs are being sent to a gas chamber. The others are being electrocuted to death or shot with a bolt gun. So no matter what we say about farming practices – and I truly believe that a lot of farmers do care about their animals and like to think that they are doing their best to treat them with care and respect – ultimately, at the end of the day, they are sending them to slaughter and there is no humane way to slaughter them.

**Chris DELFORCE:** I think farmers are being misled too, and that is why we saw so many support us when we exposed those gas chambers, because they have been sending their pigs to these places and being told that their pigs are being given humane deaths, and now they are seeing what that actually looks like and they are disgusted by it. As a farmer you cannot go into a slaughterhouse and go look inside a gas chamber, because these are enclosed boxes. There is no way to see inside them without physically going in with a gas mask while it is operating.

**The CHAIR:** Great timing.

**Tom McINTOSH:** Sorry, Chair, one more quick one if I can.

**The CHAIR:** A very quick one.

**Tom McINTOSH:** With mobile abattoirs or other methods, do you see better practice in that?

**Chris DELFORCE:** I mean, I guess we have not seen that, but they are going to use the same methods – the bolt gun, the electric stun – which are subject to human error all of the time. And the thing is that those mobile slaughterhouses maybe can kill a few animals a day; they cannot kill the 5 million pigs that we are killing at the moment in this country.

**Tom McINTOSH:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Mr McIntosh. Mr Berger.

**John BERGER:** Thank you, Chair. My question is: have you considered that the current *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act* adequately addresses concerns the general public might have with pig husbandry and slaughter, and if not, do you feel a new proposed Act will serve this purpose?

**Chris DELFORCE:** The POCTA itself I think essentially forbids cruelty. The issue is that we have these codes of practice that then say, 'Okay, here's all the kinds of cruelty you can legally do.' The other thing is that POCTA does not cover slaughter. That is the *Meat Industry Act*, which relates to AS 4696, the federal standard, which basically also says that all animals must be slaughtered with no unnecessary pain, suffering et cetera, and arguably gas chambers are not in line with that standard. Arguably, all slaughter is not in line with that standard, and I think that all farming and slaughtering of animals commercially is pretty far out of touch with community expectations. If they think that animals are being treated well and humanely and being given humane deaths, it is very far from the reality.

**Harley McDONALD-ECKERSALL:** I think the other big thing is that POCTA at the moment – this is also relevant to the *Crimes Act*, the actual criminal kind of law Act in Australia – if it was applied as written to the practices in farms, most of what happens in farms would be considered illegal. However, there are exemptions built into POCTA which allow things that are listed as being illegal to be performed on farmed animals for the purposes of agriculture. For example, if there was a dog or a cat and you were to cut their tail off with scissors or cut their teeth back with pliers, that would be illegal under POCTA. The only thing that makes it legal are these exemptions which allow that, even though it is done without any kind of pain relief, without any kind of anaesthetic. The *Crimes Act* as well – so at the moment we are dealing with a charge of bestiality. What we said in our statement is that most of the things that are done during the normal procedures of artificial insemination are classified under bestiality. Pigs are being sexually penetrated with objects by farmers, and that would be considered bestiality if it was not for a specific exemption which makes it legal to do so if it is being performed by a veterinarian person or an agriculture worker in good faith. And that makes me ask the question: when is it ever in good faith to sexually penetrate an animal?

**John BERGER:** Thanks, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Mr Berger. You touched on it briefly in your comments before, but can you tell us a little bit more about the response from the pork industry after you released footage of pigs being gassed by carbon dioxide?

**Chris DELFORCE:** Largely the industry's response was to ignore the issue and hope that it goes away. They refused several requests to be interviewed for the ABC 7.30 story. They did eventually put out a statement, but it was the usual empty rhetoric that we always see from them. I quote:

Australian Pork Limited (APL)'s position is consistent – we care about our pigs, and as an industry we share the community's concern for the welfare of our animals. That's why we continue to recommend global best-practice drawing on CO2 stunning – the most humane and effective method of managing pig welfare during processing.

...

The entire Australian pork industry takes the welfare of our animals through their whole life very seriously and we are seeking to receive and review the full footage.

But they ignored our offers to actually send them the footage or to discuss the issue with us. We turned up to their office with a hard drive of the footage and asked to give it to them so they could watch it, and instead of meeting with us they turned off all the lights and quietly slipped out the back door. The federal agriculture minister Murray Watt and the Victorian agriculture minister at the time, Gayle Tierney, also ignored numerous requests to meet with us or even to respond to the footage. Further, two remaining gas chambers – slaughterhouses – in Victoria, as AFG has ceased operating as a slaughterhouse, the Sinclair abattoir in Benalla and Diamond Valley Pork in Laverton, are continuing business as usual. They are still using their gas chambers. Nothing has changed.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Could you please provide the committee some examples of, I guess, what you would deem poor animal welfare? Obviously, we have routine practices that we understand are completely illegal and regularly used, but could you explain some of the worst instances of poor animal welfare that you have documented?

**Chris DELFORCE:** Yes. As you say, so much of the routine practices that exist are what we would consider poor welfare. I mean, how is it okay to pick up a piglet by their back legs and smash them on the floor? But that is done every single day and that is just normal. I think people would be horrified if you were doing that to puppies or kittens.

**Harley McDONALD-ECKERSALL:** I think things that we see very commonly in most piggeries across Australia are – I mean, again, you say sow stalls, sows confined for weeks at a time, but that is legal. However, you see these sows who then have these horrific pressure sores from just being unable to move, from lying on their sides. Often they have become infected. Often we see piglets who are sick and dying crushed by their mothers, even though farrowing crates are said by the industry to be in place to prevent that very thing. These piglets are dying these horrific deaths. These facilities are filled with rats, cats and maggots. You see food filled with maggots. You see rats running around the ceilings. If a piglet or a mother pig is sick or has an injury, they are often being eaten by cats and rats, even while they are still alive. At the same time, you are seeing things like overextended sows being kept in extreme confinement, for longer than is legal as well.

**Chris DELFORCE:** A number of years ago there was a sow we came across in a farrowing crate. She had given birth to a litter of stillborns. Something had gone wrong; it had caused paralysis in her back legs. She was unable to pull herself to the food and water at the front of the farrowing crate. She started eating her own legs. The farmers came and looked at her. They brought the vet in. The vet just said, 'Oh, leave her for the weekend. See if she gets any better.' Of course she did not. So after several days of that agony and starvation and cannibalising herself she was just shot. No charges were ever laid. Nothing ever came of that. We went to the police, but it was just used to charge us with trespass.

**The CHAIR:** Is that illegal, that treatment of that specific pig?

**Harley McDONALD-ECKERSALL:** I think it is a dereliction of a duty of care. I think this is where the lines become blurry, because that kind of thing if you saw it in another animal is where you call the RSPCA. You would say, 'This animal is being mistreated. They have no access to food and water. They have horrific injuries. They are not being cared for.' However, the RSPCA has no jurisdiction on agricultural issues. So you call Agriculture Victoria. However, they are covered by these exemptions, and they would say, 'Well, it's an industry thing,' because the pig industry, like other areas of animal agriculture, is self-regulated by codes of practice, which are not legally enforceable. No-one wants to step on the toes of the industry, which is largely allowed to do whatever it wants and set its own standards. So it becomes this black hole of suffering where no-one really can step in and do anything. For instance, in the kind of instance where we have seen a specifically criminal act, where a worker was sexually assaulting a pig, that was something where we were able to contact Victoria Police and say, 'This has happened. Here is the evidence' – and they have made an arrest. In other circumstances, the circumstances that Chris mentioned where pigs are in this incredible amount of suffering, there is no care being offered to them. Victoria Police have been contacted, RSPCA have been contacted and Agriculture Victoria have been contacted, but no-one really has the authority to do anything.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Ms Copsey.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Thank you. Thank you for your submission and for attending today. You just touched on industry self-regulation and progress around limiting some of these practices in how things are done. I wondered if you could speak to the history of self-regulation around sow stalls and how the industry is going in terms of a voluntary phase-out and your observations around the effectiveness of that.

**Chris DELFORCE:** The last data that we have seen published from them was their 2021 annual report, and it was about a four-fifths uptake of the voluntary phase-out. We investigated a number of piggeries in Victoria a couple of years ago. We found six. Pretty much every place that we visited still had sow stalls. At Midland Bacon they have this massive shed full of hundreds of sow stalls, one of the largest that I have seen, and that is still operating today. I believe maybe one or two of the other six have since stopped using sow stalls, but it is still quite widespread. It seems like the industry has kind of given up on that phase-out, because they have stopped publishing that data. But they still like to talk about, 'Oh, we've made this great commitment to phase them out by 2017' – seven years ago. I think they first made that commitment back in 2012 or 2013 because there was a lot of public outrage directed at sow stalls. There had been some exposure, thanks to footage of sow stalls, and people were quite rightly outraged.

**Harley McDONALD-ECKERSALL:** I think what we see time and time again is this outrage. People see the reality of how pigs are farmed and they are shocked, and then there are a lot of promises. But then once the media attention dies away, there is nothing to follow through on that. I think one of the issues that often are not talked about as well is that while the industry made this kind of self-selected decision to phase out sow stalls, they were also given free reign to pick the alternative to sow stalls. What they have gone with in the majority of cases is what is known as group housing, so these large open pens. They still contain sow stalls; however, they are not enclosed at the back, so pigs can kind of choose to go in and out to kind of have privacy.

In most cases when you see these pens, there are an extremely large number of pigs in these pens. There is no set limit on how many pigs can be forced into these open pens. They are filthy, and the floor is either concrete or slatted metal bars, which they are forced to walk on, lie on, stand on, sometimes even give birth on if they are not moved to the farrowing crate in time. We have seen a pig who has given birth in one of those group housing stalls – her piglets have been trampled on by other sows. There are higher instances of fighting in these stalls as well. So when the industry is allowed to set not only the phasing out of practices which have lost the approval of the public but they are also allowed to set what they are phasing out into, what the alternative is,

how is that going to be any better? They are bound by what is going to be the most profitable, and animal welfare is not profitable.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Thank you. In the short time I have got left I just wanted to go to the prevalence of the use of stunning in Victoria's industry. I think you spoke to that briefly before, but can you speak to us about the number of piggeries and the prevalence of stunning in abattoirs?

**Chris DELFORCE:** Yes. There are two major pig slaughterhouses that are left, in Benalla and in Laverton. They both have these carbon dioxide gas chambers. I am not sure of the percentage, but a very large percentage of Victoria's pigs and also pigs from interstate end up at these two slaughterhouses. There are also a number of smaller slaughterhouses, like Gathercole's at Wangaratta, that use electric stunning. There are maybe one or two other very small slaughterhouses that use, I would say, electric stunning. But for the most part, most pigs are going into these carbon dioxide gas chambers.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Thank you. And I will just say, for the record, you correctly interpreted my question. I meant to ask about gassing. Thank you for covering that.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Ms Copsey. Dr Heath.

**Renee HEATH:** Thank you. And thank you for your submission. In your opinion, is there a way to keep the pork industry going that you would consider moral?

**Chris DELFORCE:** Only as a phase-out to help people move into other lines of work. We do not want people to lose their income; we do not want people to become poor or families to suffer and starve. We are not thinking that this is something that can ever happen overnight, and that is not what we are suggesting. But we think there needs to be given serious consideration to a government program to help farmers and encourage farmers to move out into some other kind of industry. What that is depends on many things, like what their property can sustain and what other methods of income are appropriate to them.

**Harley McDONALD-ECKERSALL:** I think there are other industries that have over time lost social licence, become environmentally unviable. We are seeing this right now in the environmental sector as well – industries that have been a big part of our lives, of our culture, for a long, long time are now having to be phased out. And I think there is a certain cultural block to imagining a world where we do not mass farm animals for food, but I think that really it is very possible and it should be something that is in our minds. For instance, there is such a wide variety of plant-based alternatives now. There is cell-based agriculture. Magic Valley, which is a Victorian-based company, is creating pork without the pigs. This should be the future.

**Bev McARTHUR:** It can't be called 'pork' then.

**Harley McDONALD-ECKERSALL:** I mean, it is meat; it is just created without farming animals.

I think there have been many industries over time which have become no longer in line with our values, and if we had not said, 'Okay, yes, this is no longer lining up with what we value as a society', and moved away from it, then we would not be where we are today. And I think this is another time when we can stand up and say, 'Let's move towards a kinder world.'

**Chris DELFORCE:** I mean, industries closing and changing and adapting is nothing new. It has been happening forever. Maybe it is not about values, but, you know, you cannot walk down the street and go to a video rental store anymore. The world has changed, and attitudes towards the farming of animals for food have changed. People know more about animal agriculture. They care more about farmed animals than they ever have, and the industry just wants to keep going, business as usual, change nothing, adapt to nothing. And for a long time they have had the support to do that.

**Renee HEATH:** Thank you. Pig products are the second most consumed source of protein in Victoria. If you are successful in forcing out the pig industry and forcing it to close, will you be trying to ban the importing of pig products into Victoria?

**Harley McDONALD-ECKERSALL:** I think our focus is on care for Australian pigs. That is why we are here. That is what we are here to talk to today. I think there is a whole discussion about what an industry in transition looks like and, you know, whether it is about what people are deciding to pay money for to get



shipped overseas, but ultimately right now I think we need to reflect on what our values are as a country. And I think what we know and what we have seen time and time again when this kind of footage comes out is that most Australians do care about animals, are animal lovers, recognise animals as sentient as well, which is being reflected in the updates to the animal cruelty laws. Most Australians do not like these practices, do not want them happening in their country, and I think that is where we need to start.

**Chris DELFORCE:** I think the phase-out of this industry would have to come with a lot of public education initiatives that I think would go a long way towards people choosing themselves not to eat pigs, because for most people who eat pigs, the only reason they are doing so is they do not know what they are paying for. They do not know they are paying for cruelty. And if they are made aware of that, I do not think they are going to choose to pay for imported products.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Dr Heath. Mrs McArthur.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Thank you. Let us be clear here: whether it is Aussie Farms or the Farm Transparency Project, you want to end meat and livestock production for human consumption, correct?

**Harley McDONALD-ECKERSALL:** Yes.

**Chris DELFORCE:** Absolutely.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Okay. So that we are totally transparent: you are vegans, and you think that nobody should be eating meat and we should not be producing meat for the purposes of human consumption.

**Harley McDONALD-ECKERSALL:** Yes.

**Chris DELFORCE:** Yes. We believe it does not align with their values.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Correct. Okay. The pork industry is responsible for 3170 direct and indirect jobs, \$335 million is the gross value, \$31 million in export value. Ninety per cent of pig products are consumed locally, 10 per cent are exported and Victoria is a key contributor to the Australian pig industry. You would like this entire industry shut down, correct?

**Chris DELFORCE:** Yes, and those people moved into more ethical, sustainable lines of work that actually have a future, because this industry simply does not have a future. It is inevitable that the more people find out about this the more people are going to stop supporting it, and this industry will crumble on its own. The question is whether we support those farmers now to get out of it, get into new lines of work, or whether we leave them –

**Bev McARTHUR:** New lines – what? Such as?

**Chris DELFORCE:** Such as plant-based agriculture, such as cell-based agriculture, such as –

**Harley McDONALD-ECKERSALL:** Agritourism –

**Chris DELFORCE:** Agritourism, other kinds of farming, hemp farming, whatever it may be, whatever their property is suitable for – it is not a one-stop solution for all of it. But we need the investment and the research to be happening now.

**Harley McDONALD-ECKERSALL:** I also think that it is important to note that this inquiry has been initiated not because there have been any discussions around the profitability of pig farming but because there have been multiple concerns and critical problems over many, many years with farmers and slaughterhouse workers treating pigs horribly. This is an inquiry into pig welfare, and ultimately we need to discuss whether the welfare of farmed pigs is acceptable to most Australians.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Okay, let us be clear here: this inquiry was not put forward through the Parliament; this is a self-referenced inquiry from a member of this committee, so it did not have the support of the Legislative Council chamber to go ahead.

**The CHAIR:** Mrs McArthur, is there a question?

**Bev McARTHUR:** Let us be quite clear about that. Do you understand that trespassing onto property could lead to mass animal deaths by contravening these arrangements?

**Chris DELFORCE:** I understand that sending 5 million pigs to slaughter every year leads to mass animal deaths. I also understand that there was an inquiry into this very thing in 2019, and that is not within the terms of reference of this inquiry.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Yes, I was on that inquiry –

**Chris DELFORCE:** I remember.

**Bev McARTHUR:** and we learned of your position that you want to kill the meat livestock industry in this country.

**Chris DELFORCE:** We want to stop killing, actually.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Well, no, you want to kill an industry, let us be clear about this.

**Chris DELFORCE:** We want to stop killing.

**The CHAIR:** Mrs McArthur, I think it is important to note that you cannot kill an industry, but you can kill a sentient animal.

**Bev McARTHUR:** In the planning and decision-making your organisation makes to illegally enter farm properties, have you ever considered the mental anguish that you cause staff on these properties and the risk to animal health? Do you consider it, or is that okay?

**Chris DELFORCE:** I think anyone caught doing the wrong thing is going to experience some anguish. I do not think that means you should not expose them for doing the wrong thing.

**Bev McARTHUR:** So you should act illegally? That is okay? You condone illegal activity, do you?

**Harley McDONALD-ECKERSALL:** I think my question is that if you see a person raping an animal, would you consider their mental anguish before reporting them to the police?

**Bev McARTHUR:** Absolutely. That is an illegal activity. That is an illegal activity –

**Harley McDONALD-ECKERSALL:** Under federal regulations, causing an animal, during and before slaughter, an amount of pain and suffering is illegal, so what is happening in Australian slaughterhouses could be, and is, an illegal practice.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mrs McArthur. Ms Broad.

**Gaelle BROAD:** I read your submission, and it says:

... I have visited 66 slaughterhouses and 109 pig farms across Australia. Most of these visits have been a result of trespass, without the knowledge or consent of the owners of the facilities.

**Chris DELFORCE:** Yes.

**Gaelle BROAD:** So you are breaking the law?

**Chris DELFORCE:** Absolutely.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Right.

**Chris DELFORCE:** Full transparency: that is what we do. It is the only way that people will see inside these places, because these places are never going to open the doors for the public. The only reason we are having this inquiry, the only reason anyone knows anything about this industry, is because people like us risk their lives and their freedom and their safety and their psychological wellbeing to break the law and go and get this footage and expose it. By all means, charge us, fine us, send us to jail – we take that risk. We accept that risk the moment we push open an unlocked door or jump over a fence, whatever it may be, to hold up a camera

and film cruelty to an animal. We think that the cruelty to that animal should be considered a worse crime than jumping a fence to film it.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Okay, and what charge did you receive relating to the break-in at the Benalla abattoir?

**Harley McDONALD-ECKERSALL:** We have received no charges for any of the footage that we have released.

**Chris DELFORCE:** But when the –

**Harley McDONALD-ECKERSALL:** Oh, for the action? Last year 30 activists entered Benalla slaughterhouse and locked on, stopping the operations for about 10 hours. This was in direct response to the footage that came out of the gassing of pigs. There were a lot of people who were really outraged about this and felt like they had to do something directly.

**Gaelle BROAD:** So who is paying the legal fees for that?

**Chris DELFORCE:** Ideally the people who are involved in doing it themselves, but if we can contribute as an organisation, then we will.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Okay. Now, you said that you have been vegetarian since 2002, vegan since 2011, and you clearly want an end to the pig industry. Is that your view of chicken, of beef, lamb, fish?

**Chris DELFORCE:** Yes, it is. From what I have seen in the more than a decade that I have been investigating all these industries, they are all inherently cruel and I think not in alignment with most Australians' values.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Okay. So you want to see them all closed down?

**Chris DELFORCE:** Yes. Phased out, to be specific.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Right. Yes, your recommendation is a two-year phase-out of commercial pig farming must be announced. Just out of interest to your concern for animal welfare, when you have come across things that have not been appropriate behaviour, have you passed that information on immediately to the authorities?

**Chris DELFORCE:** Yes. In most cases, yes. Sometimes we know that we need to build a case. We know we need to show that this is routine, because if it is just a one-off, it gets treated as a one-off. If we have only got an hour of footage showing an animal not being stunned properly, they can ignore it and say, 'Oh, that was just a one-off.' But if we have got days showing the exact same thing happening over and over again, we show that it is a systemic problem and –

**Gaelle BROAD:** So you have undertaken your own investigation?

**Chris DELFORCE:** That is what we do, yes.

**Gaelle BROAD:** You are not giving it to the authorities?

**Chris DELFORCE:** We give it to the authorities when our investigation has concluded. And because we have such a quality, long-spanning investigation, that is the only reason authorities are able to take it seriously.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Now, you are concerned about –

**Harley McDONALD-ECKERSALL:** I think sometimes we end up with weeks and weeks of footage, and just the logistics of going through that footage and noting down each instance of animal welfare breaches takes some time. Then as soon as we have done that, we hand it over to the authorities.

**Gaelle BROAD:** So have you taken it to the media in that time?

**Chris DELFORCE:** Not before we take it to the authorities, no.

**Gaelle BROAD:** All right. You are concerned with animal welfare. Do you have any PhDs or training in animals?

**Chris DELFORCE:** I do not think you need that to care about the welfare of animals. I think most people care about the welfare of animals.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Okay.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Ms Broad. We have a little bit more time. Do we have any more questions from Mr Berger or Mr McIntosh on the screen?

**John BERGER:** Not from me, thanks, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Mr Berger. Mr McIntosh? We might have lost him. Ms Copsey.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Yes, I did have a question around –

**The CHAIR:** Do you want me to ask a question first?

**Katherine COPSEY:** Yes, if you have got one ready to go.

**Bev McARTHUR:** I have got one too, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** I presumed you would, Mrs McArthur.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Good.

**The CHAIR:** Obviously a lot of the feedback you get from people who oppose the work that you do is that your investigations are illegal. What are some of the things that the government and the animal farming industries could do to stop you doing this work and increase transparency?

**Chris DELFORCE:** Well, there is a lot of talk around CCTV. Our belief is that this CCTV needs to be publicly accessible, because otherwise whichever third party it is that is monitoring the CCTV is bound to whatever poor welfare laws exist at the time. If there is cruelty happening but it is legal, there is nothing they can do about it – the CCTV has not achieved anything. But if it is publicly accessible and any member of the public can log in and see what is happening and make up their own mind as to whether they support it or groups like us can then review that footage and if we see something happening, we can report it to the authorities, then we have got no reason to trespass. If these industries are transparent on their own, we have got no reason to force that transparency on them.

**The CHAIR:** To tie that up: do you want to be doing this work?

**Chris DELFORCE:** Absolutely not.

**Harley McDONALD-ECKERSALL:** This is definitely not how I would choose to spend my time.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Ms Copsey.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Thank you. That was my question actually. But I did have another question about powers that you think would be useful to enhance the effectiveness of regulatory bodies' inspection and other powers.

**Chris DELFORCE:** I suppose unannounced inspections and the ability to seize footage immediately and review it.

**Harley McDONALD-ECKERSALL:** Something is that a lot of these facilities do have CCTV; however, it is mainly used internally. If a worker has an injury or an incident, then they might be reviewed. The fact that we entered these facilities and installed cameras and were not caught on camera shows how little they view this footage. I think, as Chris mentioned, unannounced inspections, mandatory inspections as well, and not only just going in and having a look around and giving the thumbs up, but seizing CCTV, reviewing it and examining it. We have been providing, as we mentioned, all of the slaughterhouse footage to PrimeSafe and to the relevant

authorities in other states, and every time an investigation is opened and a lot of the time some really severe breaches of animal welfare are found. The fact that this keeps on happening shows that this is a systemic issue.

**The CHAIR:** Dr Heath.

**Renee HEATH:** I think Mrs McArthur was before me.

**The CHAIR:** I am just going in order; there is time for both of you.

**Renee HEATH:** Okay. At what point do you see yourself stopping breaking the law and into farms? Would it be if we cease CO<sub>2</sub> use, or would it be at the phasing out of the industry?

**Chris DELFORCE:** It would be at the phasing out of the industry. I mean, we have said that CO<sub>2</sub> is not the only bad way to do things, it is all bad. If CO<sub>2</sub> is phased out, we will focus more on how bad the alternatives are.

**The CHAIR:** Mrs McArthur.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Okay, so presumably you have done all of the economic modelling as to the cost of phasing out all meat?

**Chris DELFORCE:** I think that is the government's job.

**Harley McDONALD-ECKERSALL:** I do not think that is our job.

**Bev McARTHUR:** It's your job?

**Harley McDONALD-ECKERSALL:** No, no. I think it is the government's job.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Well, it should be, because you are suggesting we shut down an industry.

**Chris DELFORCE:** Make us the government, by all means. I ran for election actually.

**Bev McARTHUR:** You must have some idea what the cost, to I presume the taxpayer, is going to be to phase out the farming of pigs or any other meat production.

**Chris DELFORCE:** Divert it from the industry.

**Harley McDONALD-ECKERSALL:** Right now millions of dollars of government funding – taxpayers money – is going to Australian Pork Limited. Despite that, there has not been any sign that they have been putting any of that into investing in alternatives to CO<sub>2</sub> stunning, in alternatives for sow stalls and farrowing crates. The industry has remained unchanged for 20 years.

**Chris DELFORCE:** They put that money into marketing for their own industry.

**Harley McDONALD-ECKERSALL:** Marketing – 'Get some pork on your fork'. That is what they are using taxpayers money for.

**Chris DELFORCE:** How is that appropriate?

**Harley McDONALD-ECKERSALL:** So you can take that money –

**Chris DELFORCE:** Building gas chambers with taxpayer money, how is that appropriate?

**Bev McARTHUR:** So we are going to close down the pig industry, the beef industry, the lamb industry, the chicken industry. You must have some idea what the cost is to the taxpayer of closing –

**Chris DELFORCE:** Why does it matter?

**Bev McARTHUR:** Why does it matter? Because taxpayers have to fund it.

**Chris DELFORCE:** This is an inquiry about the welfare of animals.

**The CHAIR:** Okay, Mrs McArthur, that has now been three –

**Bev McARTHUR:** It is quite clear why it matters.

**The CHAIR:** Order! That has now been three questions, Mrs McArthur. I have been very generous with your extra questions, especially since you missed the opening remarks. Mrs Broad, do you have a final question?

**Gaelle BROAD:** Yes, thank you. Mr Delforce, you just mentioned that you were a candidate. Was that with the Animal Justice Party?

**Chris DELFORCE:** Yes, it was.

**Gaelle BROAD:** So it is the same as the Chair of this committee, the Animal Justice Party, who self-referenced this inquiry?

**Chris DELFORCE:** Yes.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Okay. Do you think that there is a problem then with your presentation being objective?

**Chris DELFORCE:** No. I mean, this is an inquiry that we were pushing the Victorian government to hold.

**The CHAIR:** Can I just state, members: we had a discussion – and you are aware of this – outside of this hearing where I declared very clearly to you that I know Mr Delforce, and I think this is getting rather inappropriate now. Unless you have a question in relation to the inquiry, we will leave it there.

**Gaelle BROAD:** I think it is relevant because that is how the inquiry came about, and he just mentioned that he was a candidate, so I was just checking which party.

**Chris DELFORCE:** It should have come about from the government. Why didn't it? They just ignored it. This is clearly an issue Victorians care about.

**Harley McDONALD-ECKERSALL:** I also think that questioning the integrity of the Chair of this committee is extremely inappropriate, and I will not participate in answering that question.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. We might just leave it there. Thank you very much for your time today and the effort that you put into your presentation. That concludes the hearing.

**Witnesses withdrew.**