



Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee

Hearing Date: 13 March 2024

Question[s] taken on notice

Directed to: Australian Pork Limited

Received Date: 28 March 2024

1. Question from The Chair to Rebecca Athorn page 6

The CHAIR: Which breeds of pigs?

Margo ANDRAE: In terms of looking after those animals – so the way that we actually do our intensive side of the industry, we give them care, they are in temperature-controlled sheds and they are given a lot of staff time. But, Dr Athorn, I am not sure if you want to add from a breed perspective our expectations around looking after the best care for those pigs and this farming intensive –

Rebecca ATHORN: In terms of free-range farming, historically pigs were kept outside but there were inherent management issues with that. It is hard to check on pigs, particularly in the farrowing process. There is a higher pre-wean mortality in these systems, and these animals are exposed to the elements and therefore they are spending time trying to protect themselves. They do get sunburnt. There are different pigs that are better suited to outdoor systems, but also there is a lot of regulation in terms of environment and the land required to farm as many pigs as we need to farm to feed Australia.

The CHAIR: Yes. I am out of time, but I feel that did not answer my question about breeds of pigs that do not like being outside, so if you could take that on notice I would really appreciate it. We will go to Ms Broad.

Response: There are a large range of factors which must be taken into consideration when housing pigs outside. Soil types and climate are key environmental considerations, and due to these factors there are limited areas within Australia suitable for outdoor pig farming. In addition, mothering ability must also be carefully monitored as some breeds maternal instincts are not as well developed as others for caring for their piglets outside where predators and other additional factors are present that are not present within indoor environments.

Experts have raised concerns that certain pure breeds (for example: white skinned breeds such Landrace and Large White) are not suited to being bred outdoors as they may struggle in an outdoor environment. They are prone to issues such as sunburn and can become stressed when exposed to the environmental and biological stressors they encounter in outdoor

environments. Even the most robust breeds will not thrive when temperatures get too hot, which is one of the reasons animal welfare needs can be met far more effectively within indoor environments in many areas of Australia.

2. Question from Katherine Copsey to Margo Andrae page 11 – 12

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. I would appreciate if you could take on notice – I would like to understand the percentage that are still using sow stalls and the time line that they have given for that phase-out.

Margo ANDRAE: Certainly.

Katherine COPSEY: I just want to understand. You know, since 2007 the industry has made a voluntary commitment to phase this out, and this is the progress that we have got to – that it is not actually completely phased out. It is still used for certain periods – in compliance with the law, I completely acknowledge – and there are a portion of operators still using sow stalls.

Margo ANDRAE: We can take them on notice, Ms Copsey. I should probably say, just to support the industry, that stepping forward and doing an industry voluntary phase-out of their own choice and at their own expense, I think, should be acknowledged. Even 88 per cent, plus the smaller ones that we know are not even using sow stalls, is a fantastic achievement for the industry, but I am happy to take your question on notice. There has been discussion of progressing a uniform national approach to animal welfare standards – should this present a barrier from Victoria acting on promoting pig welfare outcomes through strengthened regulation and enforcement?

Response: There is no evidence to suggest strengthened regulation or enforcement is necessary to promoting pig welfare outcomes, given the industries track record on scientific research, innovation and adoption of new science based recognised best practice. The submission by Agriculture Victoria clearly demonstrated that the commercial pig industry takes animal welfare seriously and is highly compliant.

Of the more than 8,000 animal welfare complaints only 179 related to pigs, and of that only 41 (23%) complaints were substantiated following investigation. Only nine complaints were relating to farms with more than 50 pigs. The largest farm investigated within this group had 337 pigs, would have had less than 30 sows, and as such would be classified by our industry as a small holder pig farm. Not a single complaint investigated or substantiated by Agriculture Victoria related to a commercial Victorian pig farm.

91% of the commercial sow herd is on farms accredited by APIQ, and 88% of these farms are accredited as having met the standard set by the voluntary industry phase out. This equates to more than 80% of the commercial sow herd being cared for on farms accredited by APIQ as using gestation stalls for a maximum of five days or less since last mating.

Farmers of the remaining 20% have chosen not to seek accreditation regarding the use of gestation stalls on their farm, and any analysis regarding their continued use or APIQ accreditation would be supposition on the part of Australian Pork Ltd. Anecdotal surveying of these producers indicates a variety of reasons including that they are smaller scale producers, it is not cost effective or they don't need it for market access.

3. Additional Question On Notice from Katherine Copsey

Question: Why is anaesthetic or pain relief not used for amputation of tails, cutting of ears and clipping of teeth of pigs?

Response: There are no anaesthetic or pain relief options registered in Australia for use on piglets. There are limited pain relief options available in Australia for use on livestock generally.

Substances with anaesthetic or pain relief properties deemed suitable by experts in the industry for use on pigs, under prescription by a veterinarian, have formulations designed for large animals, such as sows, and have not been formulated for use in young animals such as piglets. This poses a risk to piglet health if administering these substances to piglets.

Furthermore, these anaesthetics and pain relief options require administration up to 30 minutes prior to the husbandry procedure for them to be effective, which results in double-handling of the piglets.

The stress caused by double handling piglets is a welfare issue in itself as has been extensively researched and must also be taken into consideration. When undertaking these husbandry practices best practice protocols are recommended so as to minimise any pain the piglet may experience, to ensure both the short term and long term welfare of the piglet.

Please note: regarding clipping of teeth – the clipping or grinding of the tip of a piglets needle teeth does not involve any connection with a nerve and is therefore not considered by experts to be a painful procedure.