

# 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**

Margo Andrae, Chief Executive Officer,

Dr Rebecca Athorn, Manager, Production Innovation,

Dawson Bradford, Board Director (*via videoconference*), and

Tanya Pittard, General Manager, Policy and Industry Relations, Australian Pork Limited.

**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 any 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 to you, starting with Mrs 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.

**The CHAIR:** And we might have some other members join on the screen at some point during your hearing. Thank you very much for coming along today.

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, and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing, and then transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

For the Hansard record could you all please state your full name and the organisation you are appearing on behalf of.

**Margo ANDRAE:** Thank you, Chair. Margo Andrae, Chief Executive Officer of Australian Pork Limited.

**Tanya PITTARD:** Tanya Pittard, General Manager of Policy and Industry Relations with Australian Pork Limited.

**Rebecca ATHORN:** Dr Rebecca Athorn, Manager for Production Innovation at Australian Pork Limited.

**Margo ANDRAE:** And online we have –

**Dawson BRADFORD:** Dawson Bradford, APL Board Director and pig farmer.

**The CHAIR:** Wonderful. Thank you. We welcome your opening comments but ask that they are kept to around 10 to 15 minutes to ensure there is plenty of time for discussion and questions.

**Margo ANDRAE:** Excellent. We will be a bit quicker, Chair. Good morning, everybody. Honourable members of the Economy and Infrastructure Committee, I represent Australian Pork Limited, or APL, the peak body for the pork industry in Australia. We combine research and innovation, marketing and export, and strategic policy development for the Australian pork industry. We stand tall as a producer of Australia's second-largest consumed protein and its crucial role in producing affordable, high-quality food for everyday Australians. Our industry provides Australia with high-quality, nutritious food while providing exemplary care to animals across every stage of the supply chain. This parliamentary inquiry is an opportunity to demonstrate how our industry has animal care at its core. We will also showcase the sustainable and ethical practices of pork producers.

Before we begin, we must recognise that activists presenting to this inquiry have been clear in their desire to end animal farming altogether. We respect their right to have that view; however, it is also clear that our society does not have the same belief. Humanity needs quality protein to sustain a growing population, and our industry has been playing an instrumental role in feeding the world. We do not wish to get in the way of any alternative proteins. In a market democracy people can choose to consume as they wish and people can serve that market with their products, yet more people are eating pork than ever before, and we are very proud of this.

We will also not impose our views and our consumption habits on others. We firmly believe that a hearing based on science and not ideology will demonstrate the importance of livestock farming to society and the dedication and care we show our pigs. Our farmers comply with federal, state and local government legislation alongside the Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals, and the industry's Australian pork industry quality assurance program, or APIQ, is the program that demands pig producers care for their animals and follow safe and sustainable practices.

Over the last decades APL has invested more than \$23 million of producer money into animal welfare research alone, adding to the tens of millions invested by organisations such as Pork CRC and the Australasian Pork Research Institute. We seek out new science and new ways of working to continually improve the way we look after our people and our pigs. Through rigorous research, ongoing education and the implementation of best practice, we aim to ensure the humane treatment of pigs at every stage of their journey from farm to table.

Beyond pig care it is vital that the committee understands the pork industry's importance to regional communities, Victoria and Australia. The industry contributes \$6 billion to the national economy and supports 34,600 jobs in rural communities. In 2022–23 alone, Victorian pig farming supported 3000 full-time jobs, which generated \$255 million in household incomes for Victorian families. This is adding to the total of \$1.3 billion across Victoria alone from the contribution of the pig industry.

Australian pork is also a low-emissions, environmentally sustainable protein. Since 1980 the pork industry has reduced its carbon footprint by more than 73 per cent and its water use by 80 per cent. Producers are investing in on-farm waste management, feed conversion and electricity generation, and we have set a target of 60 per cent of production using waste recycling and renewable energy by 2030, a target that we are on track to achieve.

We understand that our success is linked to the trust placed in us by the community, and we are committed to maintaining that trust through transparency and tangible actions. We note that this inquiry has received hundreds of submissions. On reviewing these, as a science-based organisation we feel compelled to support the committee by being clear with some of the facts. We are more regulated than the aviation industry, with stringent codes of practice that govern our work. These codes are enshrined in law and are set by the regulators, not by the industry. These are audited by independent third parties. Animal welfare breaches can be prosecuted by the law.

We are proud of the industry-led voluntary phase-out of sow stalls, which has been adopted by over 88 per cent of the national production. This has come at a considerable cost to the producers themselves.

Pre-slaughter stunning is recognised as a humane part of the end-of-life process by the World Organisation for Animal Health. This is something that our industry cares deeply about. Any stunning system should not be examined in isolation but must consider animal handling and worker health and safety. While we always review and seek alternatives, carbon dioxide stunning is the best option for animal welfare.

Euthanising pigs happens on farms. It is undertaken to alleviate the suffering of an animal. Any method of euthanasia must be instantaneous, effective and humane.

Artificial insemination has been instrumental for facilitating global improvements in fertility and herd health. It mimics a natural process and helps reduce the spread of disease. To compare artificial insemination to bestiality is cruel and offensive.

At its core, our industry is about providing food to Australians. Today we know that you will hear from other members of our industry, and I hope you will see the human face of our pork industry and the impact that trespassing has on safety, security and mental health. Our livelihoods are put at risk through these biosecurity breaches and repeated attempts to disrupt our operations, but make no mistake, these illegal activities are endangering the wellbeing of our animals and our people. Many members of this committee are passionate about safety in the workplace, and so are we. That is why it is so sad to see this vocal minority do so much to threaten innocent workers and their families. This must stop.

But let us also be clear: these protestors are a minority. For most Victorians pork is an important and increasing part of their weekly food shop. We are privileged to provide a safe and nutritious protein to Australians at an affordable price. We strike the right balance in upholding the ethical treatment of animals while safeguarding the economic vitality of the Victorian pork industry.

In closing, I would really like to acknowledge those who are appearing on behalf our industry for their courage in the face of illegal activism and threats. They should be commended for their bravery and their passion for our industry, and with that we are happy to take questions.

**The CHAIR:** Wonderful. Thank you. We have just had Mr Berger join. Members, I will set the timer to 6 minutes, and we will see how we go at the end. We will start with Mrs McArthur.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Well, look, thank you very much for appearing today. The animal activists we heard from yesterday painted your industry as a bunch of cruel, masochistic operators who do not care about animals and who ought to be run out of town and the industry closed down. What would you say to their claims?

**Margo ANDRAE:** The reality is the industry is very much focused on the care of our animals and the care of our people. We operate under best practice, we are backed by the latest science and we undertake continuous improvement around the care for our animals and the training of our people, so for us I would just say that what they said was simply not true. I am incredibly proud of the pork industry and the way we operate, and we will always look for improvements. We will always look to improve.

But I do have to say regarding these ongoing attacks against the industry that it is not just this week, it is not just last month – it has been the last 30 years that the industry has been under attack from illegal activities like this. We are very privileged to do what we do, and we are also very open to explaining to people what we do and why we do it. For us, we will continue on a path of continuous improvement backed by science and making sure our animals and our people get the utmost care.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Tell us how you are affected or how a pig farmer is affected if people illegally enter the property and install cameras and behave egregiously towards the animals and your workers?

**Margo ANDRAE:** Yes, so what people might not realise is it actually disrupts the animals. It does – it can disrupt all patterns of their day-to-day life and they do get stressed, so that is an additional stressor. If the goal is animal welfare – and I do question how much they even spend on animal welfare research; are they qualified around animal welfare? – it does have an impact on the animals. Then that adds to the people as well. Can you imagine being on your farm and having people suddenly turn up in masks or disrupting your animals? These are animals that you care for day to day, and to have that level of disruption and that cruelty to people has a massive impact from a mental health perspective. And it is the unknown – you are there, you are legally operating. We are a heavily regulated industry. We are operating under very strict rules and guidelines. We are looking after animals and looking after our people, and yet you are suddenly invaded on your farm. And from a biosecurity perspective, there are diseases out there that we are protecting our animals from, and it just opens that threat. We have seen Victoria strengthen the biosecurity rules here, and we would love to see accountability held for those people who are breaching biosecurity. But what I might do is pause for a second,

because I do have Dawson Bradford on the call, and Dawson is a pig farmer. From a living-on-the-farm perspective, Dawson, do you want to add on how the impact of activists on farm is for average farmers?

**Dawson BRADFORD:** Yes, sure. Obviously Margo covered most of the points, but yes, it is an invasion of privacy, and the stress and fear it puts upon our staff – I am one that will stand up and advocate for our industry, and I will stand up and back myself against these activists and extremists, but there are plenty through the industry that are scared to put their hand up and speak out against these groups. As I said, while we have not been raided yet, I am extremely proud of our operation and our industry, and I just think we need to ensure the safety of our members, our pork farmers – and not just pork farmers, all farmers in Australia – is protected by the laws that keep our workplaces safe and free from intrusion from these activist groups.

Just one more point: I would like to thank members for allowing me to speak on this today, but I think it is a great opportunity for you to learn about the Australian pig industry – and I say the Australian pig industry; I know you are the Victorian pig industry, but we are one industry countrywide. You will learn in the next few days, or today even, about all the people involved through this industry. It is not just pig farmers, it is processors, it is the APL team, it is vets, it is the science community, it is the universities, transporters and suppliers. So many businesses are affected by or impacted by our industry, and poor decisions and poor policies put in place by governments have huge impacts across large sections of our economy. So I will ask you to put aside your preconceived ideas that you may have, sit back and listen today to some of the smartest people in the country, who will inform you about the Australian pig industry. If there are any more questions, I will be happy to answer them.

**Bev McARTHUR:** The pig industry is responsible for the second-most used protein by consumers in this country. The activists want to shut down this industry and then every other meat- and fibre-producing industry using animals. If the pork industry is shut down, as is their stated claim and will, what would happen to that loss of protein for the Australian consumer?

**Margo ANDRAE:** I think if I start from the top level in terms of nutrition, we are so privileged in Australia to have access to beautiful protein – and we are; we are the second most consumed protein and we are affordable, so from that perspective as well, it is a great part of an everyday diet. From a health and wellbeing perspective, we are very privileged in the role we play in that. But the reality is that if we did not have the pork industry, we would not have access to fresh meat. We would probably be importing products that come from countries that do not actually adhere to the standards that Australia has. We are, as I said, highly regulated. We have very strict standards and we take animal welfare very seriously. That is not globally acceptable, so we do not know where they are getting their feed from, but also, there are a lot of things out there on the market today that are just highly processed with salt and things like that, so it is actually not good for our kids. It is not good for their brains. Pork has been proven to be a natural protein that is good for the body.

If I flow through, though, Mrs McArthur, where would people go? There are no jobs. Rural and regional communities are already suffering. We are a \$6 billion industry, contributing \$1.3 billion to Victoria alone. Where are people going to get their livelihoods from? Not only can we do a sustainable, well cared for practice and provide safe, nutritious protein, we actually support people through the economy, through their jobs and through getting education. A lot of our farmers support local sporting competitions and things like that. So there is a richness and a social fabric to rural and regional Australia that our industry supports, and it would be a very sad day if we lost that and did not support our farmers.

**Bev McARTHUR:** Yes, we have shut down the timber industry and now we are –

**The CHAIR:** Mrs McArthur, that is your time. You are aware of that.

**Bev McArthur** interjected.

**The CHAIR:** Mrs McArthur! Thank you. I will pick up from there. You stated in your opening remarks that cruelty to pigs is prosecutable by law. I feel that this is not the full picture. Is it not the case that farmed animals do have exemptions under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act*?

**Margo ANDRAE:** Chair, I might let Ms Pittard answer that one.

**Tanya PITTARD:** The Victorian industry actually takes the Victorian code of practice for pig welfare extremely seriously, as does it take the model code of practice, which is why it is actually a core component of our APIQ quality assurance program. It is why –

**The CHAIR:** Sorry, I have limited time, and I just want to make the most of it. I asked about the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act*.

**Tanya PITTARD:** Yes. So the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act* allows Ag Victoria to take any complaints seriously and allows them to go and do an investigation on farm. We have had a couple of farms that have been investigated this year. The Ag Victoria team went in, spoke with the farmers, investigated the farm and declared that there was not a concern. The other thing is that any acts of supreme cruelty can be prosecuted under POCTA.

**The CHAIR:** Are there not exemptions where it is legal to bludgeon a piglet – but it is on comparison illegal to bludgeon a dog – for the pork industry?

**Margo ANDRAE:** Chair, in terms of that reference and the comparison between a pet and an animal, as I explained in my opening statement, if the euthanasia approach for ending a life very quickly is needed, blunt trauma is the quickest, fastest, most humane way to end the life.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, I am not asking about the practice. I am asking: are there loopholes for the pork industry?

**Margo ANDRAE:** I do not believe there are loopholes, Chair. It is a simple fact that it is a practice that is humane. It is sanctioned. I think your line of questioning is sort of trying to call out a practice, but the reality is, if there is a reason to terminate that life on farm, we use the most instant response. Dr Athorn, I am not sure if you want to add anything, given the line of questioning, but it is the most humane method, so I do not believe that is a fair comparison, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Well, that probably leads me to my next question –

**Margo ANDRAE:** We do produce 5.5 million pigs a year, and having that ability to end that life there and then, if it is required due to the nature of the piglet, I think is important.

**The CHAIR:** Yes. That leads me to my next line of questioning on transparency, because I believe, and I think many others believe, that if we knew this was happening to pigs on farms – things such as blunt force trauma – people would not want to support that. We know that many Victorians are confronted by it when they see it, and it is the same with CO<sub>2</sub> gassing. You say that you support full transparency. I am just wondering if you could give me an example of a change that you have made for your industry to be more transparent. We have had calls for CCTV in abattoirs and we know that this would be a deterrent for people going in collecting footage – so a measure on transparency, as an example.

**Margo ANDRAE:** Chair, one of the things we always try to do is explain to people not only what we do but why we do it. So we launched a full paddock-to-plate, almost, virtual tour which explained in detail exactly why we do what we do. I would have full hope that the community would support us in the fact that terminating a life that needed to be terminated right then and there was done in the most instant, humane way possible. So I believe – you said at the beginning of your question what you believe – the community would actually understand why we do what we do. But we go above and beyond that in terms of explaining that through our virtual tour and through our research. And I need to be clear, Chair, if there are things we can be improving, we will always be doing it. Our industry has invested millions of dollars in ensuring that we have the latest infrastructure and ensuring we have the latest training. We have incredibly qualified animal welfare experts. We have I think more PhD people across our industry within the farming practices across the supply chain. In terms of CCTV, we did see a change in that, but I will not go into detail with that because the next witness will be able to talk about that. But I think in terms of transparency, our view is that it is telling people what we do and why we do it, and we have gone above and beyond to do that, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Does the virtual tour show CO<sub>2</sub> gassing?

**Margo ANDRAE:** It does not go into the gondola, no, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Does it show the methods that pigs are stunned with?

**Margo ANDRAE:** It explains the methods, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** It does not show them, though.

**Margo ANDRAE:** No, Chair, it does not.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. You –

**Margo ANDRAE:** But again, Chair, you are going to hear from experts across the supply chain today and many from the processing sector, who I am sure will be able to give more science-backed evidence on why we do what we do. But I do need to come back to – it is global best practice and we have spent millions of dollars in infrastructure to ensure that that end of life is as humane and as quick as possible. And we are talking about a pre-stun slaughter, where the pigs are 100 per cent unconscious in that very short time.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, I am aware. We have had animal welfare experts vehemently disagree that it is best practice, but I will move on. You state online that only 4 per cent of sows are farmed in outdoor farming systems. Why is this such a low percentage, and what is preventing your industry from moving away from confinement?

**Margo ANDRAE:** There is probably a slight misconception there. We have a lot of different production methods across the industry, and our animals – we do farm 5.5 million pigs a year as part of feeding Australians, which we are very privileged to do. In terms of the actual production methods, some of our breeds of pigs do not like to be outdoors. They do get sunburnt –

**The CHAIR:** Which ones?

**Margo ANDRAE:** they are highly susceptible to disease, and the best protection methods are –

**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.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Thank you, Chair.

**Margo ANDRAE:** Sorry, Chair, I did not realise that Mr Bradford had his hand up. Is there a quick moment we could just go to him, considering we probably need to look at the monitor?

**Gaelle BROAD:** That is fine.

**The CHAIR:** We can, yes, if members are happy.

**Margo ANDRAE:** Thank you, members.

**Dawson BRADFORD:** Just quickly, on that breed one, it is actually genotype. There are actually genotypes within the breeds that are bred specifically for outdoor units. If you put a lot of the intensive-bred animals out into the free-range systems, they will break down. The outdoor or free-range animal is a tougher, more robust animal. So, yes, there is a difference in genotype and breeding – just clarifying that.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. We will move on to Ms Broad.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Thank you very much. Thank you for your submission – it is very comprehensive – and for coming today. Could you just inform the committee a bit about the work that you are doing with the Australian pig industry quality assurance – APIQ, I think you called it – and what you have undertaken to ensure good animal welfare outcomes in the pig industry?

**Margo ANDRAE:** The Australian pork industry quality assurance program covers 91.9 per cent of production in this country. It is an independently audited quality assurance system that covers all levels, including animal welfare, in relation to this committee. We have just extended it even further to enhance the biosecurity parts of it, so it is biosecurity, animal care, people. It is a fully comprehensive, intermittently audited system that is audited a minimum of once a year, but we can ad hoc audit if we need to. It is a traceability system so we can actually ensure how those animals are looked after and cared for – things like that. Ms Pittard, I am not sure if you would like to add more technical –

**Tanya PITTARD:** Yes. I think as well what I think the industry and people should be really proud of is the fact that we always make sure that APIQ incorporates options and additional modules to meet new needs. So, for example, with gestation stall free we wanted to have a method by which farmers could be accredited as gestation stall free. So that was referred to as option A, and producers could be accredited and audited each year to ensure that they were meeting that requirement for pigs in a gestation stall no more than five days after last mating. We then incorporated Coles specifications, which is referred to as option B, and we now have option C, which is the voluntary enhanced biosecurity standards, which are actually quite world leading and provide an additional level of accreditation and awareness for producers to protect their farms against African swine fever.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Okay. You mentioned Coles. My understanding is that they were doing their own form but then they opted for the industry standards. Can you talk to that, to why they did that?

**Margo ANDRAE:** Yes. It was really important. We do work closely with I guess the end part of our industry – as we say, paddock to plate – but the reality is that having one system that covers all of the industry and making sure it is robust and strong actually they were quite supportive of. So it was simpler to have a system that was more robust, that was independently audited and that they could trust, and so that is what APIQ is.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Okay. You mentioned independent audits. Who actually undertakes the audits?

**Margo ANDRAE:** There is an independent company called Aus-Meat that actually does the audits. APL does not get involved in that. That is completely independent.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Okay. And who pays for the audits?

**Margo ANDRAE:** The farmer pays for all the audits.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Okay. All right. Can you just tell us a bit about your collaboration with government? How do you work with government bodies and other relevant agencies to formulate those extra modules that you talked about under the APIQ?

**Margo ANDRAE:** The working partnerships across all levels of government and with legitimate animal welfare groups is probably a priority for the industry. So when we are working to improve the industry and do that continuous improvement, we do work with chief veterinary officers understanding the state-based regulations and legislation; the federal regulations, legislation, standards and guidelines and processes; things like that – the Animal Health Committee. We do believe that everything we do – working with the experts, working with the regulators to ensure that we are going above and beyond every single time – is really important. Did you want to add –

**Tanya PITTARD:** I think it is actually something that is quite unique to the pork industry, having spent my career working in agriculture, that open method of collaboration, that willingness to listen, the fact that they have collaboration across government – they work very closely with the chief veterinary officers; they understand the importance of having very stringent standards within the APIQ modules. It is the same thing in the environmental space. We have national environmental guidelines both for indoor and outdoor piggeries that



we work very closely on with state government regulators, the EPAs and the departments of agriculture to ensure that those national guidelines not only include the latest science and research but also meet the regulatory needs.

**Gaelle BROAD:** Now, I am just assuming that you would have heard a bit of the commentary from yesterday or tuned in perhaps to hear some of the witnesses, but are there any particular points or comments that you want to make in response to issues that were raised yesterday?

**Margo ANDRAE:** Probably the main one, if I am honest, Ms Broad, is that the fundamental ideology of some of those groups is to end livestock farming, so it was a very different lens that they came to the table in. And in some instances the representation of the industry is simply not true, which we have tried to counteract and we will continue to try and counteract. But the treatment of our animals, the care of our animals and the care of our people is paramount to everything we do every day, and I guess that is probably what we would like to get across – that not only are we already heavily regulated operating, we go above and beyond through our own QA system, through our own learning, through our training. In our industry we even have training that looks at whether you should be working with pigs. Not everybody wants to work with a pig, so it is having training that actually assesses that. I have done the training, and I am very pleased to say, you know, I am suitable to work with pigs. I think it is that element of: we do go above and beyond; we are a very proud industry. What we saw represented yesterday was not the truth, and it was a very opposing view, in certain cases, to what we do. We will always be the first to call out if there is something wrong, and it will be modified through training or people exiting the industry if that is what is required. For matters that are above and beyond, it is a police matter or it is a regulatory matter. We are not the regulators, but we certainly work with the regulators to make sure the industry goes above and beyond, so we are very proud as an industry.

I do want to point out, though, yesterday and I guess the night before, it does keep coming to light that there is a very clear agenda of planning illegal behaviour on farms and filming people that really should be called out. There is a very strong regulatory system, and I do want to just go back to Mrs McArthur's question before. These are people's homes. This is where they raise their children. The illegal footage, the illegal access to the farms and the disruption to the animals and the people is just illegal behaviour, and these people should be held accountable for it.

But in terms of the industry, we saw this inquiry as an opportunity to present our industry, to present what we do and why we do it. We are incredibly proud, and we will always take the approach of continuous improvement as much as we can.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Ms Broad. We will go to Mr Berger.

**John BERGER:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you for your appearance at today's hearing. I have heard a little bit about the global best practice in the pig industry. I am more interested to know: is there a particular point in time when the global best practices are earmarked, and where do we think Victoria sits within that global standard?

**Margo ANDRAE:** I will let Dr Athorn answer, but in terms of the question around timing, even as recently as early this year we continued to do research and literature reviews and work with scientists to ensure that any of the best practices that we are operating under are still current and fit for purpose. And where there are opportunities for improvements or changes, we will absolutely explore those. Dr Athorn.

**Rebecca ATHORN:** Yes. So I suppose it depends on what aspect of production we are talking about.

**John BERGER:** What is happening about animal husbandry, to start with.

**Rebecca ATHORN:** Yes, so that is a good place. The term 'global best practice' is a fairly loose term, and there is no such thing as global best practice. What there is is that we do research continuously, we look at what is happening globally, some of the trends that are happening, and we take that into our own unique set of circumstances and our operating environment here in Australia. We would take that advice, we would do our own research and our own due diligence around some of these practices. A lot of the things that are touted as best practice or standards are not necessarily legislated in other countries either. It is just that they are saying, 'This is what we do.' But they do operate in a very different environment; the climate is different, the facilities are different and those kinds of things. So we need to have a broad overview of it and have a lot of different

information coming in – information from experts and a dialogue with our producers around these different practices.

**John BERGER:** Yes, I always struggle with the global best practice or where it might sit and how it all works, but I am more interested in what our current farmers might think about being adaptable to some of the changes that are being proposed in different parts of the world that make things a lot more suitable for animal husbandry practices.

**Rebecca ATHORN:** Just from a scientific point of view and our consultation with our members, our industry is quite progressive, and they are actually really interested in what is going on out there. Our producers actually travel the globe and go and visit producers overseas and look at systems and things that are going on. A lot of those have been adopted and brought back to their own personal farms, and they share their stories with other producers, so they are quite open. They are always looking for continuous improvement. We do not hit a ceiling on anything. We are always trying to look to where we can improve. So I do not think that is an issue with our industry – with accepting and adopting practices that improve the lives of our pigs.

**Margo ANDRAE:** And I think what we have seen is probably the uptake, where they do see an option or something, of coming back and actually doing research to see if it is fit for purpose for Australia. We will always come back to that science-based evidence to ensure that it is fit for purpose back here in Australia. And then probably with some of the practices we see globally, Australia is actually exceeding them, so that is a really important thing. Some of the practices we actually go above and beyond, so we always need to make sure our farmers are aware of how that works, and it comes back to that evidence-based science.

**John BERGER:** That question was more based on the animal husbandry side of it. How does it fit for the abattoir setting?

**Margo ANDRAE:** What do you mean, Mr Berger? In terms of –

**John BERGER:** Again, we use that term ‘global best practice’, but what is the best practice around globally that can be adopted or sits with the current situation for Victoria and where we sit with it?

**Margo ANDRAE:** In terms of how they process the pigs, is that –

**John BERGER:** Yes.

**Margo ANDRAE:** Yes, okay. Up next you are actually hearing from the Australian Meat Industry Council, who represent the processing. There is the Australian meat processing council, who do research into the processing sector to ensure that they are adopting best practice as well, and they are extending to utilising technology, data, all of those areas. They are again quite progressive, like the pig farming. Some of our farmers who you are going to hear from today are vertically integrated and do have processing plants as part of their supply chain, but the continuous improvement, latest technologies – 85 per cent of our pigs are actually processed through our seven main export abattoirs, who have invested tens of millions of dollars in ensuring that their infrastructure and their training are world leading. But I am sure they will be happy to answer some of those questions later on.

**John BERGER:** Thank you. That is it for me, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, Mr Berger. We will go to Dr Heath.

**Renee HEATH:** Thank you. Thank you for your presentation and for appearing today. Can you tell us about the rigorous biosecurity management plans farms must have in place to ensure the wellbeing and safety of livestock and staff?

**Margo ANDRAE:** Yes. The industry lives and breathes biosecurity, so you cannot just walk onto a pig farm in this country, because of the fact that we and packages carry diseases. Whether it is African swine fever, or we saw Japanese encephalitis virus coming through on mosquitos, our pigs are highly susceptible to disease and to other factors, so biosecurity is number one. The Victorian government did strengthen their biosecurity legislation and rules, which we do appreciate, so thank you. But it is a fact that we have gone above and beyond because the diseases are at our doorstep. Australia has been very lucky. We have been able to avoid the top 10 exotic diseases coming into the country because of our nature – we are an island. We have been working

heavily with the federal government to make sure the borders are pushed back. Keeping the diseases out of the country is first and foremost, to make sure they do not come in, and then dropping that down to our individual farms and making sure those farms are as protected as they can be – and that is for everything, from who walks on there, what parcels come on. You shower on and shower off for a lot of our farms, so we are incredibly protective around that. That is why some of the illegal activity does actually pose such a threat as well. Biosecurity is what we live and breathe, and we have strengthened it through our QA system to ensure that as part of the audits it is checked that those biosecurity management plans are in place and that there are living documents that are adhered to across the industry. And as we said, APIQ is 91 per cent of the industry.

**Renee HEATH:** Good. Thank you.

**Margo ANDRAE:** Oh, did Dawson –

**Renee HEATH:** He has changed his name to Dawson from Lisa, I noticed as well.

**Dawson BRADFORD:** Anything goes nowadays. I would just like to add that every pig farm – every APIQ-accredited pig farm – has a biosecurity plan, so that is part of our APIQ program. As Margo said, it is paramount to our industry. We have got exclusion fencing; shower in, shower out; disinfecting of trucks – a lot of companies do not share trucks for cross contamination and disease. Biosecurity is paramount to our industry, and trespass is one of our biggest weaknesses in terms of breakdown.

**Renee HEATH:** Okay. Thank you. Are you aware of biosecurity breaches as a result of trespassing, and did they result in animal deaths, if you are aware?

**Margo ANDRAE:** In terms of that, every time there is an illegal entry into a farm that raises the risks of biosecurity threats coming onto the farm. As I said, even our workers shower in and shower off, or go in through boot protection, you name it – washing hands and things like that. The threat continues to be raised and so we are always vigilant. Every time there has been an illegal invasion on a farm of course we had to go around and take very strict biosecurity measures.

**Tanya PITTARD:** I think one of the other things too is that sometimes the footage is provided more than three months after the break-in has actually occurred. But what we have found is that farms who have been broken into, or repeatedly broken into, are then actually able to track – where they know they have been broken into they can keep a really close eye on and be aware of potential biosecurity risks on farm. Where they find out they have been broken into – we have had producers in New South Wales and Victoria who have been able to look at the metadata of the photos and actually demonstrate that the activists have gone from one farm to another farm to another within a very short succession, and they have actually been able to then look at their own health records and their biosecurity records and go, ‘Oh, now we know where that particular disease that involved a lot of care and additional work with the vets to manage came from.’ So yes, they have actually had an animal health impact because of the way that they operate.

**Renee HEATH:** Right. Okay. Thank you. Can you tell the committee of the mental toll that animal extremists trespassing has on farms and their staff?

**Margo ANDRAE:** I think we actually underestimate the toll it is taking. As I said, these are people’s homes. It is their families. They care for their animals. Even, dare I say it, people attached to the industry – so it is not just the farmers, it is the vets who have to go out and deal with the fallout of issues like this, and staff. My own staff, as we know, have been heavily bullied and harassed by activists. I think if I am really honest, the toll is getting worse because it is the unknown and it is happening and it is bullying. As I said, just imagine sitting on your farm looking after your piglets, and you have masked people coming up your farm towards you. I mean, that is scary. And this is what our farmers live with.

At some point we have to protect our farmers, we have to protect our food security and we have to protect people who are living by the law. They are doing the right thing. They are really good people. They are kind-hearted people who choose to provide food for Australians. I think if we go to the next step, mental health resources in rural and regional communities, where our farmers are, are not readily available. And I do not even know we fully understand the impact on our young people. It is just horrible. So people should have a right to feel safe in their homes. They should have a right to feel safe at work. I think it is just getting more and more unfair that they are losing that right, and I think it is time we stand up for all of our farmers.

**Renee HEATH:** Thank you. One other question: you mentioned the input into the economy, so closing the pork industry – what cost would that have to the economy?

**Margo ANDRAE:** We are currently a \$6 billion industry nationally, so that is \$1.3 billion here in Victoria that would be gone. Let alone the impact on those farmers, those communities. There are no other industries in some of these areas. So it is not viable.

**Renee HEATH:** Thank you so much.

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

**Katherine COPSEY:** Thank you. I wanted to dig down into gestation stalls and the figure that you provided, please. Can you tell me what per cent of the industry is option B certified for Coles Limited?

**Tanya PITTARD:** We can provide the overall figures for gestation stall free, which are the numbers we keep through APIQ.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Option B?

**Tanya PITTARD:** Through option A and option B it is 88 per cent of sows that are in farms that are accredited as gestation stall free. So a maximum of five days and down to 24 hours.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Thank you. I see that. So 80 per cent of the commercial sow herd is option A, and I see the 88 per cent figure as being option A verified in your submission.

**Tanya PITTARD:** Yes.

**Katherine COPSEY:** So what about option B?

**Tanya PITTARD:** Sorry, option A and option B is how we quoted it as gestation stall free, which was both option A and option B.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Okay. So the 80 per cent being option A verified, that means that 20 per cent of the commercial sow herd is not gestation stall free. Am I understanding that figure correctly?

**Margo ANDRAE:** In answer to that question: no. Whilst we do say 88 per cent of the APIQ-accredited producers are sow stall free, of the other farms – in total we have 6630-odd farms across the country – some of them would not even have sows. Some would be smaller – 10 pigs on the farm, things like that. So the answer is: if they are smaller farms that have chosen not to be part of the QA system because they are not actually going into the food system, they probably do not even have sow stalls. In answer to that, we actually estimate the number is a lot higher, but we wanted to make sure we were very factual in giving you the figures here today.

**Katherine COPSEY:** On page 34 of your submission 91 per cent is accredited. That other 9 per cent may include operations that are for their own reasons not seeking accreditation – they may be too small or so on. I am trying to understand what percentage of the commercial herd is still using sow stalls.

**Margo ANDRAE:** There would be very few. But in answer to your question, I can only go by the data that I have at hand. We do expect it is the majority – well, the majority of the industry has actually moved to being sow stall free, or for those who may not have, they are absolutely planning to move to be sow stall free. But the smaller producers, as we said –

**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.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Thank you. Do you think that consumers understand the difference between a farrowing crate and a sow stall?

**Margo ANDRAE:** We work on the approach that in everything we do we try to say what we do and why we do it. The farrowing pens, which really are a piglet protection pen for the sow, the people and the piglet, are an animal welfare management tool that manages both the animal and the people. We have been quite open with why we use them, but we always take the approach of ongoing continuous improvement to our communication if we need to.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Do you think that someone who is buying what they think is a sow-stall-free product would understand that that pig could still have spent many weeks in a farrowing stall?

**Margo ANDRAE:** I will not speak on behalf of the general public, but our own community sentiment survey work does tell us that we have an overwhelming sentiment of community trust in what we do. Ms Copsey, I am sorry I cannot answer that question that you have asked, but as I said, we do work on the approach of transparency through the virtual tour and through explaining what we do and why we do it, so we are very open in why we do use farrowing pens.

**Katherine COPSEY:** Why do you think Coles sought a sow stall free product for its consumers?

**Margo ANDRAE:** You would have to ask Coles that, Ms Copsey. It was a choice they made.

**Katherine COPSEY:** You said you work closely with your end providers. What reasons did they give in your discussions?

**Margo ANDRAE:** Ms Copsey, I was not actually at APL when that decision was made with the retailers. I do work with the retailers now, and I know their focus is very much on food security. Ensuring good animal welfare and people management are probably the main topics they talk to me about all the time. Again, I am sure we could ask Coles for their reasoning.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Copsey. I think that members will have other questions, but we have awkward timing getting around the room again, so are you comfortable taking any further questions from members of the committee on notice?

**Margo ANDRAE:** Certainly.

**The CHAIR:** Wonderful. Thank you very much for appearing today and for making a submission. That concludes the hearing.

**Witnesses withdrew.**