

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

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PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

Gaelle Broad

Georgie Crozier

David Ettershank

Michael Galea

Renee Heath

Sarah Mansfield

Rachel Payne

WITNESSES

Edison Alvares, Chief Operating Officer, Pork Division,

Dr Rebecca Morrison, Research, Innovation and Animal Welfare Manager

Dr Cherie Collins, General Manager, Pig Operations (*via videoconference*),

Olga Alexandratos, Director-Corporate Communications (*via videoconference*), and

John Berry Not in Attendance (*via videoconference*), JBS Australia Foods/Rivalea; and

Dr Robert van Barneveld, Chief Executive Officer and Managing Director (*via videoconference*),

Dr Darryl D'Souza, Executive General Manager, Technical Services (*via videoconference*),

Kenton Shaw, Executive General Manager,

Dr Kirsty Richards, Manager, Industry and Government Liaison (*via videoconference*), and

Dr Kate Plush, Science Technology and Adoption Manager, SunPork Group.

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 other members of the public watching via the live broadcast or in the public gallery with us today.

To kick off, we will get committee members to introduce themselves, starting with the room and then on the screen with Ms Broad.

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

Bev McARTHUR: Bev McArthur, Western Victoria Region.

Renee HEATH: Renee Heath, Eastern Victoria Region.

The CHAIR: Georgie Purcell, Northern Victoria Region.

Katherine COPSEY: Katherine Copsey, Southern Metropolitan Region.

John BERGER: John Berger, Southern Metropolitan Region.

The CHAIR: Thank you. And thank you for appearing before us 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. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

For the Hansard record, can you all please state your full name and the organisation you are appearing on behalf of. I think this is going to be a bit of a task, but we will begin in the room, and I might call out the screen again.

Kate PLUSH: Dr Kate Plush. I am the Science Technology and Adoption Manager at SunPork, and I have got a PhD in neonatal welfare and stress physiology.

Rebecca MORRISON: My name is Dr Rebecca Morrison. I work for JBS/Rivalea, and I have a PhD in animal science and animal welfare.

Edison ALVARES: Edison Alvares. I am the Chief Operating Officer for JBS Pork Division/Rivalea.

The CHAIR: Robert?

Robert van BARNEVELD: Hi, I am Robert van Barneveld. I am the group CEO and Managing Director of SunPork, and I have a PhD in nutrition of pigs.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Cherie?

Cherie COLLINS: Dr Cherie Collins, General Manager, Pig Operations, at Rivalea. I have a PhD in pig nutrition and physiology.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Olga?

Olga ALEXANDRATOS: I am Olga Alexandratos. I am from JBS Australia.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Darryl, and apologies, I forgot the name of who is with you, if you can provide that also.

Darryl D'SOUZA: Hi, I am Darryl D'Souza. I am the Executive General Manager, Technical Services, for the SunPork group, and I have a PhD in muscle biochemistry and meat science.

Kenton SHAW: Hi, I am Kenton Shaw, Executive General Manager of SunPork Farms. I have a 35-year career in the pig industry.

The CHAIR: Thank you. And Kirsty?

Kirsty RICHARDS: Hi, everyone. I am Kirsty Richards. I am a veterinarian and Manager of Industry and Government Liaison at SunPork. I also have a masters in veterinary public health management.

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

Edison ALVARES: Do you have any specific order?

The CHAIR: You can do it however.

Robert van BARNEVELD: I am happy for you to go first, Edison. You go first.

The CHAIR: Any order you like to, just keeping in mind that the length of your opening comments will impact just how long we have for questions, yes.

Edison ALVARES: So I will go, Rob, and you follow – is that all right?

Robert van BARNEVELD: Yes. No problem at all.

Edison ALVARES: Thank you for having us here today. We wish to thank the committee for providing us the opportunity to discuss this very important matter. We are here today representing our pork division, which is composed of the Rivalea, Diamond Valley Pork and Seven Point Pork businesses. We are a significant employer in this state, providing 500 secure and rewarding local jobs across Victoria within metropolitan and regional communities.

We take animal welfare very seriously. We are focused on the sustainable production of pork, which includes an uncompromising commitment to animal welfare for every animal under our care every day. We ensure the health and wellbeing of our people and provide economic benefits for the communities we operate in. Leading animal welfare standards are ingrained in our culture. The globally recognised five domains framework guides our animal welfare policies and practices. The five domains are nutrition, environment, health, behavioural interactions and understanding the pig's mental state, with a focus on fostering positive natural behaviours that can result in improved quality of life. These domains inform everything we do in our business, including operational guidance from our team of highly qualified vets, nutritionists, geneticists and animal science and welfare specialists. We regularly train our staff to ensure positive and empathetic interactions towards our animals. We monitor our animals daily for welfare and continually review systems and living environments that offer superior welfare outcomes. We operate stringent processes that comply with all regulatory requirements and animal welfare standards expected of us. We are committed to continuous improvement and take an evidence-based approach towards adopting new measures that enhance welfare outcomes.

The pork industry is a heavily regulated industry, as you probably heard from the previous sessions, and these standards and regulations have been set in conjunction with government, industry and animal welfare specialists. Most importantly, they are grounded in the best science available on animal welfare. Our practices are compliant with and accredited by the Australian Pork Industry Quality Assurance program (APIQ), and the Australian Livestock Processing Industry Animal Welfare Certification System (AAWCS).

We have in our business a zero-tolerance approach to any animal welfare breaches, and we investigate any reported matters thoroughly and take appropriate actions. Our welfare performance is regularly audited by independent bodies, including by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, who have a continuous presence in our meat-processing facilities to ensure compliance with export certifications, and we have APIQ on farms.

This brings me to CO₂ stunning, which is a proven method of stunning, best practice worldwide and endorsed by the World Organisation for Animal Health, the global authority on this matter. Although it is not perfect, CO₂ stunning is the best and most balanced available method to humanely stun a pig, for reasons I believe we are going to cover today during the Q and A.

To conclude our opening, we would like to highlight that pork is the second-most consumed animal protein in Australia, and its cost-effective production goes some way to ensuring food affordability for many Australians who enjoy this delicious protein. And to produce it in Australia we employ 1400 passionate, hardworking, dedicated and skilled people who wake up every morning – some of them seven days a week, including Christmas, New Year's and all public holidays – to care for our pigs every day.

Thank you again very much for your attention, and we look forward to collaborating with this very important process.

Robert van BARNEVELD: Thanks, Edison. SunPork are participating in this inquiry because we are proud of our industry and what we contribute to Australia and its food supply. SunPork is owned by three farming families from the Darling Downs. Our mission is to grow passion for pork through our people, our processes and our products, and we feel we must be succeeding in this because our business is growing and demand for our product is growing at a rate that we are struggling to keep up with. We understand that there is a vocal minority who is opposed to using animals for food, and that is obviously a view that we do not share. We also understand the vocal minority has very little knowledge of what it takes to feed and maintain a human population and the critical role animals play in meeting those nutritional needs.

Scale is an important consideration when we talk about pig farming in Australia. We do not set the price for pork and we do not receive subsidies in Australia, so economies of scale are critical while at the same time optimising the welfare of every one of the 550,000 pigs in our care at any point in time. SunPork itself farms 52,000 sows and has more than 1500 employees, producing more than 1.1 million pigs a year. That equates to about 90 million kilos of pork or 450 million meals a year. We have got 48 farms across four states, and we have another seven farms in New Zealand. We are supported by two abattoirs, a value-add plant and four feed mills that produce about 300,000 tonnes of feed per year. Our abattoir in Queensland processes 95 per cent of Queensland's pigs at a rate of 12 pigs per minute when it is operating at full capacity. Overall our value chain

contributes approximately 20 per cent of Australia's pork, and we have more than \$1.2 billion in replaceable asset value invested in this business.

In relation to this inquiry there are just a number of points I would like to make from SunPork's perspective. Firstly, our welfare standards are guided by what is best for the animal. We do not do things just because they are legislated or in a model code. SunPork always strives to operate above the minimum standards. It is also important to note that welfare regulations and standards will never keep up with the high standards that are rightfully demanded by our key customers. If you take the time to read some of the sustainability strategies and objectives from key retailers, you will find that the bar is being set very high, and as a business we welcome timely finalisation of the new standards and guidelines so that we can understand the minimum requirements we are expected to achieve so that we can continue to work to exceed them.

SunPork voluntarily removed gestation stalls in 2012. A farm raid tried to suggest that SunPork had not done this, but the footage was of a sow in a mating stall. We have now proactively removed all mating stalls in Victoria and are working to remove them from our business so there is no period of confinement. We have invested millions of dollars researching alternatives to farrowing crates that confer the same benefits for piglets while allowing more freedom of movement for sows, noting that for SunPork alone it would take us more than \$100 million in 10 years to convert our farrowing systems if we started today. It is also worth noting that when we remove farrowing crates we increase the incidence of piglet overlays, which increases piglet suffering and the number of pigs that require euthanasia, usually via blunt force trauma. SunPork does not clip teeth or ear notch. We tail dock under veterinary direction, and we are leading a \$7 million research project into alternatives to tail docking. As pig farmers we respect the contribution the pig is making to our food chain, and we endeavour to utilise every part without waste. One of our last lines is just to use hair, and we are working towards systems that turn that into keratin for food and pharmaceutical use.

Last year we published the net protein contribution of our value chain in the peer-reviewed journal *Animal Production Science*, and it shows that SunPork produces 3.26 times as much human-edible protein as it consumes during the production process. We have reduced our antimicrobial use by 76 per cent since 2016. We do not use any high-importance antibiotics under the ASTAG classification, and we have data on every antimicrobial application on any pig on any farm on any day. We do not use growth promoters or hormones in our systems, so we categorically reject claims that we are contributing to human health issues as a result of antimicrobial resistance or other inputs. We are committed to training our employees. We run the largest pig industry registered training organisation in Australia, covering certificate III in pig production and meat processing, and last year more than 1210 training units were completed within this framework within our business.

When a piglet requires euthanasia we use blunt force trauma as the quickest and most effective way of completing that task. No-one enjoys the task. If there was a more effective evidence-based option, we would look to employ that. We believe that when correctly applied CO₂ stunning is the most effective means of stunning a pig to introduce it into a processing system. It is interesting to note that through this inquiry the industry has often been asked what alternatives we have been researching. It should be noted that in Victoria under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulations, regulation 115, scientific procedures where death is the end point require ministerial approval, and the criteria to be eligible for ministerial approval do not include development and assessment of lethal agents for domestic species. This means that under current regulations scientific research and new methods of euthanasia for domestic pigs cannot be undertaken in the jurisdiction of Victoria.

All of our farms are audited by APIQ, with an additional 250 internal animal welfare audits conducted annually. Our abattoir in Queensland is certified to the livestock welfare system as well as a range of other accreditation systems. Apart from the federal government appointed on-plant veterinarian, who undertakes reports and reviews every day, the plants are subject to more than 13 external audits a year.

Finally, the trauma resulting from farm raids is real and unacceptable. I have a duty of care to SunPork staff and their families, and the current situation makes this very difficult to achieve. I cannot think of another situation where such blatant workplace bullying, harassment and violation of private property would be acceptable. Further, wearing disposable overalls in no way represents compliance with or awareness of a biosecurity system. All farms have different health statuses, and without knowledge of this you will be invariably putting all pigs on that farm at risk. If a disease outbreak was to occur, then you will see a tremendous animal welfare

travesty. Under Victorian law, any uncontrolled entry of a person, vehicle or equipment without permission is a biosecurity breach and should be prosecuted.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. Is that all of the speakers for this appearance? Wonderful. Thank you. I am going to set the timer for 6 minutes, members, and we will see how that goes – starting with Dr Heath.

Renee HEATH: Thank you so much for your submission and your presentation today. How do you ensure the most stringent standards for animal welfare?

Robert van BARNEVELD: Who would like to start? Edison?

Edison ALVARES: I can start, yes. We have a set of rules that we follow, and we train our people very rigorously to make sure that they understand what they are doing and they are skilled to handle the animals and to make sure we have the least possible distress to those animals. I think we mentioned that we are APIQ certified, and that is a very good standard that we follow today – developed by APL. We also have the AAWCS that we have in our business as a standard, and we abide by the animal welfare code as well that sits on top of everything. I am sure Dr Morrison can add something.

Rebecca MORRISON: Yes. I am happy to give you that assurance as to how we ensure high standards of welfare. We have an unwavering commitment to animal welfare on our farms and in our meat processing plants. That is achieved by, as Edison said, adhering to the legal regulations and the standards and the accreditation that we have for our welfare. Importantly we ensure that by ensuring that our people are trained, our people are empathetic, and we foster a culture of empathy within our businesses. We ensure that we are guided by expert people in this space – our nutritionists, our veterinarians, our geneticists and our animal scientists within our businesses, not just internally but externally as well. We work internationally in this space to ensure that we are always continuously improving in that space. I guess that commitment to continuous improvement gives that assurance as well.

Renee HEATH: Somebody mentioned that you have roughly 550,000 pigs under your care at any given time. How many out of that amount do have to be euthanised using blunt force trauma?

Edison ALVARES: I think it was Dr van Barneveld.

Robert van BARNEVELD: Yes. SunPork has 550,000 pigs under our care at any point in time, so that results in 1.1 million pigs being produced every year. Kenton Shaw may be able to give an exact number. It is a very, very low proportion of pigs that are actually produced that have to be subjected to blunt force trauma when you look at that volume. But if Kenton does not have an exact number, we can take that question on notice.

Renee HEATH: Yes, no worries.

Rebecca MORRISON: Can I also emphasise there why we do that blunt force trauma?

Renee HEATH: Yes, please.

Rebecca MORRISON: That is not just done for the sake of doing it; that is done for those piglets that are less than 10 kilos that are unable to sustain life. So it is the most humane care that we can give to those piglets at that point in their lives.

Renee HEATH: Okay. Thank you.

Edison ALVARES: It is very interesting, because it is exactly the opposite of how it is perceived. It is very animal welfare (to clarify: blunt force trauma is conducted to ensure welfare is not compromised-legal, quick, humane and effective method to end suffering of those pigs that are unable to sustain life) – the way it is done is very humane, is instantaneous and is very effective. I think Dr van Barneveld mentioned no-one takes it lightly, but it is the best method to euthanise a pig at that age, below 10 kilos, that is available nowadays. We always consider the balance between the pig and the stockperson, which is very important. We always balance between the two, because there is a lot of interaction between the two.

Renee HEATH: Is the alternative that they would die slowly and suffer?

Rebecca MORRISON: Without a doubt.

Edison ALVARES: It brings more risk to the stockperson as well. It depends on alternatives. It depends what you are talking about. But everything that is being analysed – there is a lot of research going on – brings some sort of risk to the stockperson or takes a longer time to euthanise a pig. So there is no alternative today, in other words. That is the best, most effective and most balanced one.

Renee HEATH: Yes. Okay.

Kenton SHAW: Can I just add, regarding how we ensure animal welfare on our farms, the key factors we work on. Training of staff, which was mentioned previously – so making sure that they are fully understanding the needs of the animal. The next one is investment. We continue to invest in improving facilities, and that is by removing confinement, reducing confinement and encouraging investment in research, particularly around additive things that exceed the minimum standards, such as enrichment, for example. We also have a comprehensive audit system. At SunPork we have done over 250 animal welfare audits in the last 12 months across our farms to make sure that we are compliant and above standard. So it is not just relying on an individual ticking a box; it is assessment by veterinarians, by managers and by staff to ensure that animal welfare standards are being adhered to and exceeded. Both of our organisations are significant investors in animal welfare research, to continuously add value and to improve animal welfare on a continuous improvement basis.

Renee HEATH: Thank you so much. Now, I understand that there was a farm invasion near Shepparton recently. It might have been last year, was it? Could you tell us about the impacts that that had on the farm and on the staff particularly?

Kenton SHAW: Yes, that was one of our SunPork farms. My responsibility is to oversee those farms and support the staff, the pigs and the facilities in Victoria. It has been a very trying time for the management and the very passionate staff onsite. They have really suffered in terms of mental anguish and stress, and if you read their submissions, they are very heartfelt in the way they feel about the invasion. They get quite concerned when they are working till 11 pm at night and all of a sudden they notice that there are people walking across paddocks with shining lights trying to invade the farm. They have discovered cameras being put onsite and they have discovered numerous times when people have come to get the cameras back again. We have had the activists steal the cameras. So it is quite a concern. The problem that I have, and our business has beyond that, is that we now have to divert investment away from things like improved animal welfare to security. So we are now investing in fencing and locks and gates and security systems to protect the staff and our facilities from these illegal activities. To me that is a real travesty, because I have always felt that as a farm we should be open and we should behave like normal farmers. We now have to rethink that to protect our staff and our pigs and our facilities from illegal activism that has never, to date, been prosecuted.

Edison ALVARES: If I can add to that, what is going on is really troublesome. We cannot really measure the consequences to the kids of the families that are involved. They are very, very tight communities, and we saw Tim Kingma here before, one of the producers. They live and breathe their business, and that is how our business operators work in these small communities. So what happens in the school when they hear that some of the farms were broken into with cameras? The way it is being exposed is so far from the truth of what we do and how we operate our business that it is not funny.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Dr Heath. Ms Copsey.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. I heard from the SunPork presentation that you do not clip teeth or cut ears. Is that correct?

Robert van BARNEVELD: That is correct.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. Why is that practice undertaken on other farms? Why have other farms not been able to eliminate that practice, please?

Robert van BARNEVELD: I cannot speak on behalf of other farms. I think with assistance and ongoing training that those farms would be able to follow a similar practice. It is a legacy, I suppose, where that was an

accepted husbandry practice, but through continuous improvement these things can change. So I do not actually see any reason why people cannot –

Katherine COPSEY: Can we hear from some representatives of farms that undertake that practice, please? Other members of the panel.

Robert van BARNEVELD: I did not hear your question.

Rebecca MORRISON: I will jump in there to confirm that Rivalea/JBS do not practice teeth clipping or ear notching as well, and that is under our veterinary direction. Again, we cannot speak for what happens on other farms. They may have a different health situation or have different veterinary guidance that requires them to do it. But our position is no teeth clipping.

The CHAIR: Sorry, Ms Copsey, I might just get you to turn your video off again so witnesses can hear you. And I neglected to start the timer, so I will just yell out to you when your time is up.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you, and thanks for the heads up for that. Can I just check whether Diamond Valley undertakes teeth clipping and ear notching?

Edison ALVARES: Diamond Valley are a processing facility, so they do not have any pigs or grow any pigs. Rivalea adopt exactly the same position as SunPork just stated: we do not do those activities as well.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. I am interested in the progress on eliminating the tail docking as well, if you could each speak to that.

Robert van BARNEVELD: I might defer to Darryl D'Souza, who is leading the \$7 million project to eliminate tail docking.

Darryl D'SOUZA: Thanks, Rob. So this is a CRC, cooperative research centre, project that was funded in 2023. The participants include Rivalea; PIC, which is our genetics company; the University of Melbourne; the University of New England; the University of Queensland; RSPCA, Australian Pork Limited; and APRIL, the Australasian Pig Research Institute Limited, and this is a group project. The research that we are undertaking has never been done anywhere else in the world. We are looking at a range of genetic and non-genetic factors to understand the multivariate causal factors that result in tail-biting events, and the primary focus of this project is to understand and be able to mitigate those factors to give farmers the confidence to eliminate tail docking on their farms. This project will finish in 2025, in March, and at the moment we have collected data from close to 90,000 pigs across Rivalea and SunPork sites. As I said, it is the first large project of its kind, and what we are doing is novel and has not been done anywhere else in the world.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. Given your group's progress on these matters, would you be opposed to them forming new mandatory requirements for pig welfare in Victoria?

Robert van BARNEVELD: Tail docking is done to prevent tail biting, as you have heard, and that is a very difficult thing to predict when it occurs. If we have an effective way of eliminating it, we would. I mean, the whole reason we are doing this is to eliminate tail docking. But if we cannot understand or eliminate tail biting, then I am sure under veterinary direction we would be required to continue to do it. The whole objective of the industry is to actually move to a point where it can be eliminated. If we have that level of understanding and it is legislated, I am sure no-one will have a problem. It is another process. It is not something we want to do. It is done as a preventative measure because it is a lesser evil than tail biting. That is why we are investing so much time and effort in trying to understand why it occurs. It would be premature to eliminate it right now, and I am sure, as I said earlier, veterinary direction would require that we continue to do it.

The CHAIR: One more question, Ms Copsey.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you. I just want to ask if you are also opposed to pain relief or anaesthetic being made mandatory should those procedures continue.

Robert van BARNEVELD: I think this might be best referred to Dr Richards.

Kirsty RICHARDS: Hi there. Thanks for having us here today. I think that question would be something we would have to, again, do the research into. At present, it involves more interventions with the piglets and more distress for the piglets to actually administer an injection. We would need to really understand that the benefits outweigh the risks in a process. But if we fully understood these and if it was to the overall benefit of the piglets' welfare, absolutely, these are the kinds of initiatives we would embrace.

Katherine COPSEY: Just one quick follow-up, if I may, Chair. I just want to understand that answer clearly. Did you just make a representation that it would be more painful for a piglet to receive an anaesthetic injection than to have its tail cut off without anaesthetic?

Kirsty RICHARDS: No. Sorry, that was not what I meant. What I was saying was that we would need to understand that the benefit of the entire process and the collective intervention with the piglet was to the benefit of that piglet. Again, it goes to Rob's comment – this is where we do a lot of research to best understand the interventions that we are making with the pigs.

Katherine COPSEY: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Ms Copsey. I might pick up there. Dr Richards, how can pigs be so vastly different from cats and dogs when these measures are so routinely used for procedures on them?

Kirsty RICHARDS: Are you talking specifically about tail docking?

The CHAIR: Yes, tail docking and teeth clipping.

Kirsty RICHARDS: Well, as we mentioned, we do not tail dock at SunPork or at Rivalea. We do not ear notch.

Robert van BARNEVELD: You mean teeth clip.

Kirsty RICHARDS: Sorry, teeth clip. The difference with dogs and cats is it is not something that is done to prevent another poorer welfare outcome later in that animal's life. It is a very different scenario. Kate, I think perhaps given the work you have done in this space, you might be best to speak to some of these questions.

Kate PLUSH: Yes, absolutely. Thank you, Chair. The whole outcome is that we are trying to improve the lifetime welfare of the pig by doing tail docking. We agree that there are processes in cats and dogs that are illegal, but they are for aesthetic purposes. There is no way we are cutting a tail off a pig because they look prettier or behave differently.

The CHAIR: Why does a purpose matter when both animals feel pain?

Kate PLUSH: The purpose is to prevent ongoing long-term horrific pain from tail biting.

The CHAIR: Yes, I understand the reasoning behind it, but why wouldn't we provide pain relief?

Kate PLUSH: As Kirsty mentioned, we are absolutely active in the R and D space to try and work out the most effective pain relief option that we can give those pigs. Rebecca and I have both done R and D in this specific area. That being said, currently there is no other alternative that is effective on pigs – they are a very different species, as Kirsty has probably already mentioned, to cats and dogs – but also that has long lasting impacts and outweighs the double handling that you have to do for that pig. Pigs are livestock. They are not used to minute interactions with humans in the same way that dogs and cats are. Picking up a baby pig away from its mother and administering an injection, putting it back and coming back 30 minutes later, picking up the pig again and cutting off its tail – those pigs actually show a higher stress response to the handling than they do –

The CHAIR: Are they handled to have their tails docked?

Kate PLUSH: Absolutely, but you have got to handle them twice to give the anaesthetic.

The CHAIR: Okay. My next question is –

Kate PLUSH: If I can, I will just add one more.

The CHAIR: Just very quickly because I have limited time, but please go on.

Rebecca MORRISON: Just in summary, we are committed to continuous improvement in this space and investigating pain relief where it is effective, it does not cause additional stress and it is also safe for our people to use as well, which is really important. We are an important stakeholder in this whole situation.

The CHAIR: I must say it is astonishing to me that it can be justified to do surgery on an animal without pain relief when you could take a pig to a vet and get their tail docked perfectly fine – I know many people that have done it. But moving on –

Bev McARTHUR: Put them in a float, perhaps.

The CHAIR: Well, yes, perhaps. My next question is for you if that is okay, Edison.

Edison ALVARES: Yes, absolutely.

The CHAIR: Do you have CCTV of stunning processes?

Edison ALVARES: Yes – on the stunning process, referring to CCTV inside the gondola no.

The CHAIR: You do not have any CCTV in your –

Edison ALVARES: We do have CCTV in the processing facilities, yes we do, mainly where there is interaction between animals and stock persons; yes. And we do have a lot of CCTVs as well on the kill floor, in the boning room, for all the reasons: safety, food safety and a bunch of others.

The CHAIR: Would you support CCTV of gas chambers? One thing that we have heard from other witnesses is accusations of footage being manipulated and not being an accurate representation of what goes on. Would you support mandatory CCTV of gassing of pigs?

Edison ALVARES: If that was to increase animal welfare in any shape or form, yes, but there is no evidence at all that it would.

The CHAIR: I mean for consumer confidence.

Edison ALVARES: Well, we have a bunch of other things for consumer confidence.

The CHAIR: I am sure you claim to. My questions are on CCTV. Would you support that?

Edison ALVARES: No, not in the gondola if it was not to increase or improve the animal welfare; no.

Rebecca MORRISON: The priority for us is the handling of these pigs and the care of these pigs before they go into the CO₂ machine –

Edison ALVARES: The whole process.

Rebecca MORRISON: and that whole process. That is our focus: we can have the most impact on the pigs' welfare at that point. CCTV is just one tool in our toolbox to do that.

The CHAIR: Actually my next question is for you, leading on from that. Can you give us an example of the empathy training that is given to staff for these animals?

Rebecca MORRISON: Yes, absolutely. We have rolled out ProHand training across our farms and in our meat processing plants. A fundamental part of that training program is understanding human behaviour and the impact that we as humans have on those pigs, and part of that is an empathy score. We can survey people and determine how empathetic those people are, because people that are empathetic are amazing stock people because they care for pigs. That is the fundamental basis of that stock person training program. And then we go on to explain positive behaviours, your impact on the pig – that has a profound effect on that pig's welfare and how we care for that pig.

The CHAIR: Do staff use any tools like batons or sticks or things like that to move animals on?

Rebecca MORRISON: There are a number of aids that are used to move pigs.

The CHAIR: Aids?

Rebecca MORRISON: On our farms we use our voice, we use rattles and we use paddles and stock boards to protect our people and to aid the stockperson to move those pigs.

Edison ALVARES: And they are well trained to do that.

Rebecca MORRISON: Absolutely.

The CHAIR: Just finally for JBS as well: you claim that your animal welfare programs are motivated by the five freedoms for animals, which are freedom from injury and disease, freedom to express their natural behaviour, freedom from discomfort, freedom from thirst and hunger and freedom from fear and distress. In this inquiry we are obviously talking about surgical procedures without pain relief, confinement and CO₂ gassing, which essentially burns pigs from the inside to stun them. Can you please explain to me how you reconcile the five freedoms with these practices?

Rebecca MORRISON: Just to clarify, Chair, we are not referring to the five freedoms. It is the five domains framework, which is an internationally recognised welfare framework that is endorsed by the RSPCA.

The CHAIR: But they are very similar.

Rebecca MORRISON: They are similar, but the five domains do go to that next level of understanding the mental state and the experiences of those pigs and that pigs – our pigs – have the ability to feel a different range of emotions. So fear, yes, and pain, enjoyment, satisfaction and those sorts of behaviours. We respect that, and that is part of our commitment to pigs, and understanding when we care for pigs and we raise pigs, there will be times when there is some distress. We minimise the distress for those pigs, but the priority for us is to enhance those positive experiences for those pigs. It is not just about ensuring a neutral life for that pig, that that pig is just okay. It is enhancing the positive. Those are the fundamentals of what we do every day for our pigs.

The CHAIR: Okay, thank you. Ms Broad.

Gaëlle BROAD: Thank you very much for appearing today and for your different submissions. I guess just one thing that I would like to understand too is: you talked about the size of the farms, and we heard from a pork producer earlier that talked about theirs having expanded and their staffing having expanded equally. I guess I know we have heard from people concerned always about the welfare of animals, so is there any concern, with getting larger, that you can maintain that same level of care? I guess, how do you handle that process?

Robert van BARNEVELD: We do not get a dispensation for a lower level of care because we have got a larger farm. The obligations are the same. If we get larger, that is a massive challenge that we are up to, but we have to deliver the same level of care to an animal that is on a large farm as we would to an animal that is on a small farm. That is the reality.

Kenton SHAW: Can I add to that?

Gaëlle BROAD: Sure.

Kenton SHAW: The way we manage the farms, we invest in tasks to remove labour-intensive tasks from an historical perspective, such as handfeeding sows, such as long movements of pigs, such as climate control. We invest in new technology to eliminate those tasks to dramatically reduce the hours required, which then allows them basically more time to spend on animal husbandry, which is clearly defined as looking after animal welfare.

Darryl D'SOUZA: And if I could add to that. I mean, one of the reasons SunPork invested in establishing its own registered training organisation is for that very fact, so that we could train our people across a whole range of activities that are undertaken on farm and at the abattoir, but a key component of that training is also around animal welfare. That is another reason why SunPork and its size have the need for an RTO within our premises, if you like.

Gaëlle BROAD: Now, we did hear from a number of witnesses yesterday. Many of them did express that they want to see the pig industry close, as with other industries like beef and lamb and chicken, so obviously a very different perspective. Have you got any comment on perhaps things that were said during the hearings yesterday that you would like to respond to?

Edison ALVARES: I could comment, and I am sure others will comment. I think one important point that we would really like to highlight and that I think you have heard from some of the other sessions is we are very proud of this industry. We are very proud to be providing a service to Australians and providing good quality protein to their tables. I think the way it is being portrayed and the way it is being exposed give exactly the opposite of it, which is very detrimental to the whole industry, to the whole families and the whole communities that live and breathe that kind of business. I think if there is one thing, I would like this committee to help to change that perception, because that is so far, again, from the truth that it is not funny. It is really not funny.

Gaëlle BROAD: Are there any other comments?

Robert van BARNEVELD: The vast bulk of Australians are voting with their wallets and their feet by eating a significant amount of meat in their diets, so they obviously accept that animals are a fundamental part of the food chain. I like to always take things back to basics. The reason until recently pork was the most consumed meat in the world is because it represented a very valuable store of excess grain or products that could not be eaten by humans, and then that could also be preserved. It is a very effective way of providing nutrition over an extended period of time, and that is why it is such an important part of diets and culture around the world. I suppose the bit that frustrates me immensely is this constant obsession with trying to catch us out with individual animals or adverse events, and to then present an entire industry as being this abhorrent group of monsters is just inconceivable. We are producing food that people want to eat. We do not work with pigs because we do not like them. We work with them because we love them, and we have devoted our careers to that process. To suggest anything otherwise is very frustrating. When you hear about farm raids and some of the stuff that is presented, it is so frustrating because as an industry we do not lower ourselves to that level and we let those mistruths get away too often. So opportunities to have discussions in a forum like this are welcomed by us.

Gaëlle BROAD: What action would you like to see with the trespassing? SunPork – I saw that you said, ‘Yes, it is not adequate at the moment.’ What would you like to see there?

Robert van BARNEVELD: It is really distressing to see what it does to our staff. Just imagine someone is breaking the law. I was horrified yesterday to hear how many farms have been raided and the risk that that poses to our industry and just the extent of the staff that are being terrorised. The fact is they are publicly declaring that they have broken the law, and they just keep getting away with it. So it would be wonderful to see some legal action and some retribution for these people that are breaking the law.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Ms Broad. Mr Berger.

John BERGER: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, everybody, for your appearance at today’s hearing. My question is in relation to global best practice. I am getting a little bit confused in terms of what is the global best practice. I hear some of your submissions today that you do not do ear notching or teeth clipping. I just wonder, was that part of global best practice some time ago? If it was or if it was not, when did it cease, and why is there a difference between your operation and others?

Robert van BARNEVELD: I will start. We have certainly got others on the line that can answer this question better than I can. As I said in my opening statement, we do what we believe is in the best interests of the animal and we look at the animal’s responses to ascertain that. We do not do things because we have to, and there are lots of legacy things that are in place that fit into existing standards. We do not look at them per se. We are always trying to operate above them. So the fact that we have removed teeth clipping and ear notching is because we can do that without compromising the animal or the production system in any way. In fact we think it is a better practice, otherwise we would not do it. We did not just eliminate it. Kate, you are probably really well placed to expand on this.

Kate PLUSH: Thanks, Rob. Yes, I guess we are constantly looking to see what happens around the world with regard to animal welfare legislation, and we actually published a review in the internationally regarded,

peer-reviewed scientific journal *Animal* last year that compared our use of sow confinement as well as boar confinement to the rest of the world and where we sit. If you actually go and have a look at that review, in terms of the level of confinement that we use currently, we are well under most pork producing countries. There are countries – ones that do not produce pork – that do have better standards, but that is for obvious reasons. We are more than happy to share that review and take that on notice. In terms of what we do, we are constantly benchmarking ourselves against what happens in the world, and we have undertaken these review processes as part of our standards and guidelines review process that we are hoping to push through soon.

John BERGER: I think my question was more directed at the ear notching and teeth clipping rather than what you propose there. I still cannot rationalise in my mind why it is that other producers still have this practice. If it is not a world's best practice, why does it continue? You might not be able to answer me, because you do not do it.

Kenton SHAW: Yes. If I can try and answer that from –

John BERGER: I will just put this as an extra if I could. It just calls into question in my mind: what is the standard world-best practice for the pig industry?

Kenton SHAW: In terms of Australian investment in animal welfare, we are very focused on continuous improvement. As Rob mentioned – as has been mentioned – we focus on the outcomes of the animal. We are quite happy to do research that changes a practice to deliver a better outcome. A clear example is no teeth clipping. Once we have identified that there is a better outcome, we will do the research on it and we will work on it, and then we can bring it into practice on a wide scale. We are not focused on just achieving the minimum standards which exist either in Australia or elsewhere. We are happy to exceed them, but we need to make sure that they are balanced – that the outcome is more positive and the research backs up that outcome.

Robert van BARNEVELD: If I understand your question – why is it not just one standard fits all – we do a lot of research ourselves within SunPork, and we publish the vast bulk of that, and that is one mechanism where other people can find out what we have achieved. Hopefully they can adopt the same thing. But there is no formal mechanism to say worldwide, 'This is now the standard.'

Rebecca MORRISON: I absolutely agree with that.

John BERGER: Yes. I think I understand that, but I am just trying to rationalise in my mind: where was the point in time that the global standard did exist?

Rebecca MORRISON: There is no global standard. There is no global standard for animal welfare.

John BERGER: Well, it is interesting, because I have been asking about global standards right throughout the hearing and people have been giving me different answers about it.

Rebecca MORRISON: Different countries have different standards, so they may be referring to one country – for example the European standard or the US.

Edison ALVARES: And there will be probably global practices for some parts of the whole supply chain process but not a global standard.

Darryl D'SOUZA: And there is good reason for that – why there is not a global standard. The way pigs are brought up in different countries differs vastly. Even within Australia there are different climate zones et cetera, so there is a range of different husbandry practices. If you look at, say, teeth clipping, for example, whilst I certainly do not know the specifics of why farms still do it, there may be reasons, particularly things like if their wean time is longer than others, potentially there is a need to protect the mum – the sow – in that instance. I think there is a very specific reason why there is not a global standard, and I think having a global standard may actually have adverse outcomes for welfare.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Thanks, Mr Berger. Sorry, I am going to have to leave it there because we are quite short on time with the longer opening. I will now hand to Mrs McArthur to finish.

Bev McARTHUR: Thank you all for coming. It is fantastic to have a room full of accredited experts and experienced practitioners, as opposed to ideological zealots, presenting to us. So well done for taking the time

to give us your evidence and your vast experience of how you rear pigs and process them. I think one of my colleagues must have suggested that the CO₂ gassing experience was burning from the inside. Is that the case?

Robert van BARNEVELD: I think Dr D'Souza is very well placed to answer this.

Darryl D'SOUZA: There is certainly no burning inside.

Bev McARTHUR: Right, so that was incorrect, that assertion.

Darryl D'SOUZA: There is certainly no burning. CO₂ is adverse to pigs, particularly around areas where there are mucus layers in the back of the throat, but there is certainly no burning of pigs from the inside.

Bev McARTHUR: Okay. Well, let us make sure we have corrected that assertion. Just going back to breaking the law: would you suggest that this inquiry make a recommendation that anybody who trespasses on private property and collects material illegally should be properly prosecuted?

Edison ALVARES: Definitely. I would think that we have to abide by the law, and that is what we do. I think it should be fair for everyone that breaches the law – to see it in court.

The CHAIR: Sorry, Mrs McArthur, can I just warn you about how quite far you are going outside the terms of reference. We have already had an Inquiry into the Impact of Animal Rights Activism on Victorian Agriculture. You participated in that inquiry. This inquiry has very specific terms of reference. I am going to allow you to continue your questioning –

Bev McARTHUR: Good.

The CHAIR: but pre-empting recommendations for the inquiry that are not even in line with the terms of reference is quite pushing it.

Bev McARTHUR: On a point of order, Chair, we are allowed to ask witnesses what they would suggest that we incorporate into our recommendations. In every inquiry I have been on, that is what we have done, and we should continue to do it.

The CHAIR: Mrs McArthur, if you listened to the end of my sentence, I said 'that are outside of the terms of reference'. So I am going to allow you to continue, but it is pushing quite a barrier.

Bev McARTHUR: Chair, you have been using and prosecuting and justifying and condoning illegally collected material for the purposes of discrediting an industry, so I want to know from the industry what they think should be done about that. They have said they think all people acting illegally should be properly prosecuted. Thank you.

Gaelle BROAD: The terms of reference do say 'any other relevant matter'.

Bev McARTHUR: Yes, any other relevant matters.

The CHAIR: Mrs McArthur, I am even pausing the clock so you do not lose your time.

Bev McARTHUR: Good.

The CHAIR: I am just asking you to please keep in line with the terms of reference. You are well aware that the Parliament has explored this many times, including in debate a few weeks ago.

Bev McARTHUR: Another question I will ask you – it seems that you are operating on the national scale, even probably internationally, maybe exporting. Should there be a national standard that would be easier for you to comply with and everybody to comply with across the country? Would that be a recommendation we might make?

Edison ALVARES: Thank you for the question, Mrs McArthur. I think it is a very welcome idea. We would support and we would I think benefit at the end of a national standard. Since it is based on science, it has to be science based, and that is how we operate, because we have experts in animal welfare and we can collaborate with any kind of standards that we should have in the country, yes.

Bev McARTHUR: Great.

Edison ALVARES: I do not know if anyone wants to –

Rebecca MORRISON: Well, I will just add there: for our pigs, our pigs do not know that they live in Victoria or in New South Wales, so for the importance of our pigs and their welfare a national standard would really help them.

Bev McARTHUR: Help the pigs – we are all into helping the pigs here. I think there was somebody with a PhD in pig psychology or something. Did I get that right?

Robert van BARNEVELD: Pig physiology.

Bev McARTHUR: Physiology, okay. Just expand on that sort of expert knowledge – how does that benefit your industry, the person that has these skills?

Robert van BARNEVELD: Well, you would have heard when we were introduced that there is a massive amount of skills sitting around this table.

Bev McARTHUR: There have never been so many skill areas present at a public hearing I think.

Robert van BARNEVELD: Interestingly, I am in my role as CEO of SunPork because I am a scientist first and foremost. Agriculture today is fundamentally a science-based business, so you need a higher level of expertise. Because of our scale, and Rivalea is the same, we are able to employ people that have a very high level of expertise, and because of that, we are also prepared to share, very willingly, our information to the rest of the industry for their benefit, because to be honest, our capacity to do that type of research within governments and within universities has diminished significantly, so we have had to take it upon ourselves to be able to do that.

Bev McARTHUR: No, we are prosecuting climate extinction. Kate, I think you are an expert in neonatal welfare. Tell us about how you go about making sure neonatal welfare is prosecuted.

Kate PLUSH: Thank you. You will often find me sitting inside of a farrowing house because it is my most favourite place in the world to be. Outside of running the R and D department within SunPork, I also invest a lot of my time heavily in what we call ‘day one piglet care’, and that exact training is to avoid the purpose that we have discussed at length over the last two days of blunt force trauma. It is really about making sure that the sows are comfortable while they give birth, that those piglets are warm after the birthing process, they get to a teat, they get a belly full of colostrum, which is the first milk the sow produces, so they have the best chance for survival. Our stockperson skill set is incredibly important for making sure that all of those tasks are achieved, because piglets when they are born are quite compromised if you compare a 250-kilogram sow to a 1.5-kilogram piglet.

Bev McARTHUR: How many piglets might they have on average?

Kate PLUSH: Our average litter size right now is about 12.5.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Mrs McArthur. Thank you very much for coming along today, and we understand that it can be a challenging experience with diverse views on the committee, but we really appreciate the time and energy you have put in to your submission and you joining us today. That concludes the hearing.

Witnesses withdrew.