



SUBMISSION

9 January 2024

Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee
Inquiry into pig welfare in Victoria
Parliament House, Spring St
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

By Email: pigwelfareinquiry@parliament.vic.gov.au

Dear Committee

Re: Inquiry into pig welfare in Victoria

Livestock SA is the peak industry organisation for South Australia's red meat and wool industries. There are over 5,200 sheep producers and more than 2,700 beef cattle producers in the state. With a membership of over 3,500 sheep, beef cattle and goat production businesses, we work to secure a strong and sustainable livestock sector in South Australia.

South Australia's \$4.3 billion livestock industry is a key economic contributor to the state which supports 21,000 South Australian jobs across the red meat and wool industries.

Livestock SA is a member of four national livestock peak industry councils: Sheep Producers Australia, WoolProducers Australia, Cattle Australia and Goat Industry Council of Australia. Livestock SA is also a member of Primary Producers SA (PPSA) and through PPSA and the Peak Councils, the organisation is an indirect member of the National Farmers' Federation.

Livestock SA welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee's (Committee) self-referred inquiry into farmed pig welfare in Victoria, which is important to our members.

Background

Livestock SA understands that the Committee will consider:

1. the scope, application, compliance with and enforcement of relevant existing regulatory frameworks and their ability to promote pig welfare outcomes;
2. the ability of the most common methods used to stun pigs before slaughter (including electrical stunning and exposure to high concentrations of carbon dioxide gas) in Victorian slaughterhouses to minimise pain, suffering and distress and prevent injury, and available alternatives;
3. the outcomes of the 2017 industry-led phase out on the use of sow stalls;

4. current industry breeding and housing practices particularly the use of different forms of confinement;
5. international comparisons to determine industry adherence to best practice standards; and
6. any other relevant matter.

Our submission to the process relates to point 6, any other relevant matter.

Continual improvement in animal welfare

Australian livestock industries prioritise the health and welfare of animals and significant producer funds are invested every year to continually improve these areas. Work is led by experts in their fields, and scientifically based decision-making is employed to set standards of practice across the red meat and wool industries.

The *Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines (S&Gs)*¹ underpin access to domestic and overseas markets and reinforce Australia's commitment to advancing meaningful and effective animal welfare outcomes. The S&Gs for cattle and sheep were agreed by state and territory governments in 2016 and came into operation through South Australian legislation on 15 April 2017.

Livestock SA support the regular review and updating of the S&Gs in line with contemporary animal production practice and emerging scientific evidence. Subsequent readoption by all states and territories after a review of the S&Gs facilitates continuous improvement to animal welfare standards which is important to our sector's continued support by Australian and overseas consumers.

Beyond the S&Gs, the red meat and wool industries have established leading sustainability frameworks. Animal health and welfare is a core pillar in these frameworks:

- **Australian Beef Sustainability Framework²**

Best Animal Care – the health and wellbeing of animals is entrenched in the Australian beef value chain and one of the greatest priorities of the industry. This core pillar (theme) was developed with the five domains of animal welfare in mind and continues to be one of the most important demonstrators of industry's commitment to sustainable practices. It contains five priorities and 11 indicators.

- **Sheep Sustainability Framework³**

Caring for our sheep – the health and wellbeing of our animals is fundamental to sustainable production and of critical importance to our stakeholders. This core pillar (theme) contains two focus areas and four priorities.

Industry performance against these sustainability frameworks is assessed annually and publicly available.

Beyond the national sustainability frameworks, South Australia's livestock industries have demonstrated a strong commitment to animal welfare through the Sheep and Beef Industry Blueprints⁴. The Blueprints were developed by industry with collaboration and support from across

¹ <https://animalwelfarestandards.net.au/welfare-standards-and-guidelines/>

² <https://www.sustainableaustralianbeef.com.au/the-framework/best-animal-care/>

³ <https://www.sheepsustainabilityframework.com.au/the-framework/caring-for-our-sheep/>

⁴ <https://livestocksa.org.au/industry-development/industry-blueprints>

the state's livestock sector, government, and research institutions. They help guide state-level investment, leverage national investment, and continue to be led by industry.

The SA Sheep Blueprint includes the initiative to adapt livestock for the environment and market to improve animal health and wellbeing. Targets include evidence-based production systems to enhance productivity and wellbeing and every major supply chain equipped to provide objective measures of livestock wellbeing.

The SA Beef Blueprint places animal welfare as a priority for the industry, with targets demonstrating a continuous improvement of the welfare of beef cattle. For example, objective measures for welfare developed and implemented across lifetime and reduction in painful procedures, provision of effective pain relief, and animal management to enhance recovery.

The livestock industry continues to support improvements of animal welfare through scientifically valid policy and collaboration between industry and government to develop meaningful and practical animal welfare outcomes. This work must be recognised and supported to provide real animal welfare outcomes.

Animal activism influence in government process and policy

Livestock SA is becoming increasingly concerned that government agendas and consultation processes appear to be losing objectivity and some decisions are departing from being based on science, evidence and practical reality. An understanding of the broader factors that must be considered to realise good policy also seem to be eroding and are being replaced with issue-specific myopia. In agriculture, this is most pronounced in animal production and consumption.

For example, the Australian Government continues to progress its 2018 policy to phase out live sheep exports by sea (and close a legal, world leading and profitable trade for sheep producers) for political reasons that are underpinned by animal activism. Animal welfare is the main argument used to substantiate phasing out live sheep exports, and that removing Australia will improve animal welfare outcomes. Data proves that banning live exports from Australia will actually have the opposite impact as it will alter the global supply dynamics, but it will not change global demand. Buyers of live sheep will simply source animals from other countries that do not have the same animal welfare requirements as we do. The other main argument is that the trade has lost its social licence. Again, this is not consistent with evidence-based community sentiment through a series of independent surveys (by VoconIQ) that have occurred since 2019.

In South Australia, the State Government is currently undertaking a review to amend the *Animal Welfare Act 1985* (AW Act). 30 per cent of respondents (307 of 1,022) had nil or minimal knowledge of the Act or what it aims to do, and 82 per cent of respondents had no professional involvement with animals. While everyone is obviously entitled to their opinion, it is logical and appropriate to question how much these views should influence decisions to realise objective, evidence-based policies. Yet governments are increasingly giving this type of ignorant feedback the same weighting as professional organisations like us that represent the collective view of thousands of professionals that work in the industry.

Animal activists and others sympathetic to, often ill-informed, ideologies that do not support livestock production do not have to purchase livestock products. However, ignorant, incomplete or ill-informed views have no place in delivering good policy.

Question 2 of the Inquiry Survey asks, "Do you believe that animals should be killed to provide food for humans?" The opportunity for this question to be exploited is high and it should be removed

from the survey. It is far more wide reaching than just pig welfare in Victoria, and it is likely that many individual anti-animal agriculture activists will complete the survey. Conversely, most professionals who work in animal food production, such as farmers and supply chain participants, will not complete the survey – they expect their industry body to do this for them as their efforts are focussed on producing sustainable and affordable food and fibre for the world. A Livestock SA response to this question is equivalent to over 3,500 ‘yes’ answers. Governments have not reflected survey results in this way, and as such, are misrepresenting community sentiment.

Evidence-based policy analysis, good process and appropriate perspective matter because getting policy right matters. Public policy measures can have pervasive effects on community wellbeing⁵.

Please contact the Livestock SA office on (08) 8297 2299 or via email at admin@livestocksa.org.au if you would like to discuss this submission further.

Yours sincerely

Travis Tobin
Chief Executive Officer

⁵ Productivity Commission 2010, Annual Report 2009-10, Annual Report Series, Productivity Commission, Canberra