

4/14 Grafton Street
Balmain NSW 2041

4th December 2005

Ms Tanya Plibersek
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Ms Plibersek,

I am writing to you as my elected member to commend the Animal Bill raised by Senator Bartlett and request your support. This is such a huge topic it is difficult to cover everything in full.

I would like to start by saying as a developed nation the treatment of animals in areas such as farming, research and entertainment is often shameful. In fact outside companion animals, animals are largely unprotected in Australia. We like to think that Australia has high standards, but as a regular business traveller to South East Asia and India, I see the treatment of farm animals on small family farms as far superior in these developing nations. Our trend towards ever increasing intensive factory 'farming' is alarming and horrifying. We treat many farm animals as production units rather than living creatures.

As an animal lover and dog owner I question why a dog is entitled to exercise but a pig is not. Why is it condoned by government to keep an intelligent animal like a pig in a cage (sow stall) no bigger than her body? A dog owner would be prosecuted for treating a dog in the same way.

I would like to focus on farm animals, because the scale of the cruelty is so big. Every year we raise and kill about 420 million animals for food, often in appalling conditions. This includes pigs, battery and broiler chooks, live exports, dairy cattle and the increasing use of cattle (and any other animals) in feedlots and plus treatment in sale yards. I would like to highlight a few of these areas where government regulation is required to stop this cruelty.

1. The circumstances under which egg-laying hens are kept are abhorrent in the extreme, and the public demands that the government addresses this issue, and bans battery cages (maybe with a phase-out period of three years). De-beaking must be banned forthwith, since it causes lifelong pain for the birds. The wire floors of the cages cause tremendous pain for hens in their legs and feet, evidenced by footage available showing them trying to move their weight from one leg to the other, within their hopelessly cramped conditions.

2. Broiler chicks are packed in their tens of thousands into sheds and, like their egg-laying "cousins," never see the light of day or feel grass under their feet. They are fed a diet of antibiotics and growth hormones, the former just to keep them alive in these appalling conditions, and the latter making them so grossly deformed that their legs cannot cope with the weight. There must be a limitation placed on the number of birds per enterprise, and limitations on the numbers of birds in sheds.

3. Pigs are known to be as intelligent and sensitive as dogs, yet sows are confined to concrete and metal cages barely larger than their own bodies for most of their lives. They never see daylight except when they are loaded onto trucks headed for the slaughter-house, by which time they are worn out from constant breeding and many are unable to walk. There is no justification, moral or economic, for this cruel confinement in which a sow is lucky if she can move one step back or one step forward. Codes of practice state that hooved animals become "foresore" from being confined on concrete surfaces, yet the "Model CoP for the Welfare of Animals - Pigs" provides for just that. Sows live in sow stalls until they are due to give birth, when they are moved to an even smaller structure, a farrowing crate - and there, she cannot even reach to touch her young. This denies the animals the most fundamental rights, the "Five Freedoms". Sow stalls are banned in the UK and Florida, and are being phased out in the EU. The Australian public demands that the government do the same and end this appalling cruelty. "Producers" claim that this curbs aggression - if the animals were not so grossly overcrowded, there would be no aggression issue. Piglets ears are notched, their tails cut off, their teeth clipped, and they are castrated without any anaesthetic or analgesia; this would be a criminal offence if they were cats or dogs.

4. The live export trade has been denounced as the gross cruelty that it is by various interest groups, and a WA exporter is facing cruelty charges over what was a voyage "representative of the industry" (Animals Australia, 2005). Animal welfare in the trade is measured solely by mortality rates, without regard to the fact that for every animal who dies, countless others suffer appallingly - blindness, lameness, salmonellosis (a form of gastro-enteritis), starvation (inanition, shy feeding), and trauma from brutal handling.

The government and the industry openly state that they cannot influence animal welfare in importing countries, so no animals should be sent to countries which have absolutely no animal welfare safeguards in place. The journey is long and arduous, on third world wrecks of ships, most of which are registered under "flags of convenience", and those unlucky enough to survive the journey are the victims of horrific cruelty in the destination countries. Review after review has failed to address these issues. The live export trade must end.

4. Animals in saleyards and feedlots are often left without food water or shelter (certainly in Tasmania at least). They are deprived of the use of their natural behaviours in conditions that are usually atrocious. Safeguards must be put into place to address the issue of "curfews" (denial of food and water in the animals' language), and shelter at these establishments. "Bobby" calves and young lambs often are too weak from being removed from their mothers to stand, and should never be loaded for transport.

In addition, animals are now routinely being transported on trucks from Western Australia to the Eastern states - simply because there is no journey time limit in the Model CoP. Clearly this is a cruel, unnecessary and indefensible practice, and it must be banned. Animals should (if they must) be slaughtered as close as possible to the point of production.

5. Surgical mutilations - mulesing (speaks for itself), and the docking of the tails of dairy cattle and horses must be banned. There is absolutely no evidence to suggest that there is any benefit to the animal or the herd with this practice; in fact it is detrimental. The docking of the tails (not to mention cutting the ears) of dogs has been banned, why do farm animals not receive the same legislative protection?

I hope I can count on your support for the Animal Bill

Sincerely,



Ms Narelle Skinner