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Farm trespassers must feel full weight of the law

For Immediate Release

VICTORIAN laws should be bolstered to protect farmers' human rights from animal activists and give police the authority to dole out on the spot fines of up to \$12,000 for farm trespass offences, says the country's dairy farmer lobby.

Peak farmer group Australian Dairy Farmers (ADF) will push the Victorian Government to crack down on people who trespass on farmland, arguing that animal activists are causing "undue hardship to farmers" by falsely presenting the dairy industry as condoning and hiding animal abuse and undertaking criminal activities against dairy farmers.

In a submission to the Victorian government's inquiry into the impact of animal rights activism on Victorian agriculture, ADF is urging the government to:

- Expand the scope of the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)* to deal with animal activists, extremists or any other private citizen impinging on another person's human right;
- Increase trespass fines to \$12,000, in line with existing laws in Western Australia, and empower police to issue fines on the spot;
- Provide more transparency around convictions and sentencing for farm trespass; and
- Change the *Livestock Disease Control Act 1994 (Vic)* that enables farm trespassers to be prosecuted for causing an animal disease to claw back costs from offenders.

Currently, the *Summary Offences Act 1966 (Vic)* offers a fine of up to \$4,029.75 or six months' jail time for trespass offences.

ADF President Terry Richardson said the current penalties were not an effective deterrent and offenders must be held accountable for their actions.

"Animal activists trespassing onto farms or committing other crimes should be held to account by the criminal justice system," Mr Richardson said.

"No-one is above the law and farmers have a right to farm without the threat of invasion, sabotage or biosecurity outbreak posed by animal activists.

"Farmers are suffering from increased stress and fear of being attacked by activists sometime in the future, just for doing their jobs."

Previously, ADF – through national farmer group the National Farmers' Federation – successfully pushed the federal government to broaden the *Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)* to cover offences committed by extreme group *Aussie Farms*, which has exposed the activist organisation to fines of up to \$2.1 million.

ADF also supported new laws put before federal parliament in July to introduce new offences for the incitement of trespass, property damage, or theft on agricultural land, with penalties of up to five years' fail time.

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