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Vegan activists get light treatment in Victorian government inquiry

For Immediate Release

Farmers have slammed a Victorian Government inquiry into the impact of animal rights activism on the State's agriculture industry which failed to look at improving penalties for farm trespass offences.

Peak dairy farmer group Australian Dairy Farmers (ADF) called the inquiry's report a missed opportunity to deal with a very serious problem and to show that the Victorian Government has farmers' backs.

"This is a missed opportunity that fails to give farmers the peace of mind that they will be protected against the criminal activity of extreme activists," ADF President Terry Richardson said.

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

ADF, in its submission to the inquiry, argued for police to be given the authority to dole out on the spot fines of up to \$12,000 for farm trespass offences.

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

"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," he said.

The report instead recommends the installation of CCTV cameras in abattoirs to remove the need for activists to trespass on processing facilities, but Mr Richardson said he doubted this would deter extremists from protesting dairy farms.

"The best way to prevent their reckless behaviour is to fix a penalty that matches the crime. Regardless of what this report says, the Victorian Government must strengthen criminal penalties for trespass, or it will send a message to all farmers across the State that their safety is not as important as vegan ideology."

Other recommendations made by the inquiry included:

- Modernising the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986* to incorporate industry standards and provide appropriate penalties for non-compliance;
- Requiring Agriculture Victoria to increase its public communication of animal welfare compliance and practices to help increase community understanding of the dairy industry's strong animal welfare practices and contribute to its social licence to operate; and
- Promoting the completion of biosecurity plans and creating a new biosecurity offence like New South Wales for farm trespassers to provide an enhanced level of biosecurity protection for dairy farmers.

ADF will formally respond to the inquiry's report.

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