MEDIA RELEASE: 24 OCTOBER 2024

FARM TRANSPARENCY PROJECT

Open letter regarding inadequacy and corruption of abattoir regulator

Dear Mr Albanese,

I am writing on behalf of Farm Transparency Project, a non-profit animal protection organisation focused on raising public awareness about commercial animal farming and slaughter practices through comprehensive investigations into Australian animal use facilities. Over the past decade, our organisation has investigated a number of facilities and practices, catalysing significant animal welfare reforms. In recent years, this has included:

- Publishing footage of the foothold trapping and killing of native dingoes in Victoria by government contractors, stimulating debate and likely contributing to the Victorian government ending the practice in parts of the state.
- Investigating the failed phase-out of sow stalls by the pig farming industry in Victoria, leading to a Victorian parliamentary inquiry, which has recommended a legislative ban on the practice.
- Investigating the practice of CO_2 stunning at three Victorian slaughterhouses, leading to widespread media coverage; the closure of one facility; animal cruelty charges laid against another facility; mandated changes at two slaughterhouses and a parliamentary inquiry which has recommended the phasing out of some chamber designs and research and development into more ethical alternatives.
- Publishing video footage of practices at five slaughterhouses in Tasmania initiating a formal government investigations into all five facilities; the establishment of the Tasmanian Livestock Processing Taskforce; the temporary suspension of calf slaughter from the state's only calf slaughtering facility; and the introduction of mandatory CCTV in all slaughterhouses state-wide.
- Providing video footage taken at a Victorian pig farm to the Victoria Police resulting in a person being criminally charged with bestiality.

I share this to demonstrate the positive impact on animal welfare that our work has had, and to establish the context for why I am currently reaching out to your office with concern and disappointment.

Over the past year and a half Farm Transparency Project has conducted investigations at 19 Australian slaughterhouses across four states. At each of these facilities, we compiled extensive reports documenting significant breaches of state and federal legislation. These include: animals being killed without any form of stunning; animals showing signs of consciousness after their throats had been slit; animals escaping pre-slaughter confinement; animals being struck, thrown, kicked and beaten by workers; ineffective equipment and dozens of other issues. I will repeat here that we have found these types of issues at each of the 19 slaughterhouses we have investigated across the last 18 months.

Seven of these 19 facilities have been export certified, meaning that their licensing falls to the federal Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. These facilities are:

- Diamond Valley Pork Abattoir, VIC
- Corowa Abattoir, NSW
- Tasmanian Quality Meats Abattoir, TAS
- Ralph's Meats, VIC
- Game Meats Company, VIC
- MD Foods, VIC
- Cedar Meats, VIC

For the first five of these, and in the past, our organisation made formal reports to the relevant Department with a significant lead time prior to publishing, and has cooperated fully with any investigation that follows. For domestic abattoirs, we have made formal reports to the relevant state licensing Department who, in the case of Victoria and Tasmania, have followed up with comprehensive investigations which have included statements from those involved in the investigations.

In the case of Ralph's Meats and Corowa Abattoir, it is unclear if a formal investigation has been concluded or if any orders

have been made to address significant animal welfare issues which, in the case of Ralph's Meats, includes dozens of cows showing signs of consciousness, including blinking, after their throats have been slit and as they slowly bleed to death. In the case of Tasmanian Quality Meats, despite the Department of Agriculture acknowledging the severity of the animal welfare breaches our investigation uncovered, by temporarily suspending the facility from slaughtering calves, no charges of animal cruelty appear to have been laid.

The recent trial of the Game Meats Company, which was heard in the Federal Court of Australia in August, revealed evidence of a complete lack of formal investigation by the Department of Agriculture and a disgracefully inappropriate attitude of "looking after our mates at the slaughterhouse", despite evidence of multiple serious breaches of animal welfare legislation. During the trial, it was revealed that the Department of Agriculture contacted the Game Meats Company just two days after receiving the formal complaint, which they sent to the slaughterhouse along with video footage showing severe breaches of animal welfare legislation. The Department was also shown to have notified the slaughterhouse of media interest in their facility.

This decision made by the Department of Agriculture to inform the Game Meats Company abattoir of a formal report of animal cruelty at their premises, rather than immediately conducting an investigation raises serious questions about its integrity as a Commonwealth Department and its ability to conduct its duties regarding maintaining and improving animal welfare standards in farms and abattoirs.

The lack of government accountability regarding what can only be described as a culture of cruelty at Australian slaughterhouses demonstrates, not just an unwillingness to tackle the animal welfare issues inherent in modern animal farming and slaughter, but also the unsuitability of the Department of Agriculture to act as the national animal welfare authority. As such, we are joining a growing movement of animal protection organisations calling for the government to initiate and support the development of an independent office of animal welfare. We are also calling for the adoption of the tools such a body would need to effectively monitor the treatment of animals, including independently accessible CCTV in all export-approved animal slaughter facilities, unannounced audits and publicly available information about the methods of slaughter used, as well as animal welfare issues reported at any facility.

This independent monitoring body would exist for the sole purpose of monitoring, enforcing and improving animal welfare standards, and therefore would not be affected by the same conflicts of interest that arise from the Department of Agriculture being responsible both for the ongoing profitability of animal slaughter industries, and the welfare of the animals who are slaughtered in these industries. If the Government is serious about their commitment to animal welfare, they will make this critical change an election promise, alongside a general promise to improve our country's outdated animal welfare laws, which place us well behind the UK and many European countries.

As you are undoubtedly aware, most Australians are animal lovers and an increasing number are becoming informed of the ways in which our current treatment of animals raised for food, clothing and medical research are out of sync with their values regarding the respect and compassion we owe to other species. With the federal election looming we are urging you to take a stand against animal cruelty and commit to making critical and overdue updates to how animal welfare is monitored and regulated in this country.

We await your response and will be following up and alerting our supporters of this communication.

All the best,

Harley McDonald-Eckersall

Strategy & Campaigns Director

Farm Transparency Project

Sign the open letter here

Signed by

Senator Mehreen Faruqi, Senator for NSW, Deputy Leader of the Australian Greens

Abigail Boyd – Greens NSW MP and Spokesperson for Animal Welfare

Cassy O'Connor MLC - Tasmanian Greens' Animal Justice spokesperson

Ms Georgie Purcell - Animal Justice Party MP, Northern Victoria

Emma Hurst - Animal Justice Party MLC, NSW

Emma Hakansson - Author and founder, Collective Fashion Justice

Tara Ward - Managing solicitor, Animal Defenders Office

Kristy Alger - Author & President, Animal Liberation Tasmania

Animal Liberation

Animal Liberation Tasmania

Animal Liberation South Australia

Animal Liberation ACT

Stop Live Exports

Pam Ahern - Founder, Edgar’s Mission Farm Animal Sanctuary

Peanuts Wellbeing Sanctuary

The Owl & The Pussycat Farm Animal Sanctuary

Facilities related to this media release:
JBS Pork Australia (formerly Diamond Valley Pork), Laverton North VIC
Corowa Slaughterhouse, Redlands NSW
Tasmanian Quality Meats (TQM), Cressy TAS
Ralphs Meat Co, Seymour VIC
Game Meats Company Slaughterhouse, Eurobin VIC
MD Foods Australia, Echuca VIC
Cedar Meats, Brooklyn VIC

Campaigns related to this media release:
Right to Know: the Game Meats Cruelty Case
End Dairy Slaughter
Shut down slaughterhouses
Ban gas chambers
Aussie Abattoirs

Farm Transparency Project (FTP) is a non-profit animal protection charity, dedicated to ending the abuse and exploitation of animals in farms, slaughterhouses and other commercial settings. Through comprehensive investigations, documentary films, and the creation of innovative tools and resources, FTP seeks to force industry transparency and educate consumers by shining a light on the brutal reality endured by animals in the name of profit.