



“There is an
urgent need for
a national ban
on sow stalls.”

The Hon Michael Kirby AC CMG
Former High Court Justice
Voiceless Patron



A photograph of a pig in a sow stall, showing the metal bars and the pig's head and orange snout. The pig is looking towards the camera.

Most pregnant pigs in Australia are confined in 'sow stalls' – small individual cages barely larger than the pig's body. They can hardly move and can't even turn around.

Mother pigs (sows) are social and intelligent animals, who naturally live in family groups and are arguably smarter than dogs. Yet on factory farms, these sentient beings are treated as nothing more than automated breeding machines on a production line.

The science confirms what our common sense tells us: sow stalls cause physical and psychological harm to pregnant pigs. Yet the Australian pork industry continues to claim they are good for animal welfare.

The use of these cages ignores the fact that pigs suffer pain and distress much like dogs and other animals.

As other countries take steps to ban sow stalls, Australia is lagging behind. Each year, we allow around 170,000 sows to be tormented by these devices.

Solitary confinement

Sow stalls are usually made of steel bars, with concrete floors and dimensions just larger than the body of an adult sow (about 2 metres by 0.6 metres). They are used on factory farms to maximise the number of pigs kept in a given area and to decrease the labour expenses of managing the animals. Sow stalls put profit before animal welfare.

A comprehensive review of the available science shows that sows suffer greatly in these devices, which:

- Prevent the sow from turning around and are too small to allow easy movement from a lying to a standing position (and vice versa);
- Can frustrate many natural behaviours like exploring and socialising with other pigs;
- Regularly cause 'stereotypies'. These are repetitive and functionless behaviours such as biting the metal bars of the stall. These behaviours develop when animals are frustrated by confinement and are a sign of poor welfare;
- Can inflict skin abrasions when sows press up against the metal bars; and
- Often lead to serious health problems, including reduced bone strength and muscle weight, impaired locomotion and severe lameness.

Currently, 67% of Australian sows spend between one and four weeks of each pregnancy this way, while 20% are confined for more than six weeks of their pregnancy. Sows are repeatedly impregnated before being killed at about two years of age.

The Australian pork industry claims that sow stalls are good for animal welfare, relying on flawed science to support its own interests.

This claim ignores the scientific consensus that sows can be housed more humanely in group pens if they are designed and managed correctly.

For a detailed review of the science on the welfare effects of sow stalls, download *Science and Sense: The case for abolishing sow stalls* from voiceless.org.au/resources



“Any compassionate observer can see the cruelty of caging a pregnant pig. Now we have the scientific evidence to prove that sow stalls inflict suffering on these sentient animals.”

Dr Charlie Teo
Leading neurosurgeon
Voiceless Council member





“The world is moving beyond these cruel devices and Australia must follow.”

Professor J.M. Coetzee
Nobel Prize winning author
[Voiceless Patron](#)

It's time to catch up

Sow stalls are already banned in the United Kingdom and Sweden and New Zealand will follow from 2015. Switzerland, The Netherlands and Finland have implemented partial bans – restricting the use of sow stalls to limited periods after mating and before giving birth – and a European Union Directive restricts the use of sow stalls to the first four weeks of any pregnancy by 2013.

The American states of Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Maine, Michigan and Oregon have also passed legislation to, at least partially, ban sow stalls.

In Australia, one state government, major grocery retailers and the pork industry are starting to move away from sow stalls and consumers are voting with their wallets.

In 2010, the Tasmanian Government announced it would ban sow stalls by 2017. The Government acted on the advice of its Animal Welfare Advisory Committee, which had conducted a detailed review of the relevant science on the welfare and productivity of factory farmed sows. It was later announced that the Tasmanian Government would fast-track this plan to July 2013, however it has also come to light that this so-called 'ban' has been compromised to allow the confinement of sows in stalls for ten days after mating.

Coles has announced that from 2013 its own brand of pork products will not be sourced from any supplier which uses sow stalls because of consumer interest in animal welfare. Woolworths says 98% of its fresh pork suppliers operate sow stall-free farms and it expects all of its fresh pork to be produced in stall-free conditions by mid-2013.

Apparently in response to these developments, Australian Pork Limited (APL), the peak industry body, announced that it would “commit to pursuing the voluntary phasing out of the use of gestation stalls by 2017.”

While this intention should be commended, a voluntary industry-wide ban is unlikely to occur for three reasons: the decision of the industry body is in no way binding on individual pork producers; the industry states that it based its decision on consumer concerns, which it describes as devoid of “real science”; and it continues to make the contradictory claim that sow stalls are beneficial to welfare. Moreover, more than a year after the announcement of the voluntary ban, the industry has said its definition of “sow stall free” will allow sows to be kept in stalls for up to 12 days during any pregnancy. APL cannot be relied upon to rid Australia of sow stall cruelty.

It is now time for the Australian Government to act. The Commonwealth Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry ought to revise the Pig Code to prohibit the use of sow stalls. This should in turn be reflected by the introduction or amendment of legislation by State Governments to ban sow stalls.



Dr Dame Jane Goodall DBE
World-renowned ethologist
[Voiceless Patron](#)



Professor Bernard E. Rollin
Professor of Animal Sciences
[Scientific Advisor to Voiceless](#)



Dr Ken Henry AC
Former Treasury Secretary
[Voiceless Council member](#)

Join the movement for change

Voiceless is an independent think tank working to alleviate animal suffering caused by factory farming and the commercial hunting of kangaroos. We are supported by a community of respected minds who are speaking up for animal protection.

Please join us, add your voice and help us create a world in which animals are treated with respect and compassion.

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2 Paddington Street,
Paddington NSW 2021
Phone **02 9357 0723**
info@voiceless.org.au
www.voiceless.org.au



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