

22 February 2018

Submission to:

ANIMAL WELFARE STANDARDS PUBLIC CONSULTATION

I am writing this submission on behalf of Stockman's Eggs. Our family has been producing eggs on the same farm in tropical Far North Queensland since 1923. During these 95 years we have seen many different ways of producing eggs come and go. We started with all Free Range because, in 1923 it was the only way to produce eggs. The pit falls were that everything was open to all the elements like heat, cold, rain, disease and predators. It was only in the 1960's when we applied to the old Agricultural Bank and secured a big loan and went into debt to update our farm with the latest innovation..... Cages!! These cages were sold and proven at that time, as the best accommodation for the commercial laying hen also being disease free and protected from the elements. As we are deeply committed to the welfare and well-being of our flock we decided to go ahead with our massive new venture. These original cages, even though they now have been superseded and modernized, were so much better for the hen. Less disease, therefore, lower mortality, access to clean feed and water at all times and they produce a cleaner egg reducing the risk of salmonella. All of this lends to the production of an egg without antibiotics, which is partially what the Animal Welfare Lobbyists are campaigning for. Like many other egg producers in Australia we went through the trials and tribulations of Hen Tax and Quotas. The only avenue to increase the size of your Egg Farm was to buy quota from other producers who found it too difficult to continue farming. Again, this added to the great expense of egg farming. In the 1960's and early 1970's there were 17 egg producers in Far North Queensland and now in 2018 Stockman's Eggs are the only farm of any size north of Townsville because we have been totally committed to the industry. During the past 20 years we realized that there was a certain percentage of the public who were willing to pay a premium price for Free Range but we also kept in mind that there was still a very big percentage of ordinary "Mums and Dads" who could not afford these prices and opt to buy the cheaper more affordable cage egg. The egg is still a very cheap source of protein to feed the family. At this time the family decided to cater for all of

our valuable customers and expand our flock numbers to 60,000 birds and reintroduce Free Range as well as Cage and Barn Laid Eggs to be able to offer a choice to everyone.

In tropical Far North Queensland, where the temperature and humidity is very high, we do have a higher risk for bacteria to mutate. We have modernized our cage system to accommodate our birds in comfort with controlled environment sheds with regulated temperature in summer and winter. We also have problems in our free range enclosures with migratory wild birds. We are very close to the Islands and New Guinea and in the migration season the wild birds do, on occasions, land in the Free Range enclosures. We are always very mindful of our Free Range having the potential of contracting Avian Influenza and Newcastle Disease. The Cage birds are protected from this threat. If we were to suffer an outbreak, generations of blood sweat and tears would all be in vain as it would decimate our livelihood and we would have no alternative to close our farm and retrench our 20 loyal and long serving employees. In this small community, 20 families out of work would create many hardships.

We admit that there may be a very small minority of Egg Producers that may not have the total welfare of their birds at heart but I can assure you that the very big majority do have. Happy Hens.... Better production. To ban cages is NOT the answer to this problem as it would destroy so many Australian families both mentally and financially. The same families who have been producing eggs for generations and who have put their lives and souls into this great industry. Don't spoil what we have.....Let us all live together and co-exist with Eggs produced from both Cages and Free Range.

Kind regards,

Desley Stockman

Stockman's Eggs Pty Ltd