

To the review board,

I wish to express my view about the use of cages where layer hens are confined for the production of eggs. I am a Christian theologian, educator and author of various books and articles published in academic journals and mass media periodicals. I also successfully completed study in Animal Law in 2005 at the University of NSW, and am working on research projects related to the history of animal welfare. The evidence produced in a variety of careful scientific studies published over the last quarter of a century written by competent animal behaviouralists, veterinarians and biologists indicates that the constant confinement of the hens is not in the best interests of these creatures. Best interest refers to their physical well-being and health as well as for the normal patterns of their behaviour (publications include academic journals such as *Ethology*, *Bulgarian Jnl of Agricultural Science*, *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*; Marian Stamp Dawkins, *Why Animals Matter* (Oxford Uni Press 2012), etc). The issues for normal behaviour and health include brooding behaviour, pecking behaviour, dust-bathing, foraging, as well as hygiene, feeding and body weight all in the context of a confined environment (i.e. cages in density located in a stocking shed). I have concerns about the well-being of layer hens in light of the fact that the usual patterns of behaviour are curbed due to confinement in the cages (both battery cage and enriched cage varieties). The management of the environment is shaped by industrial processes where the primary interest is in the main result: the maximum quantity of eggs produced for minimal costs. This perspective is rooted in an economic reductionist mindset and dreams of technological efficiency. There is a strong tendency for those who support the continued use of caged hens to state that our industry standards for welfare are high, that they are scrupulously adhered to, that everything is apparently idyllic for the hens as maximum production and maximum profits are obtained. I am less than impressed by the rhetoric employed to justify caging hens and there is a distinct habit of using covert vocabulary in published reports that may mask the environmental conditions in which the caged hens subsist for the duration of their egg-laying ability. The confinement of the hens in large numbers under one roof is an abnormal environment for these birds. It is not feasible for proper care to be shown by farmers to each individual bird when the sheer stock density (i.e. numbers of confined birds) is beyond the capacity of a handful of employees (let alone robots) to constantly and properly monitor. The vested interests of the egg producing industry may easily trump the best interests of the hens. Very little seems to be admitted by vested interests about health problems, behavioural problems, mortality rates and other welfare issues. I am disturbed by attempts to justify mass confinement where the narrative suggests to the public "hard working families" depend on these methods to earn a living as if nobody else is hard-working and if there are no other options available for egg production. This effort to privilege the method of confining hens in cages behind a public relations image of the livelihood of a hard-working family is a form of propaganda and it is devoid of due ethical reflection. Consider using the identical rhetoric and argumentative gambit in these historical cases: Two centuries ago there were "hard-working families" whose economic livelihood was built on the backs of slaves; more than seventy-years ago "hard-working men," whose income was essential for the well-being of their spouses and children, was anchored in their camp-guard duties at Auschwitz.

I urge the panel to consider eliminating cages altogether and to avoid promoting the status quo that favours one set of vested interests. I would also like to draw the panel's attention to an important symbolic anniversary that looms on the world's calendar when deliberations are made about the fate of the cages. On 16 June 2024 England's RSPCA will reach its bicentenary. The

co-ordinating figure in its founding was the Anglican cleric Rev. Arthur Broome and he was joined by a number of renowned social reformers (William Wilberforce, Thomas Fowell Buxton, Basil Montagu, Sir James Mackintosh, Richard Martin etc). It would be a commendable exercise on the part of the NSW Government to ensure that long before we reach the RSPCA's bicentenary that battery caged hens will be a thing of the past.

Ruth Pollard