



The Hon. Mark Pearson

MEMBER OF THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL



Friday, 27 November 2015

MP_15.051

SUBMISSION TO THE AUSTRALIAN TREASURY

On behalf of

CONSUMER AFFAIRS AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND

FREE RANGE EGG LABELLING

I welcome the opportunity to make a brief submission to the Australian Treasury on behalf of Consumer Affairs Australia and New Zealand in regards to free range egg labelling.

As the first parliamentarian in Australia elected on a policy platform for animal protection and well-being, my submission focuses on the animal welfare aspects of egg labelling.

Any decision on the definition of free range must not be compromised by commercial pressures to increase stocking densities that increases profits by reducing the well-being of chickens.

Chickens must, as a minimum standard, be able to move freely and be genuinely be able to choose to access outdoor space and live in systems where the stock density does not cause stress or overcrowding.

I support the current Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals: Domestic Poultry (Fourth Edition) 2002 (The Model Code) definition of free range egg production being:

- 1,500 birds/ha of outdoor area to be available to birds in outdoor systems with no rotational range management strategies in place (i.e. a fixed outdoor area); or
- 2,500 birds/ha of outdoor area to be available to birds in outdoor systems with rotational range management strategies in place;

The Model Code CI 2.4.5.3 provides that free ranging hens must have ready access through openings to the outdoor range during daylight hours for a minimum of eight hours per day. Proposals for changes that will allow 10,000, 20,000 or more hens to be confined in barns with access to outside areas will mean that in practice, the sheer density will prevent hens from reaching openings to move outside. The “free range” may be there, but the chickens will not be able to access it. It is also difficult to see how any rotation system will manage to provide proper grazing and foraging for such large volumes of birds.

The practices of de-beaking and induced moulting are also prohibited under current free-range definitions and should remain so.

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Chickens will benefit from ensuring that there is a genuine national free range egg labelling standard in that that consumers will be able to choose the most humane method of egg production.

Producers that fail to meet all of the above free range standards must label their products in a way that more accurately reflects their production system, either access to range, barn or cage eggs. Producers should be audited, and the scheme enforced, by an independent third party.

Stocking densities should be clearly disclosed on all egg packages. The stocking density should be accompanied with a graphical representation to assist time-poor consumers in making an informed decision.

Egg packaging should clearly disclose whether or not such husbandry practices as de-beaking and induced moulting are employed by the producer.

To ensure the information standard remains consistent with changing consumer expectations and advances in animal welfare science, the information standard should be reviewed every two years.

Kind Regards,

Mark Pearson

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Animal Justice Party

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