

A large flock of white ducks is shown in a dimly lit enclosure. The ducks are packed closely together, with many heads visible in the foreground and background. The lighting is warm and somewhat low, creating a somber atmosphere. The ducks have white feathers and yellow beaks. The background is dark and out of focus, emphasizing the density of the flock.

Window dressing is not reform

Response to Victorian government's review of
animal welfare legislation

Paul Mahony

Window dressing is not reform: Response to Victorian government's review of animal welfare legislation

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Cover image:

Stefano Belacchi of Essere Animali via Farm Transparency Project. Golden Duck Farm, New Gisborne, Victoria, Australia

INTRODUCTION

I thank the Victorian government for requesting feedback on its Directions Paper concerning potential amendments to animal welfare legislation.¹

This is a brief submission that highlights some fundamental problems with current and proposed legislation. It is not intended to reflect the full extent of institutionalised cruelty.

The scale of such cruelty is so large that legislative amendments under consideration will do little to improve the overall plight of animals. Unfortunately, in that context, the proposed amendments represent little more than window dressing. With the government's focus on maintaining the state's reputation in domestic and international markets, window dressing of that type may be the main aim.

If material improvements are not intended, the Victorian government should at least respect the right of the local community and others with whom the state interacts, to know how animals in our care are treated. Such information should be openly and prominently provided in all relevant places, including (but not limited to) government websites and product packaging to the extent the state is able to influence such matters.

KEY POINTS

If cruel and barbaric practices involved in puppy farming are wrong for dogs then they also wrong for other animals.

Exemptions to current and proposed legislation permit routine acts of cruelty to the vast majority of animals in Victoria. The number of farmed animals slaughtered in a single year (for whom cruelty is permitted) is twenty times the number of pets living in the state at a single point in time (for whom cruelty is prohibited).

Permitting cruelty while acknowledging sentience is unconscionable.

The Victorian government has claimed for many years that the exemptions do not permit cruelty to occur. That is untrue. The government must inform the community of the true extent of cruelty.

RSPCA Victoria has virtually no responsibility for farmed animals and many others, whose true interests are being violated.

IF IT IS WRONG FOR DOGS THEN IT IS ALSO WRONG FOR
OTHER ANIMALS.



Victorian premier Daniel Andrews has described puppy farming as cruel and barbaric.²

He is correct but the cruel and barbaric practices involved in puppy farming are permitted in respect of other farmed animals.

Concerns with puppy farming (which is still permitted on a small scale in Victoria) have included:³

- The animals being kept in small pens with no ability to exercise, socialise or play.
- Mothers suffering years of isolation, with their babies taken from them soon after birth.
- Mothers being kept in a cycle of breeding until they could no longer produce enough offspring to be profitable.

Exemptions to current and proposed legislation permit routine acts of cruelty to the vast majority of animals in Victoria. Most forms of mutilation are permitted to occur without pain prevention or relief.



The animal shown here is a five-day-old bobby calf awaiting slaughter, having been stolen from his mother in the dairy industry.

The number of farmed animals slaughtered in a single year (for whom cruelty is permitted) is twenty times the number of pets living in the state at a single point in time (for whom cruelty is prohibited), as demonstrated in the chart below.^{4, 5, 6}


CHART – FARMED ANIMALS AND PETS IN VICTORIA

Farmed animals slaughtered - 146 million
CRUELTY PERMITTED

Pets living at a point in time - 7 million
CRUELTY PROHIBITED

0

150 million



Permitted routine acts of cruelty across various species of farmed animal include (but are not limited to):

- debeaking
- lifelong confinement indoors (often in cages)
- maceration of live male chicks in the egg industry
- removal of toe segments
- stealing babies from mothers
- castration
- tail docking
- teeth clipping
- ear notching
- dehorning
- depriving aquatic birds such as ducks of water
- mulesing, whereby large, deep sections of skin are removed from the backsides of sheep
- forced breeding, often involving stimulation by humans, penetration with artificial devices, and ongoing confinement
- the extreme fear generated by the sights, sounds and smells of the slaughter process, in addition to the process itself

The Victorian government has claimed for many years that the exemptions to anti-cruelty laws do not permit cruelty to occur. That is untrue. The government must inform the community of the true extent of cruelty.⁷

ANYONE WHO HAS SPENT TWO MINUTES WITH AN
ANIMAL KNOWS THEY ARE SENTIENT.

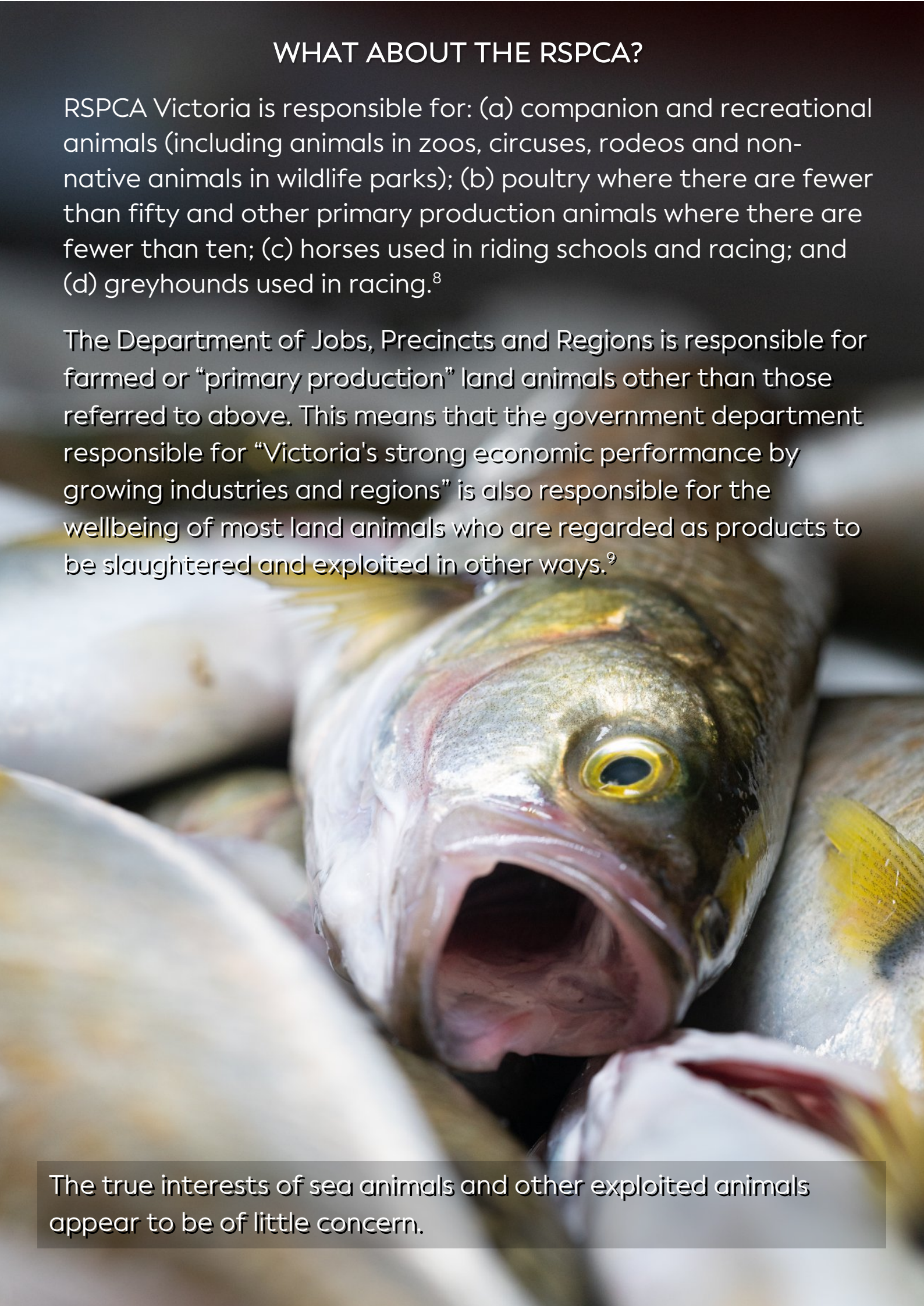


PERMITTING CRUELTY WHILE ACKNOWLEDGING
SENTIENCE IS UNCONSCIONABLE.

WHAT ABOUT THE RSPCA?

RSPCA Victoria is responsible for: (a) companion and recreational animals (including animals in zoos, circuses, rodeos and non-native animals in wildlife parks); (b) poultry where there are fewer than fifty and other primary production animals where there are fewer than ten; (c) horses used in riding schools and racing; and (d) greyhounds used in racing.⁸

The Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions is responsible for farmed or “primary production” land animals other than those referred to above. This means that the government department responsible for “Victoria's strong economic performance by growing industries and regions” is also responsible for the wellbeing of most land animals who are regarded as products to be slaughtered and exploited in other ways.⁹



The true interests of sea animals and other exploited animals appear to be of little concern.

The fact that so-called “entertainment” such as this is legal, even with RSPCA oversight, should make us question where we stand as a society.



CONCLUSION

Humans have almost complete power over the other animals with whom we share the planet.

With power comes responsibility.

However, we largely ignore that responsibility, and abuse our power, by forcing tens of billions of animals globally and around 150 million in Victoria each year to become units of production. We blast wild birds from the sky for “recreation”. We shoot native animals in the wild. The list of atrocities is seemingly endless.

It is hoped that the material contained within this submission alerts the community to the horrific double standards involved, helping to change attitudes and practices.

Image Credits

Cover Image: Stefano Belacchi of Essere Animali via Farm Transparency Project.
Golden Duck Farm, New Gisborne, Victoria, Australia,
<https://www.farmtransparency.org/photos?id=4f5e097dd35fc7052b6a>

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Bear Witness Australia, Witness #1, Pig

Animals Uncovered via Farm Transparency Project. Photo from Baiada Poultry, Laverton North, Victoria, Australia,
<https://www.farmtransparency.org/photos?id=e060c832b6fcad77ea2a>

Anonymous via Farm Transparency Project. 5-day old bobby calves from the dairy industry in the holding pens at CA Sinclair slaughterhouse at Benalla, Victoria, Australia waiting to be slaughtered the next morning,
<https://www.farmtransparency.org/photos?id=ccda6893a48001a9dd2c>

Animals Uncovered via Farm Transparency Project, photo from former Ballarat Saleyards, Ballarat, Victoria, Australia,
<https://www.farmtransparency.org/photos?id=0d769d23dc69379bc351>

Bear Witness Australia, Fish

Animals Uncovered via Farm Transparency Project, Great Western Rodeo, Great Western Victoria, Australia,
<https://www.farmtransparency.org/photos?id=935e4a045f5c5f9e31dc>

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Notes

Animal slaughter numbers are for the year to 30 June 2020. They comprise cattle, chickens, pigs and sheep. (See Reference 4 above.)

Pet numbers have been attributed to Victoria in this submission in proportion to its share of the human population. The national figures were derived from quantitative research conducted in February 2019 utilising 2016 ABS Census data. (See Reference 5 above.)