

Australian Law Reform Commission

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Media release

Australian Law Reform Commission

Monday 3 March 2008

ALRC: Will 'animal rights' become the next great social justice movement?

Increasing concern for animal welfare and consumer demand for organic and free range products—backed up with stricter food labelling requirements—is likely to trigger the next great social justice movement in Australia, according to the latest edition of the Australian Law Reform Commission's journal *Reform*, launched in Sydney today.

ALRC President, Professor David Weisbrot AM, said that the treatment of animals is increasingly becoming a social and legal issue, as well as an important economic one.

"Within Australia, there is good evidence that labelling laws have failed to keep pace with consumer demand. A quick visit to the supermarket indicates this problem—the shelves are full of boxes of factory-produced eggs confusingly stamped with labels such as 'farm fresh', 'all natural' and 'barn raised'. It is difficult to know how consumers can make sense of these labels when they want to make an informed choice to support the humane treatment of animals.

"To date, the focus of food standards law has been on human health, with no consideration of the treatment of animals in the farming and food process.

"Laws that address animal welfare and anti-cruelty are a matter for state and territory governments, which has led to inconsistent approaches to regulation, creating confusion for producers and animal welfare groups.

"At the same time, some animal activists have begun to push for a more radical approach, based on a model of 'animal rights' rather than 'animal welfare'.

"As with other social justice movements, activists are seeking to push the existing boundaries and achieve law reform through a range of strategies, including lobbying for legislative change; utilising targeted and test-case litigation; undertaking community and professional education campaigns; and harnessing the power of consumers in the marketplace.

"Animal products are a significant part of the local economy, and remain an important source of exports for Australia. The recent decision by Swedish-based international retailer H&M to ban Australian wool due to concerns over mulesing demonstrates that Australian practices face increasing scrutiny, with potential major consequences for exporters.

"The remarkable recent growth of animal law courses in Australian universities parallels a similar growth in environmental law courses a generation ago, and indicates that 'animal rights' is now firmly on the agenda for serious consideration.

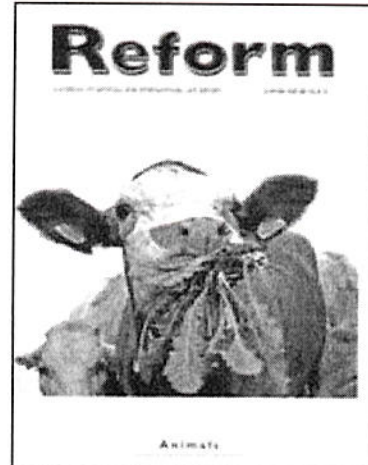
"These are complex matters, requiring the balancing of social, economic and environmental interests. Debates about possible changes to the law are at an early

stage in Australia. By publishing this edition of *Reform*—which includes a range of perspectives from food producers, lawyers and animal rights advocates—we aim to stimulate informed community debate about these issues.”

Reform, Issue 91

Articles in this edition of *Reform* feature the Nobel Laureate in Literature, Prof JM Coetzee (Adelaide University), on 'The right to life for animals and their right to go on living', and a Comment from Professor Weisbrot, as well as:

- Arguments in favour of basic legal rights for nonhumans (Steven Wise; President, Center for the Expansion of Fundamental Rights Inc., Coral Springs, Florida, USA);
- 'Suicide foods': the anthropomorphising of animals (Prof Mark Kingwell, Uni of Toronto);
- Animal rights activists' case against the animal industries (Tom Regan, American philosopher and animal rights activist);
- The philosophy behind animal welfare (Geoffrey Bloom, Geoffrey Bloom & Associates);
- The law and pig farming (Dr Malcolm Caulfield, legal counsel for Animals Australia);
- Animals and the law in Australia: a livestock industry perspective (Kathleen Plowman; General Manager Policy for Australian Pork Ltd, with Alan Person and John Topfer);
- The treatment of feral animals (Graeme McEwen, Barristers Animal Welfare Panel);
- The ethics of animal biotechnology (Professors Mickey Gjerris and Peter Sandoe, University of Copenhagen);
- Animal derived food labelling (Katrina Sharman, Corporate Counsel, Voiceless, the fund for animals);
- The common law and animal rights (Nichola Donovan, Lawyers for Animals);
- Animals, guardianship and the local courts (Ruth Pollard, Public Trustee NSW); and
- Animal law courses in Australia (Steven White, Griffith University Law School).



View electronic copies of *Reform* articles.

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