

# Perth Now

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## Hidden truth of pork industry exposed

- Narelle Towie, science and environment reporter
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**CRUEL:** Factory farmed pigs are confined to tiny metal crates.

*Source:* The Sunday Times

### **SHOPPERS are being urged to buy free-range pork at Christmas in protest at "appalling" conditions endured by factory-farm pigs.**

To provide cheap pork, millions of pigs are reared in tiny concrete cages, almost void of sunlight.

Before West Australians sit down to their Christmas ham, Animals Australia is calling on them to spare a thought for the animals.

"Most Australians care deeply about animal welfare, yet have no idea they are financially supporting animal cruelty every time they buy pork, bacon or ham that has been produced in a factory farm," Animals Australia director Glenys Oogjes said.

Research published in the journal *Animal Behaviour* last week showed pigs can quickly learn how to use mirrors to find food.

Some experts say the animals have the intellect of a three-year-old child.

Despite evidence that pigs are intelligent, they are not afforded the same legal protection from cruelty laws as dogs.

Over 225,000 mother pigs in Australian factory farms will legally spend all or part of their 16 week pregnancy in a metal and concrete crate.

The cage is only one centimetre longer and wider than the pig's body.

With their movement limited to standing up or lying on a hard floor these animals suffer leg injuries, lameness, weakened bones and muscles, urinary tract infections and heart weakness, Ms Oogjes says.

"As a result of being denied the ability to perform natural behaviours such as foraging and using their snouts to dig, they suffer frustration, distress and depression," Ms Oogjes says.

"Up to 50 per cent of the animals have been found to have painful stomach ulcers as a result of being fed food that is too finely ground, but designed to ensure that they reach slaughter weight quicker, animals."

Sow crates have been banned or are being phased out in the UK, Sweden, Finland, Netherlands, Denmark and in seven states of the USA.

But in Australia sow crates can be used for the mother pig's full pregnancy and for six weeks after birth.

Ms Oogjes says mother pigs are imprisoned in crates barely able to move for their entire 'productive' life.

This law will be reviewed in 2017.

The Australian Pork Industry CEO Andrew Spencer says the alternative to sow stalls is worse for pigs and the animals prefer to be housed this way.

"Sows are put in stalls on a lot of farms in the early part of pregnancy to protect them," Mr Spencer said.

"If they are not in stalls they will injure each other, fight and abort their pregnancies."

"The research has been done that shows clearly that sow stalls in early pregnancy are good for sows."

"Any reasonable person knows that it's clearly not in farmers interests to mistreat their animals."

But Oogjes says pigs given adequate space, bedding and foraging material are not aggressive after mating.

"Rather than provide the obvious welfare solution – more space and better quality of life – the response of the pig industry has been to individually confine animals in metal and concrete crates barely bigger than their bodies – compounding cruelty upon cruelty."

Australian Greens senator Rachel Siewert said she commends Animals Australia for shedding light on the miserable lives of millions of farm animals.

"People need to be aware that unless labelled otherwise, all eggs, ham, bacon and pork products sold in supermarkets originate from factory farms," Senator Siewert said.

"What you choose to buy, or choose not to buy, sends a clear message to these cruel industries."

Barrister Graeme McEwen with the Animal Welfare Panel says the problem in Australia is that the people responsible for administering and enforcing animal welfare law are agricultural departments

also tasked with looking after farming.

"In the administration of animal welfare in Australia, federal and state departments of agriculture suffer from the most obvious conflict of interest," he said.

"It is because they are in charge of animal welfare that the pig industry is permitted to treat sows in this manner, or the egg industry for example is permitted to produce eggs from battery hens."

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