

The Age

Environment

No more sow stalls, says pork industry

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Cruel ... sow stalls are to be phased out. Photo: Animals Australia

Government must take the lead: Voiceless

The Australian pork industry has voted to phase out sow stalls, a form of confining pigs that animal welfare activists have long claimed is cruel.

Pork producers have been debating the future of the stalls, in which most breeding pigs spend part of their 16-week pregnancy, to lower the risk of them bullying other pigs.

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The RSPCA says the stalls are narrow, metal-barred crates that are only about as big as the sow herself, preventing her from turning around, and allowing room for only one small step forward or back.

At the Australian Pork Ltd annual general meeting yesterday, producers voted to the voluntary phasing out by 2017.

Chief Andrew Spencer said it would cost up to \$95 million - but showed the industry recognised the issue had moved beyond the scientific argument of whether or not they are better for pigs.

"Today's historic vote propels Australian pork producers on to the world stage as leaders in animal welfare policy development," he said.

"It also provides the marketing opportunity for Australian pork to differentiate itself against its global competitors who continue to use gestation stalls."

Tasmania became the first state to ban sow stalls, announcing in June that they would be phased out in 2014 - three years before the rest of Australia.

Growers reacted angrily, saying they would be at a disadvantage to other states for three years, and had not been properly consulted.

Supermarket giant Coles has also led on the issue, demanding its local and overseas pork, bacon and ham producers are sow-stall free from 2014.

Animal welfare group Animals Australia welcomed the move, but urged concerned producers to act as soon as possible.

"Coles responded to consumer concerns by gaining a commitment from their producers to end the

use of sow stalls by 2014, so we call on other Australian producers to also meet this date," spokeswoman Glenys Oogjes said.


"These cruel devices are causing suffering to animals now – and will continue to do so every minute that animals remain confined in them. Coles responded to consumer concerns by gaining a commitment from their producers to end the use of sow stalls by 2014, so there should be no excuse for other Australian pig producers to not be able to meet this date.


"Skyscrapers and freeways are built in less than six years. While this is a positive announcement by Australian Pork Ltd, there is no legitimate justification for not getting rid of sow stalls earlier and we will be campaigning for them to do so.

"The only way that consumers will feel confident that the entire pig industry is acting on the cruelty of sow stalls is if Woolworths and other retailers follow Coles's ethical lead and commit to their pork products being sow stall free by 2014.

"Further, given the significant market share of imported ham and bacon products, consumers will likely demand that Australian retailers also take steps to ensure that these products are 'sow stall free'."

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