

Illegal activism puts jobs and safety at risk

8 April 2019 - The Australian Meat Industry Council (AMIC) CEO Patrick Hutchinson has called for a strong and rapid response after activists illegally entered several member operations this morning, putting themselves, hundreds of workers and thousands of animals at risk.

At least five AMIC member businesses were targeted in the invasions, led by vegan activists. The break ins were also linked to a major protest which shut down roads in Melbourne and interrupted the morning peak hour.

"What we've seen here is a group of ideologically driven people flouting the law, at the expense of businesses and employees doing the right thing, completely lawfully," Mr Hutchinson says.

The member organisations involved are all small to medium sized regional facilities.

"What this amounts to is workers in regional and rural Australia being impacted by people who are not part of their communities. They come in, they cause trouble, they create images that are not representative of the work our members do, they damage a business's ability to operate, and then they're gone."

Mr Hutchinson says Australia's meat sector provides 55,000 full time jobs. It is worth \$22 billion annually and meat the seventh-largest export commodity in the country. In many regional areas, the local meat processing facility is the biggest employer in town.

"Of course people are entitled to their own views, but illegally entering facilities is just not okay. It creates biosecurity risks, it leads to breaches of privacy, it is potentially unsafe for the activists themselves and at the end of the day it puts at risk jobs in regional communities," he says.

"There is a genuine potential for the sector to be negatively impacted through inability to conduct business or through direct damage to premises, which could potentially lead to job losses in communities that cannot afford to lose jobs."

Mr Hutchinson says AMIC's members are held to the very highest standards of animal welfare, in all aspects of operation.

"The impact of encouraging activist encroachment onto these sites hurts hundreds and in some cases thousands of employees and their families who are working to ensure a safe and consistent food supply for Australia and the rest of the world."

Just last week the Federal Government announced a crackdown on activism, including bringing agribusiness-shaming website Aussie Farms under the purview of the Privacy Act, which comes with potential penalties of up to \$400,000 for breaches.

"We welcomed the announcement from government that these illegal acts will not be tolerated. Now we are keen to see the announcements backed by action. We're aware that protesters have been removed from several sites by police, and we hope to see real penalties imposed."

AMIC is working with police and government not only to resolve this current situation but to develop improved approaches to managing ongoing activism.

"If people want to raise concerns or issues, then they must go about it in a civil way," Mr Hutchinson says.

AMIC is the peak council that represents retailers, processors and smallgoods manufacturers and is the only industry association representing the post-farmgate Australian meat industry.

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