

*This submission has been prepared by Edgar’s Mission Farm Sanctuary in response to the above application.*

## Who we are

Edgar’s Mission is a world-renowned not-for-profit organisation dedicated to the protection of farmed animals. Our sanctuary, based in Lancefield, Victoria, currently offers refuge to 492 orphaned, abandoned, abused, or surrendered farmed animals. Since inception in 2003, Edgar’s Mission has provided sanctuary and hope to over 5,000 rescued farmed animals. Many of these are birds rescued from commercial poultry facilities which gives us a unique insight into their lives, and moreover the physical and psychological issues these animals face.

## Executive summary

A planning application has been lodged by Baiada Properties Pty Limited for the construction and operation of a 24-hour intensive poultry breeding and rearing facility in Grenfell. This facility will include 4 separate farms across the property, each consisting of 10 tunnel ventilated sheds. The maximum capacity at any one time is stated as being 570,000 individual birds.

## Background

Since the 1960’s, the intensification of animal-based agriculture has increased exponentially. Making savings on space, land, labour, and feed, has seen free roaming “farmed” animals confined, en masse, in large industrial-like sheds. Sheds where the animals cannot see natural daylight, smell fresh air or scratch about in the soil.

Through selective breeding, many of these animals have had their genetics altered for exponential reasons of growth, milk production or egg laying. As a result, a range of health issues have manifested and been scientifically documented. This has raised concerns both from an ethical standpoint for the animal’s well-being, and from the production industries involved in terms of how far these animals can be pushed until the bottom line is impacted.

Initially, denying animals the ability to satisfy their basic behavioural needs in such facilities went largely unnoticed by the general public. However, recent times have seen science along with compassion questioning the ethical and animal welfare grounds for the continuance of these industries.

Whistle-blowers have played a part in exposing horrific animal cruelty that occurs behind closed farm gates and public scrutiny.

As an organisation dedicated to the protection of “farmed” animals, the basis of our objection are the poor animal welfare outcomes that are inherent within the broiler chicken breeding industry.

Edgar’s Mission further acknowledges and cites the risks posed to environment, biodiversity, human health, and biosecurity along with excessive water use as reasons for the rejection of this application.

Edgar's Mission recommends that the Department of Planning, Industry, and the Environment deny this application.

### Key areas of concern

*Broilers are the only livestock that are in chronic pain for the last 20 percent of their lives. They don't move around much... because it hurts their joints so much."*

*John Webster, Professor Emeritus at the University of Bristol.*

*"Any breeding that can be predicted to result in poor welfare should be illegal."*

*Donald Broome, Professor Emeritus at Cambridge University.*

Resulting from a competition sponsored by the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company to feed a hungry nation, "The Chicken of Tomorrow" contest was held in America in the 1940's. The result - the "ideal" meat bird, however the outcome for these hapless animals can be said to be anything other than ideal.

Prior to this point in time, "meat" chickens were either grown out roosters from the egg laying industry or "spent" laying hens – a "scrawny" bird of around 18 months to 2 years. Exhausted from an unnatural and exponential production of eggs, these hapless animals had "little meat on their bones".

The broiler bird initially took 12 weeks to reach their target slaughter weight, however today's broiler chicken reaches their target weight of between 2.2kg and 2.6kg in around 35 days whilst consuming 3.3kg of rations. Not content with such a rapid growth, the poultry industry is still working on reducing this time period.

These morbidly obese birds suffer a range of health issues which include (but not limited to);

- Pulmonary hypertension
- Difficulty breathing
- Sudden death syndrome
- Overtaxed heart unable to support rapid growth
- Cardiac arrhythmia
- Growth disorders
- Footpad lesions
- Ammonia burns to breast, hocks, feet, and skin from resting on faecal covered litter
- Musculoskeletal issues
- Slow walking pace
- Reduce movement
- Unstable gait
- Starvation due to inability to reach feeding stations

The chicken meat industry is keenly aware that broiler birds are predisposed to such a range of health issues, so much so that they factor in a production loss of 4% of birds not reaching the target slaughter weight. The Australian Chicken Meat Federation advises for the 20/21-year 665,000,000 meat chickens were slaughtered.

In addition to the health issues facing broiler birds, a further assault is placed upon them by way of the barren conditions in which they are raised. For birds that are destined to live such a short time, they have

very few positive experiences in their impoverished lives. Dimly lit sheds to reduce fighting (due to cramped conditions) offer these inquisitive birds little opportunity to satisfy their natural behaviours. Despite their size, broiler birds are still only baby birds upon reaching their target slaughter weight, with yet-to-change blue eyes (typical of baby animals like humans) and baby bird cheeps.

The natural life of a chicken sees the animal free ranging, scratching about in the soil, dustbathing and roaming over vast distances. Chickens are great explorers and are curious about the world around them, they have diverse and engaging personalities and possess an intelligence that surprises many. Scientific studies have recently confirmed that chickens are emotionally, intellectually and socially complex animals. They too have been shown to possess the ability to solve problems, empathise with others, recognise up to 100 of their kind and consider the future.

Raising chickens under factory farmed conditions with their current genetics further frustrates the lives of these animals.

### Parent birds

The inherent rapid growth of broiler chickens, coupled with their ravenous appetites, presents many challenges to ensure they stay alive long enough to breed and do not succumb to their predisposed health issues. One way this is achieved is through restricted feeding of rations, of lower protein and energy content. Some farms have been known to only feed the birds every second day.

This sees the birds hungry and competing with one another for the limited rations. Having testosterone-charged roosters free ranging amongst scared and traumatised hens is a recipe for stressed animals, and inconsistent with good animal welfare and community expectations.

### Antibiotic use

The rapid growth of these birds is such that a broiler bird hatched in the 1940's was raised in 12 weeks. Today it is around half this time, while the feed required fell by half and the growth rate multiplied by four. Pushing bodies to the limit has indeed come at a cost, none the least to the immune systems of these hapless animals that are forced to live in stressful, suboptimal conditions. Such a close and stressful confinement enables disease to spread rapidly. To combat this, antibiotics not only fend off disease but further enhance growth rates, creating a vicious cycle that allows the animals to be raised in substandard and unhygienic conditions.

A current global concern is the rise in antibiotic resistance that has come via the food chain of antibiotics fed to food producing animals. This situation in Australia is of great concern with over half of the antibiotics imported into this country being fed to food producing animals.

Whilst the "National Residue Survey shows that there are no unsafe antibiotic residues found in chicken meat" and "The use of antibiotics is strictly regulated and administration is under veterinary supervision", what the public are not told is that there are "acceptable" levels of chemical residues, and that of the 665,000,000 birds slaughtered for the 2020-21 period, only 301 samples were tested.

### Collection of birds prior to slaughter

When birds have reached their target slaughter weight they must be caught, put into crates, transported to the slaughterhouse, removed from the crates and then shackled up for slaughter. The conventional method of collecting broiler birds for slaughter is to manually catch the birds. The birds are generally caught by one or two legs, with three or four birds held in an inverted position by the catcher. Rough handling is almost inevitable given the birds are unaccustomed to human handling and will struggle to get away. Due to the weight of their bodies, limbs can break, and joints can pop along with bruising and other injuries being sustained.

## The science of sentience

The 2016 Productivity Commission Inquiry Report into the Regulation of Australian Agriculture stated, “farm animal welfare is a policy area that is expected to evolve over time as community attitudes evolve and as new scientific evidence becomes available.” The same report also notes that, “animal welfare regulations are not meeting community expectations about the humane treatment of farm animals.”

New scientific evidence into the sentience of farmed animals is emerging every day, often citing cognitive abilities that have previously not been considered. One recent study of chickens that appeared in the journal *Animal Cognition*, titled “Thinking chickens: a review of cognition, emotion, and behaviour in the domestic chicken” documented examples of “complex cognitive, emotional, communicative and social behaviour in domestic chickens...these capacities are, compelling, similar to what we see in other animals regarded as highly intelligent”.

## An eye to the future

A 2018 report commissioned by the Federal Department of Agriculture and Water Resources entitled “Australia’s shifting mindset on farm animal welfare” states that, “95% of people view farm animal welfare to be of a concern and 91% want at least some reform to address this.”

We expect this figure to be even higher once people become informed of the inadequacies of Australia's animal protection legislation when applied to food production animals. For example, most people are not aware that Codes of Practice circumvent the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. What this means is that farmed animals, in this instance broiler birds, can be subject to acts of cruelty and housed in conditions that would not be legally permissible should the animals be classed as domestic pets.

## Recommendation

Given the growing body of scientific evidence that speaks to the sentience of poultry and their ability to suffer under factory farmed conditions, this application should be denied.

*Prepared by - Edgar’s Mission Inc.*

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