Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Alison Xamon; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Charles Smith; Hon James Chown; Hon Darren West; Hon Stephen Dawson

ANIMAL ACTIVISM

Motion

HON COLIN de GRUSSA (Agricultural) [10.07 am] — without notice: I move —

That the house calls on the government to —

(a) provide greater protection for the safety and welfare of farmers, families, workers and livestock against animal activists who illegally trespass on private land or interfere with lawful activities, by investigating harsher penalties, stronger regulations or other protections;

(b) provide extra resources for law enforcement agencies to tackle rural crime and increase community protection in rural areas; and

(c) strengthen regulation and enforcement around the use of drones for clandestine surveillance, trespass or other unlawful activity.

As we begin this debate today, I want to reflect on something that happened only moments ago in the chamber and that happens every sitting day—that is, the Legislative Council prayer. I draw members’ attention to one section of that prayer, which says —

… bless this Legislative Council now assembled to deliberate upon the affairs affecting the well-being and good order of society in Western Australia;

That is, in part, why I bring this debate to the house today because it is about the wellbeing and good order of society and members of our Western Australian community feeling safe and secure in doing the jobs they do every day. We are calling on the government and members collectively to do more amid what are no doubt rising tensions in rural Western Australia, particularly around animal activism and some of the terrible incidents that are occurring. Last week, there was the incident in Harvey when animal activists clashed with a farmer while he was doing his job, which he is entitled to do under law and should be allowed to do without interference. I obviously do not have all the details of that incident, but it highlights the aggressive behaviour that is occurring across our state and nation in the name of animal activism—which I do not believe helps their cause, by the way.

On 15 February, just last week, concerns were raised about threats that had been made at Muresk Institute. Although those threats did not eventuate, police were required to establish a checkpoint at the entrance road, and members of the state support unit attended the site to review its security measures. Muresk is a place of learning for our young people, and they have the right to be safe. Our kids should be safe in our schools, and our families should be safe in their homes.

Last month, about 30 animal activists entered the Muchea saleyards and interrupted what is a lawful activity, trespassing, filming and shouting until the police were called. I have no issue with people who want to protest and espouse their views on particular issues. However, they should do that in a lawful manner and without interfering with people who are going about their lawful business. Another target was Outback Jacks steakhouse in Northbridge. I have also heard reports that livestock transporters have been harassed and people have entered their trucks when they are parked at rest stops in and around the metropolitan area. That is dangerous, because they are big, heavy vehicles, and people may be hurt and potentially killed. This sort of activity should not be taking place.

Recently, a lot of media attention has been drawn to the publication by the group Aussie Farms of an online “attack map”. The Nationals condemn this map and have reached out to industry and to the federal Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources seeking to have this map taken offline. We have also asked for this so-called charity to have its charitable status removed. This is not a charitable action. It is not acceptable in any way, shape or form to publish this kind of rubbish and to encourage and incite people to attack farmers in their homes—because, of course, their place of work is their home.

I want to read from an article about the Aussie Farms group that was published on the website farmonline.com.au on 21 January. It states, in part —

The map is sourced from a database available at www.aussiefarms.org, which is based on information submitted by the general public.

The interactive map lists the location of hundreds of rural properties, including livestock farms, meatworks and dairies.

Aussie Farms’ registered users are encouraged to upload information about farming practices and images of livestock and production.
The Aussie Farms group states its goal is “fighting to end commercialised animal abuse and exploitation through public education about modern farming and slaughtering practices”.

I would suggest that the modern farming and slaughtering practices are a heck of a lot better than what they were many years ago. Again, this is a lawful activity that is being undertaken, with no issue from a legal perspective.

Another major consideration is the biosecurity risk of people entering farming properties and saleyards. These animal activists may not be aware that by entering these places, they may be bringing in weeds, pests and diseases that may harm or injure the animals. Therefore, although they may believe they are doing a good thing, the fact that they may harm those animals goes against everything that they are trying to achieve.

People in regional areas have the right to be safe in their environment. That includes farmers, transporters and people in the stockyard and livestock industries. Just this week, the Premier condemned the behaviour of those activists and labelled their activity as illegal. I agree. The Premier was right in saying that. The police have resources at their disposal to deal with trespass and harm. However, the question I am asking today is: is the legislation strong enough or should it be strengthened? We have submitted a question on notice to the Minister for Police seeking further information about the number of police responses, charges and convictions for these types of incidents. I look forward to the answer to that question. We may need to strengthen our legislation and introduce other forms of protection.

An example from the United States that is worth considering is the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act. That is a federal law that criminalises certain types of demonstrations or acts on behalf of animals, and classifies these demonstrations as acts of terrorism. The act makes it a crime, designated as terrorism, to damage or interfere with animal enterprises by intentionally damaging property. I am not suggesting that this is the way we need to go.

Hon Darren West: That’s good.

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: However, there may be some merit in parts of this legislation, and it is certainly worth debating. We must consider every extreme as we debate this issue. Under this law, the definition of “animal enterprise” is expansive. It includes zoos, circuses, rodeos, farms, animal laboratories, pet stores, animal shelters, furriers and any fair or similar event intended to advance agriculture, arts and sciences.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: Member, is this an actual piece of legislation?

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: This is called the Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: So it does exist?

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: Yes, it does exist.

Hon Darren West: Is it a federal act or a state act?

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: It is a US federal law.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: It is a US law?

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: I am referring to a US law as an example that we may want to look at. It is interesting that under this law, the penalty for nonviolent action that causes damage of up to $100,000 is a fine or imprisonment for up to one year, or both. Thus, nonviolent civil disobedience may constitute terrorism under this act and result in an activist spending one year in prison. It is worth noting that the penalty for nonviolent action that causes damage of over $100,000 is a fine and a maximum of 10 years in prison, and the penalty for over $1 million in economic damage is a fine and a maximum of 20 years in prison. That is one extreme. I am not suggesting for a minute that we need to go that far. However, these issues are taken seriously by other jurisdictions. In this state, changes to the penalties should be considered. We as a Parliament and a state should look at all avenues to ensure that our farmers, livestock handlers and all those working in our rural industries and rural communities are safe and have the law on their side when it comes to the animal activism that has been taking place.

It is also worth noting that WA Farmers has organised a meeting in Harvey next week—a “calm the farm” meeting, if we want to call it that—with representatives from the Western Australia Police Force and lawyers, who will speak to dairy and meat producers about their legal rights and how to respond to activists who are trespassing on their property. It is important to strengthen the legislation and review penalties; however, it is also very important that people know what protections are available to them under the current laws. The role of government is to disseminate and make that information readily available to people. I commend WA Farmers for organising this meeting. Another meeting scheduled for 1 March will feature the Pastoralists and Graziers Association and representatives from the transport and saleyards sectors. This is an important step for farmers and people in associated industries in understanding their rights. We must inform people of their rights under existing laws, as well as look at whether those laws need to be changed.
Another issue is the need for extra resources for the police to tackle rural crime. This issue comes up from time to time and has certainly been raised with me as I travel around my electorate. People do not feel that the necessary resources are available for them to call on when they are needed. As I have said, and I will say it again, people have the right to feel safe and secure in their rural properties. We must put the necessary resources in place to ensure that these crimes can be investigated and, when necessary, prosecuted. I want to refer to a petition that I presented to the house last week, from a resident of the south west, Geoff Charteris. He created this petition because he had had enough; he has had a gutful of the criminal activities going on in his patch. This petition that I read in the house last week, with almost 500 signatures, was about doing something about rural crime. It is not going away; it is getting worse. The activist part of it is only part of that rural crime. Theft, stock rustling—if we want to call it that—and those sorts of things are also occurring and certainly need investigating.

We are calling for a review of legislation aimed at protecting landholders against trespassing, hunting or fishing on private land without permission. We want to protect against theft, damage and the destruction of livestock or property, including reviewing the adequacy of maximum penalties. We need to look at these penalties. We need to address biosecurity risks and look at any other activities as we try to strengthen protections for people.

Property and stock theft is very significant. Given the value of livestock and wool, it can amount to a massive economic loss for farmers. More than that, these people have worked hard to produce these livestock. Many of them know each individual animal. As one farmer put it, they feel violated when these people enter their properties because of the hard work and commitment they have made to breeding those animals. It is a disgrace that this is happening. Perhaps we need to consider forming a stock squad or some other dedicated response unit that can investigate these incidents and prosecute offenders. We have not had a specialist stock squad since about 2008. Perhaps we need to investigate that. It is important to consider having that resource in our regional areas to be able to specifically focus on those types of issues and investigate them with the knowledge and understanding that is needed to do that job properly.

The Victorian government has announced the formation of a livestock and rural crime squad to specialise in rural crime, farm and livestock theft. This squad will be staffed with 20 new specialist rural crime investigators, after stock thefts rose by 40 per cent from April 2017 to March 2018. During this time frame, 232 incidents of burglary, break and enter and theft offences were recorded in which livestock were stolen; however, just 10 of these resulted in arrest or summons.

Hon Alannah MacTiernan: Are you suggesting that those stock thefts were related to vegan terrorism?

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: No, I am talking about rural crime in general. I am not sure that vegans would be stealing animals. I remind members that the motion is about not only rural crime and providing greater protection for the safety and welfare of farmers, families, workers and livestock against activists, but also providing extra resources for law enforcement agencies to tackle rural crime. The reference to the stock squad is about the rural crime issue itself. They are interrelated. Rural crime is a crime; whether it is committed by an activist or someone else for their own gain is irrelevant. It is time to recognise that stock theft is a serious issue, and we have to do something about it. We need a dedicated resource available for these issues to be dealt with. Our police are already busy enough dealing with plenty of other issues in our regional areas. Creating this dedicated stock squad or rural crime unit—whatever we want to call it—will also take the pressure off local police forces.

I want to talk about drones. The third part of the motion relates to regulation and enforcement around the use of drones. Obviously, in many respects, this is a federal issue because the regulation of remotely piloted aircraft systems is handled by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority. On 1 December 2017, CASA produced a report that included the results of a survey it carried out about regulating the use of remotely piloted aircraft systems. Eighty-six per cent of the respondents—I think there were about 3 700 responses—supported registration.

Eighty-four per cent of recreational users of drones supported some form of registration of that equipment. That is handy. Obviously, if a drone is registered, there is the ability to track that device if it is captured, for example. If it is found on someone’s property, perhaps the owners could be tracked as well. It is another mechanism to ensure that we have all the tools in our toolbox to try to manage the crimes perpetrated by the owners of these devices. Illegal surveillance by these drones is becoming more and more prevalent. I am a member of a number of groups in my home area of Esperance—online chats on WhatsApp or whatever app people are using. There are regular reports on that app of drone sightings on someone’s farm. People walk out of their houses in the morning and see a drone, hovering low, flying across the front of their shed to see what is in there.

Hon Rick Mazza: Shoot them out of the sky!

Hon COLIN de GRUSSA: Most often they try but quite often they do not have a gun handy. What protection do they have? What legal options are available to people in that instance? Is that constituted as trespass? Does it breach privacy laws?
A report entitled “Landowner protection from unauthorised filming or surveillance” was presented to the New South Wales Legislative Council in October last year. This is a great report and could form the basis of some investigation in this state. In the time I have left, I want to refer to a couple of the recommendations of that report.

Recommendation 3 states —

That the NSW Government review the Surveillance Devices Act 2007 to consider whether to insert a public interest exemption for unauthorised filming or surveillance.

Recommendation 4 states —

That the NSW Government establish a whole of government working group to review the current legislative framework around unauthorised filming and surveillance and identify barriers to enforcement and successful prosecutions.

One of the critical things about the legislation around drones is that it is more than just licensing and regulating their use; it is about what they can be used for and what breaches of what act are made. It is quite complex. I believe that we may be able to use state legislation to offer some protections to landowners. That needs to be investigated.

Recommendation 5 states —

... review the laws and penalties of trespass and unauthorised surveillance to consider the responsibility of those planning illegal activities ...

Recommendation 6 states —

That the NSW Government, through the Council of Australian Governments, raise the need for a comprehensive approach to the regulation of drones across state and federal jurisdictions, with particular regard to the potential privacy and security impacts of the increasing use of drone technology.

That is a good suggestion and one that I hope this government can pursue through its involvement in COAG.

HON RICK MAZZA (Agricultural) [10.28 am]: I would like to thank Hon Colin de Grussa for bringing this very important matter to the house. Obviously, rural security and crime is an important matter that has to be dealt with. I want to focus on paragraphs (a) and (c) of Hon Colin de Grussa’s motion in the limited time that I have.

I will start by saying that I appreciate the ministerial statement that the Minister for Agriculture and Food made on Tuesday. It is good to see that the government takes vegan activism and an attack on our food producers seriously. Mention was made of the Muchea saleyards. I believe that 30 activists attended the saleyards. Anyone who has been to a saleyard would understand that it can be a very dangerous place. Trucks are backing in and out and there are large animals. If the operators of the saleyards are distracted by people protesting, it could end up in serious injury or death. I thank the minister for that ministerial statement. In fact, there are significant penalties—a year’s imprisonment and a $12 000 fine—but I will talk about that later on.

Food security, obviously, is very important to the community in Western Australia and Australia in general. Biosecurity breaches caused by people entering farms without permission and without going through biosecurity measures cause great problems. More importantly, the vegan movement needs to be brought into check. I want to distinguish between vegans and vegetarians. I have no beef with vegetarians! I know there are a number within this chamber. Vegetarians generally follow quite a healthy diet; they will eat eggs, cheese and other animal products, and often eat fish. But vegans eat no animal product, and the diet is actually a disguise for animal rights activism; that is what it is. The Oxford Dictionary defines activist “terrorism” as —

The unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims.

I think that describes very well what has been going on with a number of our farmers who have been harassed and attacked. It is domestic terrorism, and we, as a Parliament, should move to protect food producers and farmers from that.

The attack map that has been referred to is an absolute disgrace. In some cases it points a butcher’s knife at locations and farmers, which does not send a very good message. On social media a number of farmers have been explaining how very anxious they are that their farms are being identified. Everybody deserves the comfort of being in their own home, and that is what this is about for farmers—their farm is their home. It is akin to home invasion when people go there and harass them while they go about their lawful business of producing a very high quality food product for not only Western Australia, but also Australia and the world. Our food producers produce a very, very good product, and in the main their animal welfare methods, practices and consciousness are world standard. It is disgraceful that people think that they have a right to harass and intimidate people in their own home and environment. Stronger penalties are needed. One year’s imprisonment and a $12 000 fine may sounds like a lot, but what it translates to is a small fine, a good behaviour bond or maybe some community service.

Today’s Farm Weekly covers this subject, and also quotes federal Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources, David Littleproud, who said —
The example in Caloundra Magistrates Court in Queensland last week where a serial farm invader got only a $200 fine for her third offence trespassing on farms … That is what happens. They get a small slap on the wrist and if any penalty of significance is issued, the activism group may cover that fine. The chances that they will go to prison are almost nil.

Hon Martin Aldridge interjected.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Pretty much.

It is very important that the government looks into this issue. It is important that the Parliament protects its citizens so they are able to go about their lawful business of food production. There is no doubt that at times some members of Parliament aggravate the issue. Lisa Baker’s comments in the other place last week infuriated a lot of people.

Hon Darren West: You should read what she said.

Hon RICK MAZZA: The Premier came out and rejected Lisa Baker’s comments on this issue, and quite rightly so. It is good that he supports that.

Hon Darren West: You should read the Hansard.

Hon RICK MAZZA: I am sure Hon Darren West will have something to say about this later on.

Again, Farm Weekly made some comments in today’s article, which states — While the relationship between producer and consumer has never been more important, the divide between farmer and activist has grown wider in the past weeks.

Further down, the Minister for Agriculture and Food says, “I didn’t even know they were there until after.” Sorry; I will backtrack. Several members interjected.

Hon RICK MAZZA: Yes—that was the farmer.

Hon Martin Aldridge interjected.

Hon RICK MAZZA: The article is a little difficult to read! This article refers to a farmer in Harvey, who said that he felt intimidated by these people. He did not even know that the activists were on his property at the time he went out to shoot a few crows in the afternoon, as he does every day. The Minister for Agriculture and Food says — … over the past few months we have seen a number of incidents of vegan activism in WA: protests at … Northbridge … and at the Muchea saleyards, the … Aussie Farms website …

At least the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development has identified that. I hope that the government moves towards implementing stronger penalties for these domestic terrorists who are harassing food producers.

Hon Samantha Rowe interjected.

Hon RICK MAZZA: That is what they are. They are harassing food producers. They are identifying farms.

Hon Alison Xamon: You’ve got to be kidding!

Hon RICK MAZZA: As I have said, this is a disguise for extreme animal activism. In fact, it has become such a problem that, in May last year, the Daily Mail published a story about vegan parents who had neglected their 20-month-old daughter to the point that she was suffering from malnutrition and rickets. Some people really do take this to the extreme.

Hon Alison Xamon: Wow—wee!

Hon RICK MAZZA: That is the headline. I am not saying that; it is right there in the headline.

It is up to Parliament to make sure that the rule of law is obeyed in this state and that the penalties for people who trespass on properties and harass and intimidate people need to be much stronger. That protection needs to be provided as soon as possible.

HON ALISON XAMON (North Metropolitan) [10.36 am]: Wow! I rise to make some comments on the motion. I must say that some of the things that the two previous speakers said were reasonable and I concur with them, but a fair degree of licence was taken in some of their comments. I have to say at the outset that I become really, really concerned when members throw terms like “terrorist” around so loosely in the chamber. I think it is deeply irresponsible. I remind members that we will be debating legislation very shortly that provides for how we deal with terrorism. It is a serious matter and when people are so cavalier with that term, I become very, very concerned. I ask that people rein it in a bit so we can talk about the genuine issues that face us today.
I must say at the outset that I do not support the tactics employed by the animal rights activists and I will explain why that is. I will also put some context around the issue as well. I recognise that when people enter other peoples’ private properties, it is deeply problematic, particularly if a person lives in the regions and is far away from law enforcement and is fearful about those people entering their property. I am also persuaded by the concerns that have been expressed about the impact on biosecurity. I think that is a very legitimate issue and there are concerns about that. I do not accept that we need to increase penalties, but I do think that perhaps more work needs to be done so people know their rights. Perhaps it would be useful to look at how people can gain that support.

However, I want to talk about what motivates people to go to such extreme measures. These are not measures of terror; they are certainly extreme measures and they are about breaking the law. The reality is that the key concern of a lot of animal rights activists is that they have lost faith in the capacity of the state to appropriately oversight whether animal welfare is adhered to within this state. We know that this is not actually new. People have been going onto farms and filming gross acts of cruelty, for example, for decades and decades. In the past, that is how breaches of animal cruelty have been revealed, whether it be looking at cruelty on battery hen farms, cruelty towards pigs or cruelty towards other livestock animals. They have taken it upon themselves because they have not had faith that the systems in place will enable people to ensure the state is doing the job of overseeing animal welfare. If we want to discourage this sort of activity—I think there is good reason to do so—the simple solution is to enable inspectors to independently and appropriately inspect to see whether biosecurity measures and animal welfare are being upheld to the standards we expect. We know that this is what the community wants from us as well. The community wants to know that animals are being treated fairly and that gross animal cruelty is not occurring on our farms. I strongly believe that the majority of farmers do not operate that way but there will be rogue farmers who mistreat their animals, and that needs to be exposed, and I think it needs to be exposed by the state. That is why we need to ensure animal inspectors can go in, without having to give notice, and report back through the appropriate channels. Members opposite want this matter addressed, and I completely understand why, and that would be a start.

The second thing I would like to comment on is animal rights activists protesting at restaurants. It is with some despair that I watch this activity. I despair because I am one of the people in this chamber who is vegetarian. I am not vegan; I was vegan, but I found that it was too difficult when I fell pregnant, but that is another story. I have been vegetarian for 29 years; I became vegetarian primarily on animal welfare and environmental grounds. My children have chosen to be vegetarian but my husband is not. I tell animal rights activists that they will not win over hearts and minds by berating people for how they eat. I am concerned and saddened when they do that because I am sympathetic to the idea of educating people about the impacts of eating meat and perhaps looking at reducing the amount of meat they eat, but I do not think berating people is a fair or effective way to achieve that outcome. However, I have to say that it goes both ways. I do not berate people for what they choose to eat. Good luck to anyone here who can say that I ever have, but people, including people in this chamber, have mocked me because of what I choose to eat. I have to say how incredibly lame that is, people. If they want animal rights activists not to protest about what they eat, fair enough, that goes both ways. We do not berate people because they eat halal or kosher food or because they are diabetic and do not eat sugar or have coeliac disease, so do not berate people if they choose not to eat meat or any animal products. I am seeing that lack of respect going both ways. I wanted to stress that.

Hon Colin de Grussa raised broad concerns about the theft of livestock. Obviously, any suggestion that animal welfare activists are responsible for that would be outright ludicrous, but I did not hear Hon Colin de Grussa necessarily suggest that. Concerns were raised about the theft of stock, biosecurity, and unlawful shooting and fishing on people’s private property. Concerns were raised also about a lack of independent oversight of these activities, which goes far beyond concerns about animal rights activists trespassing onto people’s property. It sounds as though there is a much broader issue here, and I concur that it sounds as though it needs to be addressed. I think there is a bit of a bandwagon-type mentality going on here because people have seen a political opportunity to target a particular type of activism. As I said, I do not particularly support this type of activism. Unfortunately, it alienates more people than it brings on board so I think it is ineffective in that regard but it happens because people lose faith in the state’s capacity and willingness to independently oversight animal welfare measures on properties.

The first thing we should do is make sure that we step up that oversight so the good farmers, who are doing the right thing, can effectively be exonerated, if you like, from suggestions that they are not. However, it would mean that rogue farmers who are not doing the right thing could be picked off and people would not feel the need to take matters into their own hands, because they should not. I want to be very clear. I do not know whether any of the farmers involved are good. That is not my assessment to make and probably not that of the animal rights activists to make either, which is precisely why if people had faith in the system and the appropriate people were
independently going out to properties, without notice, and determining what needed to happen, it would be much easier for all.

I remind members that the Productivity Commission report itself has said that we need reform in this space; new standards for farm animal welfare; enforcement of farm animal welfare standards; an assessment of the efficiency and effectiveness of the livestock export regulatory system, and that we need to improve it; a standalone statutory organisation that can look at animal welfare; and independent evidence-based advice on animal welfare science and community values. We do need reform in this space and that has been recognised by the Productivity Commission. We are seeing a brand of activism emerge out of frustration. That is not good and I hope people can reassess some of the tactics because, as I say, I do not believe they are bringing the community along with them with their activism. Frankly, the animals deserve better. They need that effective oversight and that is the state’s role.

HON ALANNAH MACTIERNAN (North Metropolitan — Minister for Agriculture and Food) [10.46 am]: I thank Hon Colin de Grussa for bringing this motion forward. This is an appropriate forum to be dealing with issues of this type. We are seeing a changing environment and we have to be prepared to look at providing the appropriate response. Before I deal in some detail with this matter, I compliment Hon Alison Xamon for what I thought was a very measured and well-argued position. I have to say to Hon Rick Mazza that it is completely unproductive for us to try to engage in a cultural war here. This is not what we need.

I point out that the food that vegans eat are produced by farmers. Whatever it is they are eating, whether it is smoked tomatoes, almond milk or mushroom-based products, they are products produced by farmers. It is incredibly important that we understand, as was put so eloquently by Hon Alison Xamon, that it is wrong to denigrate people because they have chosen the path of veganism, and it is just as important that activists must respect the right of Australians to exercise their choice to eat meat. I know many very decent human beings who have chosen this particular pathway for moral and health reasons. It is not one that I have chosen. I ostentatiously eat meat to assure people that I support all farmers. I urge us to move away from this culture war. It is not in anyone’s interest for us to inflame this situation.

As Hon Colin de Grussa has said, there are very real concerns for farmers. I understand that this type of activism can be a real, practical threat. People feel unsafe in their environment when there is a risk of people trespassing on their property or a drone flying over it. It is a very uncomfortable feeling. They also have a deeper and more profound existential concern. Many livestock producers have put it to me that one of their concerns about moving forward with animal welfare legislation is that if we give in on this part, then the activists’ ultimate agenda is to continue to have more. Certainly, it is true that the ultimate aim of a percentage of animal activists is to close down livestock production, but that is not where the bulk of the Australian population lies. We stand strongly behind our livestock producers and believe that it is possible to raise animals in a humane way whilst feeding the Australian population its chosen diet. Calm heads must prevail and we have to be committed to credible animal welfare so that the bulk of the Australian and Western Australian population will remain firmly behind our livestock producers, as they are today.

The Premier and I have made it very clear that we want to distinguish this latest round of vegan activism from veganism itself. This activism is counterproductive and there is a degree to which one might think that perhaps this comes out of some sort of smugness, complacency or self-indulgence that they are going to achieve anything positive by going into a restaurant or threatening a farmer on their property. It seems that this type of activism is not designed to achieve a positive outcome and, quite frankly, it is setting back the cause of animal welfare. I ask those people who are doing these things to think very hard and long about what they are actually trying to achieve.

The member raised the question of whether the existing penalties for trespass, for example, are strong enough. The real challenge is putting in place enforcement. We can come in here and have a knee-jerk reaction and set the penalty at 10 years’ jail or a fine of $20,000 or $40,000, but the difficulty lies in our ability to enforce that. As the member has acknowledged, there is certainly one meeting, possibly two meetings, next week between industry and very senior players in the police. I have been in constant dialogue, as has the Premier, with the Minister for Police on the trespass issue to ensure that we have an appropriate response. As we know, there have been a number of these cases. For example, in the Harvey case there was no trespass. No matter what laws we have against trespass, there would not have been an offence to prosecute.

The member also raised the issue about drones and drone surveillance, which is a real issue for not only farmers, but also many other people. The public and farmers have raised proper concerns about this issue. The safety aspect of using drones is regulated under the Civil Aviation Safety Regulations and the privacy aspect is dealt with under the Surveillance Devices Act 1998. Given the emerging prevalence of drones in the intervening 20 years, it is really quite important that we look at whether these laws are adequate for these purposes. It is something that we certainly need to take on board. In a number of cases, livestock producers have taken on activists using not only criminal action, but also civil action and suing them under civil tort provisions —
For those members who do not know where rural Western Australia is, all they need do is drive on Great Eastern.

I would first like to thank the member for raising the issue of community safety in rural and regional Australia.

Of country towns like Kalgoorlie–Boulder, Kununurra, Esperance, Geraldton and Bunbury, nothing is more important than feeling safe in their own home. The harsh reality is that residents are absolutely fed up with their homes being broken into, putting up with antisocial behaviour and hearing appalling language in public places.

I lived in Kalgoorlie–Boulder for around 10 years, so I have personal insight into regional life. For the residents of country towns like Kalgoorlie–Boulder, Kununurra, Esperance, Geraldton and Bunbury, nothing is more important than feeling safe in their own home. The harsh reality is that residents are absolutely fed up with their homes being broken into, putting up with antisocial behaviour and hearing appalling language in public places.

I will also take this opportunity to again raise the issue of Aboriginal incarceration rates and Aboriginal crime rates, because this is an area where the government continues to fail.

On the more general issue of rural crime, in particular, livestock theft, the stock unit of the Western Australia Police Force was abandoned in 2008. It was felt at the time that there were more efficient ways of dealing with livestock theft. I suspect that as the price of livestock has increased quite considerably, this very real risk of livestock theft has increased. This is an important issue that can be raised at the meeting that is happening next week with senior officers of the police about whether we need to have a more focused unit. I have just come back from Broome and, as always, in any conversation with pastoralists up there, the centuries-old tradition of cattle rustling is still an issue for pastoralists with various people claiming who has been rustling whose cattle. It is a lot more difficult to ascertain up there because animals move across boundaries quite readily. This is clearly a serious issue and I thank the member for raising it. We will put the issue of whether we need to look at the restoration of the stock squad on an agenda for discussion with the Commissioner of Police.

In Australia, we call it cattle-duffing, not rustling.

HON ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: It depends where one comes from. Cattle rustling is the term I have always used.

Hon Jim Chown: It is American terminology.

Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN: All right; cattle-duffing. I bow to the member’s superior knowledge on this. I hope it is not personal knowledge!

Perhaps one of the fundamental underlying provisions is: how can we move beyond these culture wars? I do think there is a place for having a higher degree of transparency around our animal welfare laws. It is ultimately in the interests of the farming community to be able to point to a very credible system of monitoring and compliance. Indeed, at the recent meeting of agriculture ministers, an item put on the table by the federal minister, written by his department, was a proposal for us to really get our house in order in relation to the livestock standards and guidelines to ensure that we have a credible process for establishing those guidelines and a credible and consistent approach across the nation for the enforcement of those guidelines. This is going to be an important part of the armoury of our livestock producers to show the community that they are doing the right thing — that a clear set of standards are being complied with. The majority of us who choose to eat animal products can then be assured that we are doing this ethically.

HON CHARLES SMITH (East Metropolitan) [11.00 am]: I want to make a few brief comments regarding part (b) of the motion, which states that this house calls on the government to —

provide extra resources for law enforcement agencies to tackle rural crime and increase community protection in rural areas;

I will also take this opportunity to again raise the issue of Aboriginal incarceration rates and Aboriginal crime rates, because this is an area where the government continues to fail.

I would first like to thank the member for raising the issue of community safety in rural and regional Australia. For those members who do not know where rural Western Australia is, all they need do is drive on Great Eastern Highway or Great Northern Highway and keep going until the green turns to red dust. Members may know that I lived in Kalgoorlie–Boulder for around 10 years, so I have personal insight into regional life. For the residents of country towns like Kalgoorlie–Boulder, Kununurra, Esperance, Geraldton and Bunbury, nothing is more important than feeling safe in their own home. The harsh reality is that residents are absolutely fed up with their homes being broken into, putting up with antisocial behaviour and hearing appalling language in public places.

Kalgoorlie–Boulder still struggles to attract professional people, like medical and mental health practitioners, due to the crime and antisocial behaviour issues. In rural and remote regions, the harsh reality is that young Aboriginal members of the community, particularly young Aboriginal boys, commit high volumes of crime and participate in antisocial behaviour. This has just been acknowledged and recognised by the member for Kimberley, who recently called for traditional cultural punishment. She at least knows that this is a significant problem and that it is out of control. She has my total respect for raising this issue. Unfortunately, I cannot agree with traditional cultural punishments just for one segment of our society. I think it is a great idea for all criminals to be speared —

Hon Colin Holt: What?
Hon Charles Smith: — and particularly perpetrators of domestic violence. Yes, I say that tongue in cheek, for those who are questioning my comments. At least the member for Kimberley is prepared to recognise that there is a problem that needs to be dealt with. The Western Australian government needs to acknowledge this and act with Aboriginal people if it is to make rural and regional Western Australia a better place to live, work and play for everybody.

Approximately two years ago, I advised the house on Aboriginal incarceration issues. I will repeat what I said then, because the McGowan government needs to stop ignoring people who have some insight into the realities of living in regional Western Australia. The disparity in Aboriginal incarceration rates overwhelmingly comes down to two things — violence and reoffending. More than 50 per cent of Aboriginal prisoners are in prison for violent offences, meaning assault, murder, sexual assault and robbery. Aboriginal people are also disproportionately victims of murder and assaults. Family violence also has a huge part to play in those offences. From firsthand experience, I can relate to the house that 99 per cent of all police work out in the bush is dealing with Aboriginal domestic violence. Recent data from the Australian Institute of Criminology’s national homicide monitoring program between 1989 and 2012 shows that 67 per cent of Aboriginal murders were classified as domestic violence murders, compared with 26 per cent of non-Aboriginal homicides. The report also found that 70 per cent of Aboriginal murders involved alcohol, compared with only 22 per cent for non-Aboriginal murders, despite drinking rates for Aboriginal Australians being no greater overall than those for non-Aboriginal people. In fact, a higher proportion of Aboriginal people are non-drinkers than non-Aboriginal people. The report also found that those who do drink are more likely to drink harmful amounts. That is the crux of the situation. Family and community violence thrives in socioeconomic disadvantage and its bedfellows of social dysfunction, alcohol abuse and unemployment.

Another major factor in the disproportional rate of Aboriginal imprisonment is reoffending, which I will talk about now. Of the 2015 prisoner population, 77 per cent of Aboriginal prisoners had a prior sentence compared with 50 per cent of non-Aboriginal prisoners. Believe it or not, there are known facts that indicate whether reoffending is likely. One important factor is having accommodation available to offenders post-release. Having accommodation for prisoners who are released is a major factor in reducing reoffending. That is an area that the government needs to look at.

The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Steve Thomas): Member, can I interrupt you briefly. There is a fair bit of movement around the chamber and, I suggest, perhaps some question mark about the degree of relevance under standing order 47. I thought the same thing until I read part (b) of the motion before the house, which reads —

provide extra resources for law enforcement agencies to tackle rural crime and increase community protection in rural areas;

The member is addressing Aboriginal issues. My understanding is that there are plenty of Aboriginal people in rural areas, so I will allow the member to continue. Hon Charles Smith has the call.

Hon Charles Smith: Thanks, Mr Acting President. I want to quote Warren Mundine, who has stated —

… governments and commentators must move past the narrative that indigenous offenders are victims of racism, colonisation and intergenerational trauma; that they deserve pity rather than the consequences of their actions.

He went on to say —

It doesn’t help offenders or produce good policy.

I want to conclude by addressing the problems that the police are facing in rural and regional areas. That is a new issue in the last year or so, as police seemingly no longer wish to relocate to the regions. Police officers in regional areas have received a $2,000 pay increase over the last two years — $1,000 a year — but the government has increased rents in those areas. The rent increases total $3,020, compared with the pay increase of $2,000. Why would any police officer move to the regions to take a pay cut? In years gone by, there were incentives for police to go to the regions. It is now becoming very, very difficult to attract police officers to regional police stations. Even popular spots such as Margaret River are failing to attract officers and fill vacancies. Therefore, I urge the government, in the strongest terms, to look at reversing the Government Regional Officers’ Housing hikes and make country policing an attractive proposition as it once was.

HON JIM CHOWN (Agricultural) [11.10 am]: I congratulate the majority of members who have spoken on this important matter for regional Western Australia and the farming community at large. I took great heart from the minister’s response to this excellent motion moved by Hon Colin de Grussa. My experience in my farming career is that animal activist activity surges and wanes. My family has personal experience of animal activists coming onto a property on more than one occasion. We owned one of the largest private piggeries in Serpentine until a few years ago. On at least three occasions, they came into our state-of-the-art facility that complied with every requirement for the animal husbandry of these animals. They would come in at midnight or in the early hours of
the word "terrorism" gets thrown around a lot in the lead-up to federal elections. I make that point. Members, how

such as "terrorism". They are trying to inflame that cultural war for whatever reason—possibly electoral. Usually

they will tell you about it. That is the right answer, member. Vegans are very passionate about

the care and welfare of animals, as I have stated. As Hon Alison Xamon expressed, these people are doing their cause

more harm than good. Some people would say, “Why don’t you encourage it more, because you don’t like these

left-wing activists?” I am quite a balanced person. The reality is that we need to inform our communities at large

that this practice will not be entertained and has inherent danger involved in it, certainly in rural communities.

I congratulate members for their comments on this matter this morning and I look forward to less activism. Activists can demonstrate in front of Parliament and at the roads down at the wharf, as they have done for years, but they should not take their activism onto private property or private saleyards. They should go out and do it on the road. We do not want them there and they are not doing their cause any good at all. In fact, they are having the opposite effect in the general community at large.

HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural — Parliamentary Secretary) [11.15 am]: It looks like the farmer might get the last word! I commend Hon Colin de Grussa for bringing on this motion. As the only working farmer in Parliament, this issue can affect me and only me, and all those involved in agriculture. I note that as the only farmer in the house, I am sitting next to the only vegetarian in the house and we get along just fine!

Hon Martin Aldridge: That is not what she told us.

Hon DARREN WEST: As far as I know, we are getting on fine.

That goes to the minister’s point. These cultural wars between those who produce meat and those who choose not to eat it are not helpful and should not be encouraged. I get concerned when people inflame the rhetoric with words such as “terrorism”. They are trying to inflame that cultural war for whatever reason—possibly electoral. Usually the word “terrorism” gets thrown around a lot in the lead-up to federal elections. I make that point. Members, how do we know whether our friend is vegan? Does anyone know?

Hon Rick Mazza: Wait six seconds.

Hon Alison Xamon: They will tell you about it.

Hon DARREN WEST: They will tell us. That is the right answer, member. Vegans are very passionate about what they believe in. I understand that people have very strongly held views on all ranges of subjects and people who choose to be vegans are included in that group. As the Minister for Agriculture and Food said, vegans eat food produced on farms too. Whether it is bread or mung beans or chickpeas or whatever vegans choose to eat, it is produced by a farmer—not at my farm, but it is produced by a farmer. In fact, most of the produce off our farm is not meat. It is fodder or grain or other such things. I encourage vegans to investigate further the consumption of Western Australian white lupins. They are a superfood. We have processing in place to de-hull those and make
Hon Colin De Grussa; Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Alison Xamon; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; Hon Charles Smith; Hon James Chown; Hon Darren West; Hon Stephen Dawson

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them into all kinds of flour, as the bakery in Mingenew does—it makes a terrific lupin flour. That is a great food of the future that we produce abundantly here in Western Australia.

Hon Rick Mazza: Do you grow it?

Hon DARREN WEST: Absolutely. We grow them.

Hon Martin Aldridge: It is an ad.

Hon DARREN WEST: Absolutely! I have some for sale if the member would like some. This is a great food. They are also a legume crop so they help build up soils and get on top of weeds. I encourage all vegans who may be listening, or reading the transcript, to get behind Western Australian white lupins.

Hon Jim Chown was wondering what the activists are trying to achieve. I can tell the member and everyone else that it is to try to draw attention to their cause. That is what they are trying to achieve. All these stunts—let us face it, a few political stunts have gone on from time and time for that same reason—are trying to attract attention. They got their attention last week. I side with the farmer in Harvey. I know that he was very distressed at the time, but it was not all that helpful because he provided the activists with the footage that they sought. The best thing that we can do is to ignore these people. Ignore them and not give them the attention that they are seeking.

Hon Rick Mazza quoted _Farm Weekly_. _Farm Weekly_ sensationalises these issues to try to flog a few copies of its magazine. It is not helping at all. The best thing that we can do is try to ignore the activists that come out and seek that attention. That person who parked on the side of the road outside that farm in Harvey has achieved exactly what they set out to achieve, because we are still talking about it in Parliament today and giving it even more attention. I suggest that the best thing farmers can do, and what I would encourage farmers to do, is not provide them with the footage that they want. Tell them to go away; and, if they do not go away, call the police and put an end to the situation. It is not helpful when people behave in the manner that the activists want. Therefore, the advice that I would offer to my fellow farmers is to not encourage these people.

My colleague Lisa Baker, the member for Maylands, whose name was brought up in this debate, made a speech recently. Her issue was timing, because it happened the day after the Harvey incident. In that speech, she essentially paraphrased an article in the British medical journal _The Lancet_. Her speech was spun so far out of context by _The West Australian_ that it was unbelievable. Lisa Baker suffered unnecessarily from a whole lot of people, when she did not actually do anything wrong. Lisa and I completely disagree on this issue. However, if someone is misrepresented and has their story spun completely out of context in _The West Australian_, at least in fairness the people who have criticised her should first have read what she actually said.

Several members interjected.

Hon DARREN WEST: There is an example in _The West Australian_ in which she is called a “meathead”. I am talking about that article.

No-one has ever interrupted, intimidated or caused any concern on our property. We have not had any drones fly over our place. I expect that could happen one day.

Several members interjected.

Hon DARREN WEST: There is a piggery on our farm, but we are not on the attack map. I am pleased about that. I do not agree with the attack map, because all farmers live at work. We have never had any problems, and I would suggest that most farmers have not had either. I am not saying that people do not trespass on our farm and break the law. Of course they do; that happens from time to time. People come onto other people’s farms and steal livestock and equipment. There is a law against that. Although we live on a reasonably busy road, we have never had these problems. I do not think it is as widespread as some of the non-farmers in this place would lead us to believe. I think everyone needs to calm down. People are using the word “terrorism”. Seriously! Terrorism!

Several members interjected.

Hon DARREN WEST: The people who use that word are seeking attention. Let us be very clear about that. I know that a federal election is coming up, and people use that word a lot around federal elections, especially people on the opposite side. It is not terrorism.

I acknowledge that Hon Colin de Grussa, a former farmer, has brought this motion to the house for the right reasons. I support the motion, because the motion is clearly in the interests of the farming community, of which I am a member. Some very important issues have been brought out in this debate today. We should not provide the oxygen and attention to activists that they seek. We should not have a culture war.

Several members interjected.

Hon DARREN WEST: I accept that the Premier and the minister have sided with farmers. What is wrong with that? The reason they have done that might be that Labor is the only party in government that has a working farmer in its caucus. The Premier and the minister have supported our farmers. That might be because there is a farmer in
the Labor caucus. There is not a farmer in any other caucus, but we have a farmer in our caucus. It has been good to be able to work with the minister and the Premier on this issue.

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan** interjected.

**Hon DARREN WEST**: He has leased out his farm. He is not farming anymore. I am the only working farmer in this Parliament.

Several members interjected.

**The ACTING PRESIDENT (Hon Dr Steve Thomas)**: Order, members! Hon Darren West, the problem with seeking and allowing interjections is that you will not infrequently get them. I advise you to direct your remarks to the Chair, and I ask other members to allow Hon Darren West to complete his address in silence.

**Hon DARREN WEST**: Thank you, Mr Acting President. I do enjoy a robust debate, as members know, but I will direct my comments through the Chair.

It is important that we talk about these things. However, it is also important that we understand where we are all at. Activists seek attention. Let us remember that first and foremost. When we give them attention and provide oxygen, and call it terrorism and have articles in the newspaper that are spun out of proportion, it benefits only the activists. Our farming industry is very well run. We have very good animal welfare standards across the board. Our farmers care about their livestock and actively contribute to and promote the consumption of meat and other products. We will keep producing what the consumer wants. If people choose to be vegan, that is their right, and we will produce the food that they eat, because we all need to eat.

I thank the member for bringing on this motion. I am always happy to discuss matters of agriculture. That is what I spent my life doing before I came into Parliament and what I will continue to do after I leave Parliament. It is important that we all work together and cooperate and get along, because we have a great future in agriculture. There has never been a better time to be involved in the agricultural sector. A few activists are not going to spook me away, and I think most farmers would say the same.

**HON STEPHEN DAWSON** (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Environment) [11.25 am]: I want to put my thoughts on the record. I congratulate Hon Colin de Grussa for bringing forward this motion. As a regional member of this place, I share the concerns about “activists” and their actions over the past few months. I was overseas during the parliamentary recess, and it seems to be a worldwide phenomenon. Activists have been able to get a foothold in various cities around the world. It seems to be the case that a philanthropist of some sort has provided the money and they are campaigning for that cause. In Dublin, there are ads on the back of buses and signs saying that veganism is the way of the future and we should stop eating meat. It is fair enough to campaign. In the past, I was an activist on various issues. Campaigning is fine. We live in a democratic society. However, I have an issue with these so-called activists going onto people’s farms and putting cameras in people’s faces. That is wrong and we should all say that is wrong.

I appreciate the comments today from the Minister for Agriculture and Food and her support for farmers and the farming community in this state. It is appalling that these so-called activists are coming into restaurants at which people are eating with their families and are screaming that they should not be eating meat. It is scandalous and should not be allowed to happen. I want to call that out for what it is. It is shameful. People should be allowed to eat meat in restaurants without being persecuted by someone. Farmers should be allowed to farm. There is stringent legislation in this state to protect farmers. We often have debates about some of the agencies that monitor the work of farmers. However, the fact is we have laws. These farmers are operating within the laws. These activists are skirting around those laws and causing grief in regional communities. I do not support what they are doing.

Hon Colin de Grussa has moved a very good motion. I certainly support the comments of Hon Alannah MacTiernan and congratulate her for her work in this portfolio.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.