



Battery Hens

Right now in Australia, eleven million egg-laying hens are confined to tiny 'battery' cages, unable to socialise or exercise their natural behaviours.

Permanent confinement

Battery cages are used on factory farms to confine egg-laying hens. These 'battery hens' spend their entire lives indoors, in artificially lit surroundings designed to maximise laying activity. Each hen has between 3 and 20 cage mates and is allocated space equivalent to little more than an A4 sized piece of paper. This is insufficient room to act on natural instincts like preening, nesting, foraging and dust bathing.

These birds spend their lives standing on sloping wire floors designed to facilitate egg collection and many experience chronic pain from the development of lesions and other foot problems.

De-beaking

Due to the suppression of many of their natural behaviours, chickens raised in battery cages often become frustrated. This can trigger pecking, bullying and cannibalism. In an attempt to prevent this behaviour from causing injuries, factory farmers routinely conduct beak-trimming or 'de-beaking' on chicks. This involves the removal or burning off of the upper and lower beak through the application of an electrically heated blade.

While de-beaking is known to cause acute and chronic pain due to tissue damage and nerve injury, no State or Territory law in Australia requires pain relief to be used in conjunction with the procedure.

Emotional but unprotected

These harmful practices, which are permitted by law in Australia, ignore ample research which demonstrates that chickens are highly social animals with complex

cognitive abilities. Like humans, hens experience physical sensations and emotional responses such as pain, fear, anxiety, pleasure and enjoyment.

Battery hens are supposedly protected by State and Territory animal welfare laws and by the Model Code of Practice for poultry. However, by permitting close confinement and practices like de-beaking, Australian legislation fails to provide hens with adequate protections against cruelty.

Making progress

The continual refusal by Australian State and Territory governments to ban battery cages stands in stark contrast to developments overseas. The EU legislated to phase out battery cages by 2012, and has pursued legal action against member countries who have failed to comply. Voters in California have approved a ban on battery cages by 2015 and Michigan followed suit committing to a phase out of battery cages by 2019.

While legislative changes in the EU and the US are encouraging, the real victory to date lies in the support that consumers are demonstrating for alternatives to the battery cage system.

In the UK and Ireland, sales of cage-free eggs have overtaken sales of battery eggs, while Australian sales of cage-free eggs grew 67% from 2005 to 2010. Through their purchasing decisions, Australians continue to send a clear message to politicians that battery cages are simply unacceptable and must be banned.

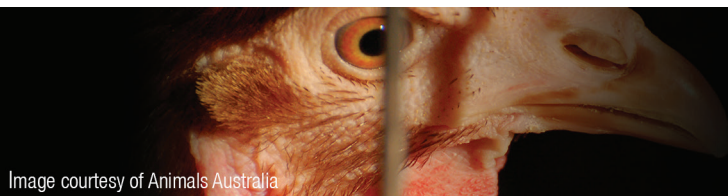


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