

23-07-2014

'Outrage expert' finds Joyce's PETA position one-sided



Australia's wool industry and its supporters would gain nothing and lose much by focusing on disapproval of PETA's methods in filming shearer abuse of sheep, a world outrage expert has suggested.

Independent American risk communication consultant Dr Peter Sandman recently reviewed industry

and government responses to PETA's footage of shearers, kicking, hitting and throwing sheep.

Dr Sandman was critical of government and industry moves towards "ag-gag" laws in Victoria and federally to minimise or make illegal unapproved filming on farms.

The industry deserved credit for spending more time acknowledging than defending, changing the subject, hiding or counter-attacking, he said.

But the exception is Federal Minister for Agriculture Barnaby Joyce, "who has spent more time counterattacking than anything else," Dr Sandman said.

He said Mr Joyce's main thrust in media statements was to attack PETA, while Greens MLA Shane Rattenbury's comments were "right on target."

"Barnaby Joyce needs to stop blame-shifting and deal with the real issue here – the Australian public have a right to feel confident that the animals involved in their food and clothing production are treated humanely," Mr Rattenbury said.

Dr Sandman said Mr Joyce's 'support' for the industry was one-sided and did more harm than good, especially when it undermined trust in the government's oversight role. Mr Joyce risked many people worrying "that apparently the fox is guarding the henhouse... or in this case the sheep-shearing sheds," he said.

In response to Dr Sandman, Mr Joyce said no one supported animal cruelty. "Not the Australian Government and certainly not the Australian Wool industry.

"So it's essential that evidence of mistreatment is reported promptly and it appears that it hasn't happened here," he said.



AWGA - News Update

"I stand by the wool growers, who are overwhelmingly decent people. I believe that they would act quickly to stamp out this kind of behaviour on their farms because it is the correct thing to do.

"I understand that the images released by PETA could be up to two years old," Mr Joyce said.

"Holding onto these kind of images is not in the best interests of the animals. Farmers I know would never accept that," he said.

"Failure to supply the appropriate information in a timely manner reduces the chances of a successful investigation and prosecution.

"PETA have questions to answer, and I stand by that."

Dr Sandman told Sheep Central the wool industry should ignore the illegal activity and focus instead on the serious problems the law-breaking exposed or point out the activists' action without disapproval.

"I have long advised my clients to shrug off minor law-breaking, such as when demonstrators trespass on private property and to discourage the police and other officials from over-reacting to such infractions.

"Dangerous and harmful behaviour needs to be stopped. But civil disobedience that breaks small laws in order to reveal a problem or dramatize a criticism should usually be tolerated, especially by those who are the source of the problem or the focus of the criticism," he said.

"When someone is attacking you, I tell my clients, deal with the attack on its merits.

"Don't look for ways to complain that they're attacking you the wrong way."

The consultant said the five options an industry had when under attack included counter-attack, hide, change the subject, defend or, acknowledge and improve.

He said the 'best' industry response to PETA's video release he had seen came from Shearing Contractors Association of Australia secretary Jason Letchford who applauded the PETA investigation "and believes that the work by such organisations is necessary to remind all industries around the world to be vigilant against complacency when it comes to animal rights and welfare."



AWGA - News Update

Mr Letchford also said the SCAA appealed for PETA subscribers to understand wool producers were striving to improve their industry's compliance with international animal welfare standards.

Dr Sandman said a good response from the industry could have included an admission that "PETA has convincingly revealed that our industry hasn't got where it needs to get in making sure that animals are properly treated."

"The horrible nature of sheep in these videos is something we needed to know and it is something the public deserves to know and it is something the public deserves to know.

"If PETA broke some fairly minor laws to get the proof so be it," he continued.

"That changes nothing about the important evidence PETA has unearthed."

Dr Sandman said one of the main goals of the industry's response should be to remind people that it respectfully agrees that cruelty to animals should be stopped, but that the wool industry should not be abolished.

Dr Sandman is conducting a risk communication and outrage management seminar in Melbourne in September.

<http://www.sheepcentral.com/news/outrage-expert-finds-joyce-peta-position-one-sided/>