

'Pig farming rules a legal cruelty'. *RodneyTimes*. Opinion. Pat Booth (26 May 2009).

## Pig farming rules a legal cruelty

BY PAT BOOTH Last updated 05:00 26/05/2009

OPINION: Just about everyone's a loser in the great pork controversy. Particularly the pigs.

A few influential humans look and sound unthinking/irresponsible/ inhumane in varying degrees.

Notably the experts who draft, police and exploit the regulations which are at the core of the controversy.

How can anyone with any intelligence, sensitivity and humanity believe that housing animals in a space barely bigger than they are is anything other than barbaric, cruel and totally unacceptable?

People who interpret what are clearly badly-drafted and crazy rules in this way are doing so for their own convenience and profit.

The dithering and unconvincing spokesman for the pork board on television didn't even begin to mount any case for the defence.

His stumbling explanation – that sows are stropky and aggressive to each other at stages of pregnancy and must be protected from injury – in no way justified pinning them in cages with only centimetres to spare.

That appears to be accepted by pork people as being good and necessary practice.

And the owner – apparently a former pork board chairman – was alternately unconvincing and belligerent.

Minister of Agriculture David Carter wasn't much better, at first pleading surprisingly that he didn't know that such travesties were being practised and then criticising animal welfare activists who took former pork board advertising frontman Mike King to the farm.

His response: They should have told him or his officers what they had found, not gone public so effectively.

Going by the first reaction of inspectors who called next day, that would have been a waste of time.

They seem to have run their tape measures over the crates and decided that the totally nonsensical regulations which condemn pigs to these conditions were not being breached.

Now, belatedly, the government wants the rules investigated and redrafted by the end of the year.

Presumably by the same heartless or unthinking law draftsmen who produced the present inhumane code.

Among other responses was a rather righteous reaction from a daily media columnist who lambasted Mike King for not knowing that this is what happens on money-making pig farms.

And then suggesting archly that King should hand back the fee he got for fronting pork promotion.

Actually, Mike King did seem ill at ease over that aspect of his involvement which he stressed over and over resulted from ignorance.

I can only suggest that if every media celebrity or journalist was required by law or conscience to repay money earned while unwittingly or irresponsibly advancing what seemed good causes at the time which failed later, then the lists of celebrity bankrupts would soar – and fast.

And among the names would be those media financial writers and analysts who ticked the boxes in one way or another for what have since been revealed as incompetent and, in some cases, recent and tragic shonky investment packages.

Thousands of investors who believed them lost millions.

Like Mike King, they accepted smooth-tongued assurances that all was well. The only difference – those publicly-accepted media experts have not so far recanted and admitted responsibility as he has.

My test suggestion: If the departmental and farming experts believe there is no harm in housing highly intelligent pigs in this way, perhaps they would like to join in a rerun of a piece of earlier Green Party campaigning.

Then Sue Kedgley was effectively photographed inside a sow crate on Parliament's steps to stress the inhumanity involved.

So let the minister, his officers and consultants, plus pork board spokesmen, spend weeks in a skin-tight metal cage in the build-up to outlawing what they will then belatedly recognise is a harshly cruel system. And fast.

• A matter of record: My wife and I were both joint presidents of Safe at a stage of its formative years in the 1970s.