

Key finds pig probe 'disturbing'

Minister calls for pig farm probe

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Prime Minister John Key says he found television footage of intensive pig farming "very, very disturbing".

TVNZ's Sunday programme aired footage by animal welfare organisation Open Rescue, who were accompanied by comedian Mike King during a break-in at a North Island intensive pig farm.

King, a long-standing front man for a campaign advertising pork, said he was deeply ashamed of his role in promoting that type of farming.

The pigs were unable to move and obviously in distress, chewing at the cage bars and frothing, he said.

At his post cabinet press conference today, Mr Key told reporters he found the programme "very, very disturbing".

There was a need for change if that was indicative of a large number of piggeries around New Zealand, he said.

"You'll be aware the Minister of Agriculture has put out a press release requesting the location of that piggery so his officials can go and investigate," Mr Key said.

"All I can tell you is there's a process we're going through."

The New Zealand Pork Industry told One News the pork industry was phasing out long-term use of sow stalls.

The programme did not represent the pork industry as a whole, it said.

In light of the programme, the New Zealand Pork Industry Board said it had decided to postpone the annual Bacon of the Year awards, due to be announced this week.

In response to the programme, the SPCA has called for a ban on sow stalls and farrowing crates.

SPCA chief executive Robyn Kippenberger said it was calling on "the Agriculture Minister David Carter to ensure that the Animal Welfare Code for Pigs was altered, as soon as possible, to ban these cruel practices".

"It is total nonsense for a code that is meant to reflect the humane principles of the 1999 Animal Welfare Act, to allow pigs to be kept for most of their lives in such tight conditions that they can't even turn round."

Pigs were an intelligent and sensitive species and there was considerable evidence that this type of ongoing cruelty lead to demented behaviour, such as biting their cage bars, Ms Kippenberger said.

Pig farmers who continued to use sow stalls and farrowing crates were "behaving in a totally inhumane and unacceptable way, for the sake of short-term profit".

"The industry as a whole does itself no favours by continuing to protect and support these farming methods, which are banned in the United Kingdom and much of the rest of the European Union," Ms Kippenberger said.

There was a widespread misconception that only imported pork and bacon was produced in inhumane conditions, she said.

The only way to avoid eating pork or bacon produced in grossly inhumane conditions was to purchase meat labelled 'free farmed' or 'free range', she said.

"And to be absolutely sure, it's best to look for bacon or pork that bears the blue and white 'SPCA Approved' logo on its packaging," Ms Kippenberger said.

Mr Carter today urged SAFE to reveal the location of the property shown on TV, so it could be inspected by animal welfare investigators.

"The television images were disturbing. It is essential we find out if this intensive pig farming operation is in breach of the Animal Welfare Act.

"If SAFE has the welfare of these animals at heart, it needs to provide details of the property today so the authorities can take appropriate action," Mr Carter said.

SAFE campaign director Hans Kriek said the minister would be given the farm's location, most likely by tomorrow, but expressed concern Mr Carter was "playing games to a degree".

He said Mr Carter was attempting to "dilute" the issue by making it out to be a rogue farm, not typical of those found around the country.

"This is an average New Zealand farm," Mr Kriek said.

- NZPA