

## Piggery practice legal but not acceptable

**T**he power of publicity may have just saved tens of thousands of pigs in this country from a tormented life that was only ever made possible by the indifference of the pork industry, and the ignorance of everybody else.

The pictures that beamed into the homes all around New Zealand on Sunday night, images as unpalatable as the filth and squalor in which sow stall pigs live, have opened the eyes of the ignorant to an inhumane practice, and the ears of the indifferent to public calls for it to cease.

What seems to not be in dispute is that the conditions on the Levin pig farm recorded by animal welfare activists and former pork industry front man Mike King are not breaking the law.



**Michael Cummings**  
Deputy Editor

The national attention sparked by the release of the footage prompted Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) officials to visit the Levin farm, owned by former New Zealand Pork Industry Board chairman and Feilding farmer Colin Kay.

The inspectors who visited the farm said last night they found no signs of suffering.

In any event, it seems the conditions broadcast on Sunday do not contravene the law. What this episode has shown us, however, is that legal practice is not always acceptable practice.

The avalanche of public attention that has smothered the pork industry the past two days has placed Agriculture Minister David Carter in an awkward position.

After seeing the footage broadcast on the *Sunday* programme, Mr Carter was clearly disturbed but pleaded ignorance as to whether the conditions at that particular farm were typical of the industry, or if it was a rogue operation.

That the Minister was oblivious to the conditions of pigs living in sow stalls is concerning, but his relatively short time in the job should afford him the benefit of the doubt.

What he should not be given any credit for, however, is his attack on Save Animals from Exploitation (SAFE) for how it has brought attention to intensive pig farming.

Mr Carter has criticised SAFE for not revealing the identity of the farm where the footage was taken sooner.

"Instead, the organisation seems more intent on playing publicity games than assisting the animals on this farm."

Of course SAFE played publicity games, and did so with a degree of panache that reaped unprecedented success, making Mr Carter's befuddled handling of the matter look positively amateurish.

SAFE and Mr King have wielded the power of publicity masterfully, and the weight of public opinion has swung behind their cause quickly and with a force that's given the Government little option but to act.

Whether or not it does will be a matter of great interest but, like the rest of us, it can no longer plead ignorance.