



Crackdown on activists

EXCLUSIVE

By **DAVID MCKENZIE**
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THE Federal Government and livestock industries will launch a major offensive against animal welfare activists this year.

Tough new laws are being considered by the Government, to crack down on people interfering with any aspect of animal production or marketing.

The livestock industries are preparing to respond quickly and effectively to activist propaganda stunts, and develop education campaigns to win over the public.

The plans were discussed at a secret "council of war" meeting convened late last year by Federal Agriculture Minister Peter McGauran to address the growing tide of animal welfare activism.

About 40 people attended, including leaders from all major livestock industries — cattle, dairy, sheep meat, wool, chicken meat, egg, pork, deer, goats, live exports and horse racing.

Also represented were the Nation-

al Farmers' Federation, state farming bodies and key industry research and marketing bodies, including Australian Wool Innovation and Meat and Livestock Australia.

At the meeting, Mr McGauran acknowledged industry concerns about existing state laws relating to trespass and intent to cause economic harm.

These had been highlighted by the acquittal of Ralph Hahnheuser, the South Australian activist who fed shredded ham to sheep awaiting live export at Portland in 2003.

While Victoria had initiated new laws to cover "reckless" as well as "intentional" behaviour, there was still a need for tougher, more consistent state laws, the meeting agreed.

Mr McGauran also pledged to look at whether federal laws, notably the Crimes Act, could be invoked or strengthened to complement state laws, based on UK or US approaches.

A paper prepared for the meeting flagged a range of new offences needed to plug existing gaps, including:

- Disruption of the workings of an "animal enterprise".
- Harassment or obstruction designed to deter animal production or

export.

- A breach of biosecurity at an animal enterprise or scientific laboratory.

- Interference with commercial activities of third parties, with reckless disregard for damage to trade in animals or animal products.

Mr McGauran also urged livestock industries to "get on the front foot" in responding to activist stunts.

He was told several initiatives were under way, including use of high-profile industry people to provide quick, informed responses.

This proved effective late last year when the pork industry quickly neutralised the campaign by animal rights group Voiceless to discourage people from eating Christmas hams.

The NFF is developing an education campaign to inform the public of the true facts about livestock production and the animal welfare standards in place.

MLA is also working on "integrity" campaigns for individual industries, and marshalling research and development data for use in industry campaigns.



Acquitted: animal welfare activist Ralph Hahnheuser