

We believe that the information standard on free range eggs adopted by Ministers is contrary to the interests of the industry and consumers. The standard allows intensive production systems to be classified as free range and appears to directly conflict with specific findings by Federal Court justices in their decisions on cases of deceptive conduct brought by the ACCC.

Loopholes in the standard ensure that almost any excuse can be given for keeping hens locked up, but we believe that the term 'regular and meaningful access to the outdoors' is too vague anyway. Major producers are laughing at how easy it was to con the ministers into accepting what they wanted. There is no mechanism for checking each operation – so it would have been more effective to leave things as they were and let the ACCC launch prosecutions. Adopting the Model Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals (Domestic Poultry) would have been a more realistic standard. We have attached a document detailing how the Model Code was developed and the reasons for a maximum stocking density of 1500 hens per hectare.

A fully grown laying hen produces half a cubic metre of manure a year – so at a stocking density of 10,000 hens per hectare, the land will be covered by 5000 cubic metres of manure each year – far above the limits of sustainability. Chicken manure has the highest amount of nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium of all manures, it will likely render the land useless for farming within a few years. Contamination of groundwater and water courses is also likely.