

Question of conscience

The photographs taken inside a Mangrove Mountain chicken farm which appear in today's *The Sunday Telegraph* will shock many readers. But they only tell part of the story. Other photographs taken secretly last week at the same farm were too horrific to publish.

Lame, six-week-old birds sprawl in manure, their over-sized bodies too big to be supported on their spindly legs.

Their limbs are twisted and deformed. Their breasts are burnt red raw by the nitrogen in their own faeces in which they wallow.

Rotting carcasses of dead birds are trampled and pecked at by other chickens. Small birds, unable to reach food and water troughs, slowly starve to death.

According to animal welfare groups, these pitiful scenes are not uncommon in the factory farms which breed tens of millions of chickens a year in Australia.

Most of the animals are destined for processing by one of Australia's two huge chicken conglomerates which supply most of the supermarkets and fast-food chains in the country.

Chicken farmers have a duty by law for ensuring birds in their care are kept in humane conditions.

They say they are being forced to cut corners by the big conglomerates who pay them just 53c to grow a chicken. The farmers have a point. Price competition has driven down margins throughout the industry, but it is farmers being squeezed.

But an intelligent, caring society should ask itself

‘The suffering of any living creature is too big a price for cheap food at the checkout’

which should come first — the chicken or the economics?

No civilised country should tolerate such cruelty. The suffering of any living creature is too big a price to pay for cheap food at the checkout.

Intensive farming threatens the health of humans

as well as animals. Studies in Britain have found that up to 40 per cent of birds in poultry slaughterhouses contain either salmonella or campylobacter food poisoning.

And there is mounting evidence that the overuse of antibiotics in animals is creating superbugs resistant to medicines.

Clearly, on the evidence presented by *The Sunday Telegraph* today, government regulations are either inadequate or are not being enforced. Federal and state governments must immediately review the laws governing farming cruelty.

All of us can share in the task of alleviating the suffering of factory-farmed chickens.

We can refuse to buy poultry not certifiably cruelty-free. Each time we buy a chicken from the supermarket or a box of chicken wings from KFC, we should ask if the chickens were reared inhumanely.

Without that guarantee we should take our business elsewhere. In the face of such brutal suffering, we cannot afford to sit on the fence.