

'Small Victory for Battery Hens.' *Dominion Post*, 23 December 2004. Copyright.

Small victory for battery hens

New codes still won't give chooks room to spread their wings

BATTERY hens will have their minimum living space increased by about the size of two cigarette packs over the next 10 years under new codes of welfare issued yesterday.

Hans Kriek, campaign director for Save Animals from Exploitation (Safe) said that still amounted to less than an A4-size sheet of paper for each bird.

"In their whole lives they can't spread their wings."

Animal rights campaigners tried to take birds to a press conference yesterday at which Agriculture Minister Jim Sutton announced the changes, as well as a new code for pigs.

The protesters were barred from Parliament.

The code for layer hens increases the minimum cage size to 550 square centimetres per bird by 2014.

In the interim, all existing cages must allow 450 square centimetres for each bird and by 2008 all existing cages must provide at least 500 square centimetres.

Mr Sutton said caged hens produced 92 per cent of New Zealand's eggs.

"The science on layer hen systems is unclear," he said.

The National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee had reluctantly concluded it could not recommend the abolition of cages till they could be sure that would improve the welfare of hens.

Forced moulting will only be permitted if replacement birds are not available.

Food and water may only be withheld for up to 24 hours.

Beak trimming can only be done



Standoff: Security guard David Cunningham denies hen protesters and three "rescued" battery hens access to Parliament. Picture: KENT BLECHYNDEN

within 10 days of hatching except in outbreaks of cannibalism.

Only trained operators could trim beaks.

The committee would review information in five years to decide if conventional cages should continue.

It would also look at the economics

of increasing cage sizes more quickly. The big changes to the pig code would see bear stalls phased out by 2010.

By 2015 the maximum permitted confinement period in dry sow stalls would be four weeks after mating.

The new code would also set a maximum confinement in farrowing crates of six weeks, and hen tethering of pigs. From next year, castration of piglets over the age of seven days must be done by a veterinarian.

Committee chairman David Mellor said the isolation of pigs was necessary because they were aggressive after mating even if they were given ample space and food.

The committee would have preferred a quicker transition to new practices. "But we found it very difficult to introduce that on economic grounds, which we are obliged to take into consideration."