

**Submission
No 20**

**INQUIRY INTO THE RSPCA RAID ON THE WATERWAYS
WILDLIFE PARK**

Name: Ms Jodi Markwick

Date received: 21/06/2010

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Summary of Mrs Jodie Markwick's Submission to the General Purpose Standing Committee No.5 Inquiry into the RSPCA raid on the Waterways Wildlife Park, Gunnedah on the 3rd February 2010.

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02/06/2010

Jodie Marie Markwick (nee Small)

In the following Statement, I Jodie Marie Markwick (nee Small) have documented all preceding events, during the RSPCA Officer (Ms Kylie Prose) inspection on the 22/01/2010 – both verbal and emotional.

While in Gunnedah, collecting vegetables for the animals at the Park, I received a mobile phone call from a neighbour – Karen Kennedy – stating that an RSPCA Officer (RO) was at the Park in response to a complaint received.

I told Karen to tell her, (the RO) to stay at the kiosk and that I would be back soon. Karen told me, that Teena Sutcliffe, a Wildlife Park volunteer, had told her (the RO) that I would be back soon, but the RO said she could go anywhere and didn't have to wait.

Karen told the RO that her whole attitude was rude and abusive i.e. towards Karen/Teena and another volunteer Judy Mitchell.

I then rang my mother (Nancy Patricia Small) who was a patient at Tamara Private Hospital, Tamworth. I told mum that there was an RO there at the park in response to a complaint and wanted to inspect the Park.

Mum said “keep your cool, let the RO do her inspection and for the RO to forward any directions to her (Mum)”.

When I arrived at the Park, Karen Kennedy was leaving. Karen appeared to be visibly shaken and upset. I asked her what was wrong. Karen replied that she, Teena and Judy were all yelled at and abused by the RO and that the RO was really angry.

Karen then left.

At this point I could see Teena and the RO over at the eagle's cage. The RO was pointing at Teena.

I proceeded to walk over to them. On approach the RO turned her back to me and made a phone call, totally ignoring me.

I then explained who I was Mrs Jodie Marie Markwick (nee Small) and that I was Col and Nancy Small's daughter and that I was "caretaker" of the Park while mum was in hospital. I then asked why she was here – the RO told us (Jodie and Teena) that she was here to follow up on a complaint. I asked about "what" and the RO replied it was concerning dingoes, emus and kangaroos.

Then the RO asked me what qualifications did I have and what roles do Teena and I play?

I told the RO that I, family and friends had built this Park up the last 36 years.

The RO replied to me that I shouldn't be here because I had no qualifications/degrees only Personal Learning Experience.

As Teena and I tried to answer the RO's question the RO told Teena several times to "shut-up" and me (Jodie) to shoosh and only answer when spoken to. Yelling and pointing at us, I felt degraded (I couldn't understand why RO was speaking to us in this manner).

I/we tried to answer the RO's questions, but we were shot down whenever we opened our mouths. I then asked the RO to come around the Park to see the animals for herself.

We then walked down through the first section of bird cages, and the RO said she wasn't interested in the birds – that she could see that they had food (seed) and water. At the Wombats – the RO's camera wouldn't work when the RO tried to take photos of the Wombats yard. I told her that we had a new baby wombat, the RO responded with the reply ... "it is unusual for wombats to breed in captivity"... I replied "it is because we feed and care for them so well and they are content, that's why they breed."

At the Lizard's yard I explained that we were currently building a new lizard's enclosure and that there was currently shingle back and blue tongue lizards in this yard and I will show the RO the new enclosure on the way around the Park.

At the little gate near the lizards the RO asked to go in and grab a red kangaroo's tail... to do a "fat" test. I looked at the RO dumbfounded... these kangaroos are wild. Teena and I looked at each other thinking, how stupid was she (the RO)... a full grown red male kangaroo would not like/ or tolerate having his tail grabbed!

I replied that she (the RO) could do it, but it was not advisable i.e. / due to the above stated reason. I also explained that the Kangaroos/Emus were free to roam and feed/water as they pleased and were only interrupted if medical attention was required and that they (the Kangaroos) had access to 3 dams/hay/grain 24/7. To me it appeared that the RO couldn't see that they were free to feed and roam.

At the big round Bird Cage the RO asked why we had no little birds in such a big cage and why were there Finches/Lousy Jacks in the cage?.

I explained that they are wild birds that get in and out by themselves, and that it is hot and all the birds were either in their hollows, or high up on the branches.

(At this stage I thought to myself that the RO's eyesight was diminished!).

The RO also asked why we had pigeons etc.? I showed the RO the “signs” explaining each bird and its history on the cage, and that we had many types of birds on display.

At the Deer Yard, I showed the RO that we had a new baby deer and explained that they breed every year, and that they are fed grain/hay/fresh vegetables/greens daily.

At the Ostrich Yard the RO asked to go into the yard. Again I looked dumbfounded at the RO as these birds don’t like their “harem” disturbed. I advised that it wouldn’t be advisable... then Teena said “look at the size of his drumsticks (legs), you can see how big they are, look at them, you can see how healthy they are!”

At the Dingoes Yard the RO asked how many dingoes did we have, what sex they were and how old they were?

I told her that there were 6 dingoes and two were quite old (Teena and I worked out that the old ones were approximately 14-15 yrs. Old.)

The RO then made a mobile phone call... stating that” she would look up dingo size/weight, but not as bad as reported”. (I didn’t know who the RO called).

At the Owls/Magpies Cage the RO said why do you have magpies, don’t we have enough of them already? (meaning in the country?)

Again, I couldn’t believe her attitude, didn’t the RO realise that we are a Wildlife Park as well as rescue centre for orphaned and injured animals.

I explained that owls/magpies were fed meat/chicken and watered daily.

At Lorikeets’ Cage the RO said “not interested” In birds. I tried to tell her about what feed (seed/mush/powder) we gave them, again “not interested in the birds”. We noticed that the RO’s mood was changing.

At Echidnas’. I explained that Echidnas’ were underground due to the daylight and heat.

At new Lizards’ yard the RO was quite happy with it.

Koala Rehabilitation area there were two rescued/injured Koalas and a rabbit.

I told the RO that the Koalas were soon to be released as they were nearly recovered from their injuries and the rabbit had only been brought in recently.

The RO asked where we got their leaves from and how often were they fed.

I said that Dad goes and gets them and they are changed daily. I showed the RO the large water drums with the leaves in them and they are changed daily as well.

The RO really inspected the Koalas enclosure and the RO expressed her opinion that the rabbit was stressed out, due to the heat and suggesting that we freeze a water block and put into a sock, so that the rabbit could lie on it. I said that I would take her suggestion into account, though I thought the rabbit was fine. It had shade/water/food and was quietly lying down and happily eating a carrot!

The RO asked if we had any other Koalas – I replied “yes” we did and that they were the main attraction.

Main Koala Yard. The RO asked if people were allowed into the yard and I said “yes”, but only under supervision and only to pat! The RO replied that she didn’t know that the National Parks and Wildlife (NPW) allowed that and I said, “Yes they did”.

The RO asked how many Koalas there were and I told her there were 6 Koalas.

We all walked to the back (of the enclosure) where 5 Koalas were in the trees and the old girl near the water dish.

The RO said “look how happy and healthy they are ... do they have any diseases?”

I replied “no they are clean and disease free”.

The RO replied “I wish ours were” – I asked “why”? The RO replied “because they were dropping dead like flies out of the trees, due to Chlamydia disease”.

I asked where she (the RO) was from and she said “Port Macquarie”.

I asked “is it because we have a hot, dry climate here and yours is wet and hot, that we don’t have it (Chlamydia) here?” – the RO replied “yes”.

The RO then asked to take a personal photo (on her personal camera phone) of “blue jeans” (a Koala which has a blue eye/brown eye and very rare!)

The RO said her grand-daughter would love to see these lovely Koalas. I said “yes” to the photo.

As we were leaving the enclosure I explained that we had a sprinkling system attached to the Koala yard to combat the high temperatures in summer. On this particular day the temperature was 41 degrees.

I went and turned on the sprinklers and asked the RO to come back into the yard to experience the difference in temperature the sprinkler makes.

The RO replied that “this is the place to be!” We left the yard and I asked the RO what she thought of the Park and of any information to give to mum.

The RO (on walking up to the Kiosk) said “with a little finessing” we will bring mum up 2010.

At the Kiosk the RO explained that she had recently shut two Parks down because of dead and dying animals and lizards etc..... but our Park was nothing like that, but with a little finessing she would bring mum up to 2010 and overall the park was good. At this time Judy observed the change in the RO’s behaviour and attitude towards us.

The RO asked how long mum would be in hospital, and I said until the end of next week. I asked what information she would like from mum when she returned. The RO asked Teena to write these details on one of our notepads, about food of all the animals, ailments of the animals in each area, feeding schedule, meat quantities, diet of each animal, sexes of animals in each yard etc. No formal request was made on official paper for this information.

The RO also enquired about mum's books (NPW Books), fire plan, evacuation plan (I thought fire plan/ evacuation plan etc. had nothing to do with the RSPCA?)

Overall the RO said that with just a few minor adjustments and paper work brought up to 2010 and to tell mum "not to worry" and the RO would be back in two weeks to help sort out the paperwork and update to 2010.

Departure from the Park.

As the RO, Teena and I walked toward the front of the Park two Japanese tourists were coming in the gate. The RO said to them – "come in, it's great, you'll love it!"

At the car Teena asked about the RO's approach towards Teena and the other Volunteers and why was she (the RO) so abrupt?

The RO stated that "you don't know what you're up against when you enter someone's Park.

Teena replied "but that we were all nice towards you?" and I asked the RO where she would be next week and the RO replied that she would be rescuing some mistreated horses and she wouldn't be back until after that.

I asked the RO for her card, but she didn't have any RSPCA's cards left and wrote her name and phone number on a notepad. Again telling us to tell mum, not to worry!

Little did I know that being told "not to worry" was going to be such an explosion of events.

This was not a routine inspection (no official paper was ever given to me/or formal requests given) – this was a dismantling of our Park's history and of our people's support.

I have never felt so degraded, having someone come into our Park and speak/yell at us the way the RO did, I still haven't slept soundly since this day.

The RO should be taught decorum!

I really hope no other Park/persons have to endure this RO's presence

All facts are true as recalled on the day stated.

Regards

Mrs Jodie M Markwick.

Jodie Marie Markwick

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "Jodie Marie Markwick", written in a cursive style.