

**Submission  
No 3**

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

**Name:** Mrs Margaret Dodd

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7th June 2010

Legislative Council

General Purpose Standing Committee No. 5

Inquiry into the RSPCA raid on the Waterways Wildlife Park, Gunnedah NSW.

I, Margaret Dodd, hereby submit my interpretation of events leading up to and including the seizure of 8 Koalas and 2 Lizards from Waterways Wildlife Park, Gunnedah NSW.

Although a working volunteer member of the Friends of Waterways Wildlife Park for 17 years, I didn't have any personal involvement with these events, but the people who had first hand experience with RSPCA NSW are known to me and I was able to ascertain from their reactions, the trauma experienced by each and every one of them.

The initial visit by the RSPCA Officer, Ms Kylie Prowse from Port Macquarie left a scar on the emotions of everyone who had contact with Ms Prowse on the 22/2/2010.

Ms Prowse's behaviour was disgraceful and a very poor representation of the RSPCA NSW organisation.

Ms Prowse's behaviour has cast a shadow on everyone involved with RSPCA NSW and certainly did nothing to further their cause.

The incident on the 3/3/2010 was a disgrace as well. Senior personnel should reflect and take a good look at their behaviour and methodology in carrying out inspections.

Regardless of the question of the care of the Koalas, RSPCA NSW by their actions showed nothing but contempt and disrespect for the owners of the Waterways Wildlife Park, with RSPCA NSW Officer Ms Prowse in the forefront of the disrespect shown.

The added insult of filming of the proceedings by a commercial television crew with the cameras rolling as soon as they entered the property (without permission from the owner) was unlawful.

The invasion of the Park by 9 people was likened to storm troopers attacking an enemy site in some war torn country. No warning, no respect, with aggressive behaviour.

On entering the premises, at no time did any one of the 9 “invaders” identify themselves with official documentation.

Mrs Small along with visitors from the Gunnedah community and overseas friends, were in such a state of shock that Mrs Small didn't think to ask for identification.

After entering the premises and proceeding to the Koala enclosure, a member of the group thrust a “paper” at Mrs Small requesting a signature to allow the film crew to film proceedings.

Once again Mrs Small was confused and without her glasses she was unable to discern what sort of document she was signing.

The whole incident was conducted under extreme anxiety, and intimidation.

On another occasion later in the day, other volunteers at the Park, along with overseas visitors from the Netherlands, were addressed by RSPCA NSW Officer Ms Prowse in a loud, bullying, disrespectful manner. The overseas visitors were so shaken by the encounter that after departing from the Park they returned to the Gunnedah Visitor Information Centre and lodged a complaint about the manner in which they were addressed by a member of RSPCA NSW – namely Ms Prowse.

Gunnedah residents were appalled by the treatment shown to members of the Gunnedah community, the general public and the final removal of the 8 Koalas and 2 Lizards to a destination unknown.

The stony silence of RSPCA NSW with no answers to questions put to them as to the destination of the Koalas and Lizards ignited further concern from the Gunnedah community.

The unfolding events since that date have been well documented in the press with the final insult when eventually 7 of the Koalas were returned, was that the baby was not with its mother and the revelation that the baby had somehow “disappeared” from the care of the Port Macquarie Koala Hospital.

RSPCA NSW was very quick to publicise the fact in the media, that one of the seized Koalas had been euthanased owing to the poor condition of the animal. Not for the fact that the Koala in question was over 17 yrs. old, had been sedated for transportation to Port Macquarie, some 5 hrs. travelling time. The diet of the Koala had been altered and anti-biotic administered to combat an alleged infection.

No word, no publicity, no information on the whereabouts of the baby Koala until confirmed by the RSPCA NSW Solicitor some 12 weeks after the “disappearance”.

It is felt that RSPCA NSW was misinformed as to the situation at the Wildlife Park.

RSPCA NSW made a mistake! And to bring the film crew as well, was another sign of bad judgement.

In the early stage of this debacle, a simple apology with the acknowledgement that a mistake had been made in “seizing” the Koalas and Lizards would have diffused the whole situation.

Unfortunately RSPCA NSW took the other path – stony silence!

Hopefully the members of the Committee will consider every aspect of the incident and come to a decision to alter legislation in relation to RSPCA’s unrestricted powers, so as to ensure that this manner of “invasion” never occurs again.

Yours sincerely

*M. Dodd*

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