

**Submission
No 90**

INQUIRY INTO ANIMAL CRUELTY LAWS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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SUBMISSION TO THE NEW SOUTH WALES UPPER HOUSE INQUIRY INTO ANIMAL CRUELTY LAWS IN NEW SOUTH WALES.

To the Chair, Deputy Chair and Members of the Select Committee on Animal Cruelty Laws in New South Wales

I have been a supporter of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, New South Wales, since 2005. The content of my submission is based upon my knowledge and experience of the activities and performance of this organisation. My submission is therefore limited and does not address every item in the terms of reference of the inquiry.

ANIMAL WELFARE AND CRUELTY CASES

Animal welfare is the RSPCA NSW's core business. It has been dealing with animal cruelty and animal welfare for many years. It is the largest organisation of its kind in the state of New South Wales .

It has developed a vast amount of experience and expertise which places it in a very strong position firstly, to understand what is needed in terms of animal welfare legislation in this state and, secondly, to provide advice on appropriate revisions to legislation which covers animal cruelty.

Through its nine shelters in New South Wales the organisation carries out one of its longstanding and most important functions, namely the provision of shelter and care to lost, abused, rescued and abandoned animals.

The veterinary hospital attached to the Yagoona shelter is state of the art. The shelter itself applies high standards of hygiene nutrition, housing , veterinary and general care.

In 2018/19 over 13,000 animals were rehomed including animals other than cats and dogs and nearly 4,000 animals were reunited with their owners. Acts of cruelty did not mean the end of the road for these animals.

The 32 inspectors attached to RSPCA NSW operate over the entire state. In the year 2018/19 they investigated 15,673 cruelty cases. 77 prosecution cases have commenced. In the same year 29,000 animals were attended to. This work is done in close cooperation with the staff in RSPCA shelters.

In February 2019 one of the largest rescue operations in the history of RSPCA NSW was carried out by the RSPCA . In the space of 12 hours 187 dogs living in appalling conditions were removed from a commercial breeding property and transported to one of the RSPCA shelters. Many of these dogs required immediate veterinary care including surgery for a variety of conditions. To date most of these dogs have been rehomed. This operation was planned by RSPCA inspectors and carried out by them in coordination with various specialist and RSPCA staff from the Yagoona headquarters . This rescue operation is a fine example of the advantages of having the inspectorate and the main body of RSPCA staff working within the same organisation towards a common goal.

Any move to diminish or limit the current animal cruelty investigative powers of the RSPCA would be a retrograde step in terms of overall provision of services to animals in need in the state of New South Wales. If these powers were transferred to a state government body such as the Police Force or another statutory body there is a danger that animal welfare would not be given the top

priority in terms of personnel and funding. There would always be something else which is more important than animals and resources allocated to animal welfare would inevitably diminish. Also, it would be at the mercy of changes in political priorities and fortunes.

The inspectorate and the RSPCA staff as a whole work together seamlessly within the same organisational structure. Any move which severs the link between the inspectorate and the main body of staff would result in diminished efficiency, more complex reporting lines and lines of authority. The inevitable result of this would be delays in reaching animals in need of assistance.

STAFFING AND SUPPORTERS

Apart from its permanent staff of over 500 the organisation has nearly 6,000 members statewide, 1,254 foster carers and over 3,000 volunteers. In varying degrees the focus of all of these people is animal welfare.

The strength of the organisation's staffing level supplemented by its volunteers and foster carers enables the RSPCA NSW to assess and treat individually the animals in its care. This means that causes and sources of animal cruelty can be documented and assessed.

RSPCA NSW actively interacts with its supporters and seeks feedback regarding the efficacy of its programs and services. It is constantly seeking ways to improve its performance and welcomes suggestions from its supporters both formally and informally.

Most of the RSPCA's income is donated in various ways by the New South Wales public. Over 70,000 people donated to the RSPCA NSW in the last financial year. Donated funds totalled \$32,431,810. For every dollar raised 73 cents was spent directly on animal welfare, 14 cents in every dollar was spent on fund raising to enable the organisation to meet its animal welfare goals.

The state government via the Department of Primary Industries provides annually just over \$400,000 dollars. The total cost to operate the inspectorate is approximately 6.5 million dollars. This plus all of the other operations and services of RSPCA NSW is financed mainly through donations from the general public.

The high level of financial support from the New South Wales community is indicative of the regard in which the RSPCA is held and the high level of awareness of its work in the general community.

EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAMS

The word "prevention" in the society's title is taken very seriously. The RSPCA does not sit back and wait for notifications of cruelty or abuse to be reported. It is very proactive in this regard and takes steps to prevent these things from happening in the first place.

One of the RSPCA's strategic goals is to foster awareness of animal welfare so that fewer animals need to be brought to shelters. Much of the work of the organisation involves liaising with state and local government, industry and community groups to find more ways of providing welfare services and raising awareness. While there is a need for shelters to operate the RSPCA will continue to provide refuge for lost, abused and abandoned animals.

Animals, particularly domestic animals, do not exist in isolation. They are part of the fabric of our society and the ways in which we interact with them influence our own welfare and wellbeing as well as theirs.

To this end the organisation has developed a number of school and community education programs aimed at raising awareness of the importance of animal welfare. Through the work of the inspectorate the RSPCA staff know which areas are in need of these programs and give them first priority. Last year over 350,000 people were reached by these programs delivered by RSPCA staff including the inspectors.

One of the oft stated goals of the RSPCA is to keep people and their pets together. It provides assistance to animal owners who may be struggling in a variety of ways to look after their pets. Veterinary care, emergency pet boarding and financial assistance is provided to people who for a variety of reasons are unable to look after their pets. The Homelessness program is one such initiative.

Firmly implanted in the RSPCA's philosophy is the view that if an animal is in need there is often a person nearby who is also in need. RSPCA inspectors often have to deal with these situations which necessitates working with welfare agencies to assist people in need of help. Animal hoarders fall into this category.

The organisation works closely with local government. Through its outreach programs it provides vaccination, microchipping and desexing programs in areas of social disadvantage.

DEFICIENCIES IN THE CURRENT LEGISLATION

From discussions with several senior RSPCA staff members including one of the inspectors there are deficiencies in the existing legislation relating to definitions such as what constitutes adequate shelter and what could be defined as cruelty varies from one situation to another.

With its vast store of knowledge and experience and having to deal with welfare and cruelty matters on a daily basis there is no other organisation in New South Wales better equipped to advise legislators on appropriate changes to the legislation.

Streamlining the existing legislation so that it can be applied uniformly and without ambiguity is highly desirable. It would also have a beneficial effect on the provision of training, education and outreach programs

BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY LIAISON

RSPCA NSW has a high degree of recognition and respect in the community. The organisation has about 30 corporate sponsors and 223 companies are involved in workplace giving schemes.

Some of the organisation's outreach programs are made possible by corporate sponsorship. For example, the program launched with students from the Fairfield West Public School Newly Arrived Program, HEART (Humans Enriching Animals and Rehabilitating Trauma) was aimed at increasing knowledge and understanding of animals with new migrants.

These contacts with the business community require a lot of time and effort to build and to maintain.

Ultimately these partnerships are aimed at the promotion of the value of animals in our society.

IN CONCLUSION

If the RSPCA NSW were to lose its investigative powers the nature of the organisation would fundamentally change. It makes perfect sense to leave its organisational structure intact so that the animals in need of help can be given it by the same organisation who investigates the perpetrator of the abuse, bearing in mind that there are cases which need to be referred to the police and welfare agencies.

There seems to be no point in making a significant change to an organisation which has been involved in animal welfare and cruelty matters for over 90 years and to not take full advantage of its store of knowledge, experience and expertise.

26th November 2019