

*Select Committee into the Operations of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Western Australia (Inc) — Report — “Select Committee into the Operations of the Royal Society
for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Western Australia (Inc)” — Motion*

Resumed from 7 September on the following motion moved by Hon Sue Ellery —

That the report be noted.

Hon RICK MAZZA: I acknowledge the government’s response to this inquiry and I want to make a few comments on that response. I note that only one recommendation was not supported, and that was the recommendation regarding emergency notices. However, the reasons the government gave for not supporting that recommendation could be avoided simply by having the notice remain in place until such time as it is reviewed by the minister. Seven recommendations were supported and the vast majority of them noted that consideration be given to review the Animal Welfare Act and the inspector governance framework. I can understand the government taking a fairly cautious approach to the recommendations in this report because of the contentious nature surrounding it, but I am quite confident that given a bit of time the government will use the report and its recommendations in its consideration of the inspector governance framework being developed by the Department of Agriculture and Food. Many of the recommendations could be implemented without the lengthy process of reviewing the Animal Welfare Act and I am quite confident that many of them will be implemented.

Recommendation 8, in particular, could be implemented sooner rather than later. The current situation of a private charity directing general inspectors and using private law firms to prosecute is probably not an ideal way of dealing with prosecutions in the state. It was interesting to read some of the transcript of the oral evidence given in the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Sub-Committee’s inquiry into the animal welfare of domestic pets in the United Kingdom. Those hearings occurred fairly recently. Many of the issues that we raised in Western Australia are consistent with what has been raised in the UK. In fact, Australia was mentioned a couple of times in that transcript. One thing of interest is a reference to building a Chinese Wall between the processes of fundraising, campaigning, investigating and prosecuting. The report basically states that there should be clear, blue water between all those functions, particularly between investigations and prosecutions. Having those roles together does not sit comfortably with me; there needs to be more than a Chinese Wall between them.

Of particular note was the committee’s recommendation 17 that the RSPCA apologise for the allegations of live baiting in the greyhound industry. Hon Lynn MacLaren raised the issue of greyhound racing in her contribution a few weeks ago. I know that there has been a rally to ban greyhound racing in Western Australia and I understand that a petition is also being put together to ban it, but it is interesting that there is no evidence at all of live baiting in this state. Racing and Wagering Western Australia has very strict controls on the industry, which it monitors very stringently. Although the RSPCA put up a \$10 000 reward for any information leading to a conviction of live baiting, the reward remains unclaimed. Why there is now a push to ban a very legitimate sport in this state, an industry in which many people are involved and for whom it is their livelihood—I can see an interjection coming —

Hon Darren West: Will you take an interjection?

Hon RICK MAZZA: Absolutely, Hon Darren West.

Hon Darren West: Is the member familiar with the situation in New South Wales?

Hon RICK MAZZA: I am but there is no evidence at all of live baiting in this state. I am glad the member mentioned New South Wales because it is going to ban greyhound racing either early or in the middle of next year.

Hon Darren West: And the opposition has opposed the ban.

Hon RICK MAZZA: I am glad that the opposition has opposed the ban. I feel that Mike Baird and Troy Grant will rue the day that they banned greyhound racing in that state. It is a livelihood and a pastime for many people. It is a legitimate response because I understand that New South Wales has had some issue with live baiting, but why not find out who those people are who are doing the wrong thing, weed them out and prosecute them—I am sure it is the minority—and let all the others who are doing the right thing continue on with what they are doing? I do not think we should be pushing for a ban in this state and I think that New South Wales might have some problems in the future.

In conclusion, I think this has been a very useful inquiry. I am quite confident that the recommendations will be very useful to government in forming a review of the Animal Welfare Act and reviewing the inspection governance framework.

Hon NIGEL HALLETT: I would like to make a few quick points on the committee. Firstly, I would like to thank the staff. It was a long inquiry, with some 138 submissions, and one that came under a lot of pressure. Some of the political pressure that was applied was disappointing; it was a very open committee that was well chaired by Hon Rick Mazza. I congratulate him on the way he conducted the committee and how he went about

being as open and accountable as anyone could have expected. It was disappointing that a couple of members, including me, were targeted by the other place about having vested interests. Having lived in regional Western Australia and involved with livestock for most of my life, I have heard many comments coming back from the regions about the direction in which the RSPCA is heading, not only in recent times but over a reasonable period. There is concern about the direction the organisation is taking. We had every right, as members, to support the inquiry into the RSPCA. When we consider that there has been half a million dollars of government funding, and considering the accountability of that funding, it was quite appropriate. It was certainly no witch-hunt and no member of that committee showed any inkling of trying to implement a witch-hunt during the whole exercise.

There was a lot of public criticism of the RSPCA and its direction. In May 2015, there was a photograph in *The West Australian* of the hobby hunting, which certainly did not comply with Western Australian animals that were used. In my opinion, the RSPCA had lost its way, but in its support, it was not being monitored by the Department of Agriculture and Food. I feel the department was remiss in how it administered the act and in the support it gave to the RSPCA in that period. Any organisation, regardless of what organisation it is, if the management wants to go in a direction in which there are no checks and balances, it will go that way, and I accept that that is the way it went. The former president of the WA RSPCA, Eric Ball, is fairly well respected—he is an Order of Australia recipient—and he made the comment that the organisation had lost its way.

The RSPCA is an important charity. The number of cruelty complaints in society rose to some 6 500 in 2014–15, and that is a doubling over the last five years. We all acknowledge that the RSPCA has a huge role and does a fantastic job, but it had to be drawn back. As Hon Rick Mazza touched upon, there were high-end law firms doing some of the prosecutions pro bono, and given the age of some of the people being prosecuted, it was pretty intimidating.

The whole exercise has been extremely good; I think the government, the department and the Minister for Agriculture and Food have a very good set of recommendations to go through. If they are adopted, as I hope they will be, both organisations—the department and the RSPCA—will be the beneficiaries. No-one is going to do it cheaper or better than an organisation such as the RSPCA.

Looking back at the live export scenario in 2011, we saw the role the RSPCA played in the banning of the live export trade to Indonesia. There was no thought about the long-term consequences, either to our producers or to the Indonesian producers and customers. Most of the Indonesian herd is now depleted and it has a real problem restocking it. Beef has become very dear there, and five years down the track, the implications of that ban are still being felt. I would expect the RSPCA to support the exporter supply chain assurance system and to look at ways of improving it instead of trying to ban the actual trade. Australia is the world leader in the live export trade and if we go out of it, another country will pick it up. Are they going to have the same controls over their livestock? I doubt it. That is one thing that Australia can generally hold its head up very high about; it is doing that very well.

One exporter made a very good point to me about developing new markets. He said we are going to have incidents, and that when we change a culture of centuries to refrigeration and how they handle stock, there will always be an incident while that transition takes place. I think he was very correct in the sense that the older markets of some 20 and 30 years are developed, and there are very few issues with them; it is the newer markets that are creating the odd issue and we have to work with those countries to develop the transition period.

I will not go through too much more. I think Hon Rick Mazza touched on most issues. It was an excellent committee that was well run, and I certainly think the outcome for the RSPCA and the government was a good one. I hope the recommendations are carried by the government.

Resolved, on motion by Hon Rick Mazza, that consideration of the report be postponed to the next sitting of the Council.