

**ANIMAL WELFARE BILL 1999**

*Second Reading*

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

**MS WARNOCK** (Perth) [3.50 pm]: The Opposition supports this long-awaited legislation and believes it should be further strengthened. It replaces a 1920 Bill that has needed updating for many years. Today we witness increased awareness of animal rights in western societies. People's expectations and beliefs about how animals should be treated have changed a great deal. We are now more likely to criticise others for cruelty to animals. People now demand a tougher approach to punishment of offenders. We are not as tolerant of hunting, particularly for sport rather than food, as we once were. Some people even oppose eating meat. It is good to see a tougher approach being taken to all kinds of cruelty to animals and that the definition of "cruelty" has been considerably expanded.

There is reason for optimism when one considers the detail in this Bill and the enormous public interest in it that attitudes to animals and animal cruelty are changing. However, recent incidents exposing cockfighting and dog fighting in Western Australia might suggest that we need to be even more vigilant.

My colleague the member for Rockingham circulated a petition on the subject of animal welfare some months ago and was inundated with more than 64 000 signatures demanding stronger protection for animals. As all members know, very few subjects are likely to arouse such passion as animals, particularly ill-treatment of animals. It is a good thing that we are taking the opportunity to say that cruelty and misuse of animals is not on and that our society will severely punish those who do it.

Together with other parliamentary colleagues, I went to the opening of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals' new premises at Malaga in June. The new facility is a five-hectare property at which abused or abandoned animals are temporarily housed. Its establishment is an excellent step forward for a respected charity that receives no regular, ongoing government funding.

Dr Hugh Worth, the National President of the RSPCA and a well-known person in this field, reminded the audience that the RSPCA was established in England early in the nineteenth-century by William Wilberforce, who is more widely known as the leader of the campaign to abolish slavery. The RSPCA's magazine states -

It was William Wilberforce who first taught us that animals have an intrinsic value of their own and, accordingly, must be considered to possess the right to live in a manner which enables them to have a positive life and develop and enjoy their inherent qualities. To achieve this we must accept that we owe a duty of care to the animals that we have taken into our lives for our companionship and enjoyment.

That is the RSPCA's philosophy. It is a mark of a civilised society that, although we quite properly place offences against the person higher up the punishment scale, we also treat very seriously offences against our fellow creatures.

Although the RSPCA has been around for a long time, this the first time that it has had an animal welfare centre in this State. It is the realisation of a 100-year-old dream. It has sponsorship, fundraising campaigns and many volunteers, but no regular government funding. That is why my colleague the member for Rockingham has moved his amendment relating to the proceeds of RSPCA prosecutions under this new legislation. I will forbear telling members what the RSPCA does because I have limited time and I am sure that most members know that.

The purpose of the new Bill is to repeal the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1920 and to replace it with a modern Act so that animals will be decently cared for and protected. What is in the Bill? First, it contains increased penalties for cruelty offences - a maximum fine of \$20 000, a minimum fine of \$1 000 and imprisonment for one year. As I mentioned, the Labor Party will suggest making those penalties even tougher. New cruelty offences have been proposed with offences for special circumstances. The legislation also contains new offences relating to releasing animals for hunting, shooting or fighting. I mentioned a moment ago that we have recently heard of instances of dog fighting and cockfighting in Western Australia. Apparently charges have been laid for the cockfighting offences. It is very timely that we are introducing a Bill that imposes tougher penalties for cruelty to animals.

Members may recall that this Bill first appeared as a draft in October 1998 and comments were invited. About 200 submissions were received and this new Bill is apparently the result of numerous subsequent improvements. One thing that interests me is the definition of "animal". It was much narrower in the old Act and has been expanded to include more animals. It no longer includes only domestic or captive animals; it has been expanded to include live vertebrates other than humans or fish. Fish-related cruelty offences will be controlled under the Fish Resources Management Act.

The Bill also contains a section relating to the use of animals for scientific purposes that may well be the result of increased activity on the part of animal liberationists.

Ownership of pets is the reason that most people have an interest in this Bill. Pet ownership in Australia is so much a part of everyday life that it involves 13 million Australians, it employs over 37 000 people, it contributes about \$3.3b to the economy annually, and it makes the 13 million people involved happier, healthier and less stressed. I agree with that.

Dr Gallop: What about the slightly younger person sitting in front of you?

Ms WARNOCK: I know that it engenders very good feelings even in younger people such as my colleague the Leader of the Opposition.

Like many people who grew up in the country, I spent my childhood surrounded by thousands of animals. There were sheep, goats, kangaroos, emus, chooks, pigeons, horses and cattle. I fed and looked after chooks, groomed horses and walked behind sheep with a dog and, like most people, we regularly ate animals. Animals are treated very well in the country because they are an essential part of the work force and the landscape. However, some people do not respect them. We need laws to indicate that in a comparatively civilised and humane society, certain behaviours are expected of people with regard to animals. That is why the Opposition supports this Bill very strongly. It takes a much tougher approach to animal cruelty and imposes on all of us a responsibility to look after our fellow creatures properly.

Leave granted for speech to be continued.

Debate thus adjourned.