

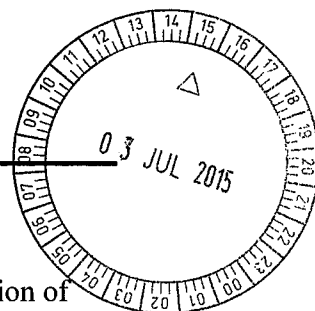
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Ms Samantha Parsons

Select Committee into the Operations of The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Western Australia (Inc)

GPO: Box A11

Perth WA 6837

Dear Ms Parsons

Submission into the Operations of The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Western Australia (Inc)

The RSPCA (WA) provide an essential and relevant service in the prevention of animal cruelty in this State.

There are many facets of the RSPCA work, much of it to do with *prevention* of animal cruelty, which is clearly reflected in the name. Having policies, guidelines and statements that are articulated to the community and are open to scrutiny and discussion are crucial when changing people's attitudes towards better outcomes for all animals, be they companion animals, livestock, native fauna or introduced feral pests.

In my view, where legal action is required, such as by prosecution, it is because the animal cruelty is so blatant, so horrific that the usual means of changing a person's attitude wasn't (and probably won't ever) work without taking this action and that the general public would support such action. It is then the court that decides if the person's actions on animals deserves punishment. The RSPCA is right to take these actions where they are needed.

The RSPCA's role of enforcement through its's inspectors has a long history of reflecting the attitudes of the greater community and I believe this role sits rightly with the RSPCA in WA.

Whilst the Department of Agriculture and Food (DAFWA) has ultimate responsibility for the Animal Welfare Act, DAFWA have a clear conflict of interest in supporting farming of livestock whilst enforcing and prosecuting farmers for animal cruelty. In my view, this should be done independently to the government agency that advocates and supports farmers. I have been responsible for 53 inspectors whilst I was with DAFWA so I am well aware of the limitations their inspectors have in undertaking prosecutions.

I have reviewed the RSPCA Policies on hunting and am of the professional opinion that these policies are balanced, scientifically valid and reasonable. Their views on whether recreational hunting have any real impact on the effective management of pest species is correct.

I have previously been employed as a government inspector with DAFWA and the Agriculture Protection Board and during these appointments, as well as my current work, I have had many dealings with the RSPCA. I have no other connection or affiliation to the RSPCA other than in a professional capacity.

My roles have previously included the regional and state-wide management of pest species and they currently include dealing with pest animal issues across Australia in my business. It is essential to have reputable companies and organisations set Best Practice actions, policies and practices for achieving animal welfare at the forefront (not just compliance, but be a part of improving them), and I believe we along with the RSPCA do this admirably. Of course I have been the subject of many complaints over the years (we kill animals so it is to be expected) and because we have nothing to hide, my dealings with RSPCA inspectors has always been positive.

In my view, I consider the RSPCA (WA) to be well balanced in its policies and activities in relation to animal welfare. I have never considered the RSPCA to be an animal activist organisation as my dealings and views, based on my experience and interactions with them and consideration of their documented policies has always been positive. They have a "real world" understanding of the issues rather than a dogmatic, narrow minded view in my experience.

It is imperative to have organisations such as RSPCA (WA) make public awareness of the issues a priority as is what makes positive changes in animal welfare. The recent example of the SSAA and its members making derogatory remarks towards such a highly respected organisation such as the RSPCA (WA) is shameful. Compared to others, who have hidden agendas, having clearly articulated stances (through published policy statements) such as what the RSPCA have ensure those professionals such as us see what we need to aspire to and succeed for better animal welfare outcomes.

Minor political parties and their supporting groups wont come out in the open to denigrate the RSPCA, or indeed professional pest management companies like ourselves who openly question the merits and so called benefits of hobby hunting from an animal welfare or efficiency view as we are too highly respected. What they will do instead, is to seek to silence their detractors. For example, the WA government funds the RSPCA (WA) inspectors just \$500,000 per year, yet the actual cost to the RSPCA for its inspectors is \$3,000,000 per year. This review is to look at the RSPCA's roles yet the government only funds 16.6% of the RSPCA's cost for this one role that no one else is capable of doing anyway. The timing of this review comes immediately after the RSPCA was seen to be publically critical of the SSAA, who supports the Member of Parliament that requested this review. And the very same organisation had its solicitors threaten me with legal action for my criticism of recreational (hobby) hunting during the same period. It won't take the general public much deliberation to consider what has occurred by who within this timeline and the real reasons behind it. Yes, I have also recently been the subject of attempts to silence me by the very organisations that fund members of this Select Review panel through threats of legal action. They cannot hold a review into my company, but given the RSPCA has government funding, it could be seen as a softer target.

It is essential to have a 'third party' advocate for all animals' welfare, not just companion animals. I believe the general public not just expect it, but demand it.

I do not fund the RSPCA as I would consider it could be perceived as seeking bias or favouritism for an agenda. But I happily give my considered professional advice to them (and vice versa) pro bono. And I consider the RSPCA roles and their statutory duties are conducted with professionalism and at a significant cost saving to the WA government.

That the RSPCA publically stated they oppose recreational or hobby hunting is correct within the context of their concern for animal welfare within government lands compared to professionally run and conducted programs. Given the SSAA has stated they are a direct competitor to professionals, the RSPCA's stance increases in credibility. After all Prevention of Cruelty is in their name and Charter.

In closing, in my 33 year professional career, I have always considered the RSPCA (WA) and their policies and views as something for us all to use to improve our animal welfare outcomes. I believe their dual roles of animal advocates and the inspectorial and prosecution roles has been better served by RSPCA (WA) than what any government agency could do. RSPCA are animal advocates, not bound by the daily politics and pressures of their industries as politicians and their government departments are.

Give the RSPCA inspectors more funding I say.

Yours sincerely

Mike Butcher
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In recognition of outstanding application of best practice in wildlife management

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