

Helen Kenney OAM.

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Submission to inquiry into the RSPCA Victoria.

I have worked as a veterinary nurse for my husband since 1979. My current work load involves pre appointment contact with clients of our small animal house call practice. I am qualified in counselling and there are many occasions that this skill is required in dealing with clients. This qualification was also needed by me after the 2009 bushfires as I worked heavily in recovery after my teams had finally extinguished the fires.

In the last few years we have had a few clients investigated by the RSPCA and Shire's checking for breaches of the companion animals regulations. I do not and cannot in any way condone cruelty or over breeding of animals. I often wonder if I could fall foul of regulations as my own dogs sleep on our beds having them totally ignore every attempt we have made to find an alternative for them including heated beds.

I believe that that the RSPCA ignores the very real mental health issue of hoarding, in this case animals. Many people who are charged believe that they are doing the right thing by their animals making certain that they are fed and loved but some of them cannot distinguish between obsession and cruelty. They each believe that they are doing the right thing by their pets making certain that they have a home, regardless of the standard of housing provided. Whilst RSPCA issues notices against them for sometimes very poor animal husbandry, there seems to be limited support for these people to reduce numbers of animals and bring into line their management of the situation. Often the first instance is the arrival of inspectors and police leading to a feeling of intimidation and then progression to victimisation which naturally leads to aggression on the part of those owning the animals.

I am aware of one client, who despite having a large number of her animals seized two and a half years ago still has no RSPCA charges laid against her. Whilst I understand that our court system is overloaded this becomes a real issue allowing the lady to accumulate more animals to replace those seized, this owner is a hoarder. During some seizures every document relating to the animals are also taken leaving the owners desperate to make sure that their pets are in safe hands and not euthanised.

As well meaning as the RSPCA inspectors and their veterinary officers are they lack the knowledge of individual breeds of animals and an understanding the traits that make up some breeds. I have recently received an RSPCA report on a breed of dog which was described as unable to look at the veterinary officer and knowing the breed it is a normal trait of this breed. Attached to this report was a report from a so called animal behavioural expert who seemed to lack any understanding of the breeds that she was dealing with. One of my own family pets needs to be ignored until he decides to make contact with humans and having owned many of this breed I know it is a breed trait. I believe that it is essential that the veterinary officer and inspectors communicate with people who live with various breeds of animals so that they can increase their knowledge beyond a wikipedia summation of traits.

I hope that this inquiry is beneficial for both those accused and the animals owned by them and I am happy to be involved in progressing the discussion.

Yours faithfully

Helen Kenney OAM