

Inquiry into the RSPCA Victoria

SUBMISSION TO THE ECONOMY AND STANDING INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO RSPCA VICTORIA

On 17 August 2016, the Legislative Council agreed to the following motion:
That, pursuant to Sessional Order 6, this House requires the Economy and Infrastructure Committee to inquire into, consider and report on, no later than 22 August 2017, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Victoria (Inc) in relation to

- (1) the appropriateness and use of its powers pursuant to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986, including in the context of its other objectives and activities;
 - (2) the appropriateness and use of funding provided by the Victorian Government, including in the context of its other objectives and activities;
- and
- (3) any other consequential matters the Committee may deem appropriate.

Firstly, thank you for the opportunity to make a submission before the committee. My name is Linda Kitson, and not only have I owned various animals (birds, cats, dogs and horses), all my life, but am also the Asst Secretary of the Governing Council of the Cat fancy Australia & Victoria Inc, and also Chair of the Combined Cat Applicable Organisations Committee. In connection with my work with both of the latter, I have seen examples of both the RSPCA's work and also their lobbying.

From the RSPCA's own website, the RSPCA is:

“The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Victoria) is a non-government, community based charity that works to prevent cruelty to animals by actively promoting their care and protection.

RSPCA Victoria was established in Melbourne in 1871. Since this time, the RSPCA has become Australia's leading animal welfare charity.

RSPCA Victoria is a member of [RSPCA Australia](#) (the federation of the eight state and territory RSPCAs in Australia). The RSPCA National Board consists of the Presidents of their nominees from each member Society, with the CEOs as advisors.

Across the state, the RSPCA's community services include the work undertaken by our [Inspectorate](#), [Animal Care Centres](#), [Clinics](#) and [Education](#) teams.

The RSPCA operates nine Animal Care Centres and one [community pet care centre](#) in Victoria, providing refuge and care and where possible to more than 20,000 animals every year.

Our team of RSPCA Inspectors works to protect animals from cruelty, receiving more than 10,000 complaints every year, prosecuting offenders and rescuing animals from dangerous situations.

Our Education team contributes to prevention strategies by influencing over 9,000 young people about the value and importance of animals in our lives.

The RSPCA works to educate the community regarding animal welfare and works with government and industry to ensure the standard of animal welfare and care continues to improve.

As a not-for-profit organisation, the RSPCA relies on community support to care for 'all creatures great and small'. More than 90% of the RSPCA's funding is due to the generous support of the Victorian community.

RSPCA Victoria is governed by a [Board of Directors](#) who are elected by RSPCA members to make strategic decisions that will lead us toward achieving our vision. Our Board of Directors operation according to the RSPCA Victoria [constitution](#).

Each year, the RSPCA documents our achievements in animal welfare in our Annual Report.”

The Victorian Government’s Department of Agriculture relies upon the Inspectorate team of the RSPCA to investigate and where necessary prosecute animal cruelty cases under the relevant legislation (PoCTAA) here in Victoria. This is a rather unique level of prosecuting ability, as they are the only charity organisation able to do so.

But unfortunately, this ability is where there seems to be a breach of conflict for the RSPCA, as this action is in conflict with the other relatively newly stated aims and objectives of the RSPCA, including their Constitution 4.1.3 “Influencing the amendment and development of Victorian legislation and standards considered necessary for the protection and welfare of animals”

So not only are they prosecuting the law, but in many cases, they have involvement in actively campaigning against that same law.

The RSPCA receives grants from the government each year to operate, and recently was allocated an additional \$5 million by the government, to allow a larger inspectorate team. It is though, unclear from the financial reports, whether that in fact is what these funds are used for.

On the RSPCA’s own website, they actively promote all of their policies - which are claimed by them to be scientifically based. In the recent Pet Shop and Puppy Farms Bill Inquiry, the RSPCA’s stated opposition to a companion animal breeder having more than 10 entire dogs was challenged by the Inquiry committee, with the RSPCA admitting that there was in fact no scientific basis for this figure being the limit which they fully supported, only because it made it an easy point for an inspector to determine whether a breeder was illegal - not by the conditions and care that the animals were receiving nor on any welfare issues, but by simply doing a head count. The RSPCA’s policy on Companion animals states “the RSPCA Australia is opposed to uncontrolled breeding of companion animals because this inevitably leads to the euthanasia of healthy animals”. No evidence is cited for this statement, and neither conclusion being drawn by

the RSPCA on either policy is scientific, in fact it appears as if these are more convenience and ideologically based, instead reflecting the stated Animal Activists groups positions on these items.

Links are embedded on the RSPCA website for their current campaigns – Cat Welfare, Duck Shooting, Greyhound Racing, Humane Food, Live Export, Jumps Racing, Puppy Factories, Rodeos and Testing on Animals. A visit to the RSPCA Burwood on 29th March 2017 also revealed clothes being sold in their pet supply shop supporting their anti Puppy Factory campaign, in addition to a café, a dog grooming salon, a vet clinic, and the adoption centre – which somewhat surprisingly had only 30 cats and 10 dogs on view – hardly an animal oversupply as is constantly claimed.

The RSPCA Australia website, linked from the Victoria page, goes a step further, in also including tips for conducting a campaign with letter writing tips, how and who to target, and a list of the ministers to contact.

An examination of the Animals Australia and PeTA Australia websites perhaps not surprisingly shows almost identical campaigns being targeted by them against all issues being listed by the RSPCA. Animals Australia even promote themselves as “Animals Australia is Australia’s foremost animal protection organisation”.

Without the headings on the pages, if one was to ignore the animal adoptions, the pages are in fact almost eerily alike and could easily be confused.

This leads one to inevitably conclude, as did Neil Comrie, in his internal review into the RSPCA, that the RSPCA Victoria has now stepped into the arena of becoming activists against the very legal legislation that its own inspectors need to police, and against legislation that is legal, and that perhaps there is now very little difference between these groups at all with animal rights ideology, rather than science based fact, now heavily influencing the stated positions of the RSPCA. This lead to his

Recommendation 21: That RSPCA Victoria, while continuing its legitimate advocacy role, discontinue its public activist campaigning against the existing laws of this State.

The RSPCA in their response agreed to accept this recommendation in full, yet no changes at all have been made on their website with regards to their activist activity.

Whilst the RSPCA heavily adopts an activist stance, it is hard for it to also retain its previous pre-eminent position as being the trusted animal welfare advisors

I do not support the idea, as suggested by many of the submissions from various Animal Rights groups, of a separate Independent Office of Animal Welfare with officers tasked to both inspect cruelty cases as well as provide an activist role against legislation. This does absolutely nothing to tackle the actual problem that the RSPCA finds itself in - trying to do two conflicting things at

the same time – any other group also attempting to do the same things will not lead to a different outcome, as the same conflict of interest exists.

Instead I believe that the focus and duties of the RSPCA should be split. They should have a solely government funded arm who is only involved with investigating and prosecution of cases. These prosecutions should therefore not have to rely on charity donations to cover any losses from court cases. I also believe that the figures released should not only show cases investigated and how many were prosecuted but also how many were found as frivolous or without merit, or how many had notices to comply issued and then no further issues resulted – constant claims come from the animal rights groups about the ineffectiveness of the RSPCA based upon the number of convictions, however if for instance, of the 10000 cases reported to the RSPCA, if even only 50% were frivolous from the reporter having little idea of basic animal husbandry, then that makes a huge difference to the perceived level of cruelty within the state.

A separate arm should then be established to concentrate on the adoptions and community education campaigns on the proper care required by animals. This should then rely on community donations or grants to operate, as do the other rescue groups within the state.

Activist positions should not be adopted by the RSPCA at all, if it is to regain its trust within the community.

I do not believe that the RSPCA should continue to operate as currently - they must cease their heavy campaigning against the very laws they are required to act under. No other arm of law enforcement has the same ability to be able to do so without it being seen as a conflict of interest.

Again thanks for the opportunity to have our say

Regards

Linda Kitson

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