

RSPCA — FUNCTION AND ROLE

Motion

HON RICK MAZZA (Agricultural) [10.16 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house calls on the government to investigate whether the RSPCA is transforming from an animal welfare society into animal rights activists and is losing its original core values and community respect as a credible organisation.

Before I commence my speech, I would like to make it perfectly clear that I believe that the RSPCA plays a very important role in animal welfare within our community. I raise this issue today because I am concerned that this fine institution does not lose its way and become something that the community does not support.

I refer to the brochure from Field and Game Australia. Hon Simon O'Brien touched on this in his budget reply speech. It states —

British Conservative MP Glyn Davies told a packed House of Commons earlier this year that he 'wanted his RSPCA back'.

"In my mind the RSPCA was always an animal welfare body, that's how I always saw it. But I must admit I'm finding it more to be an animal rights body," he said.

...

Another Conservative MP, Simon Hart said that the RSPCA's prosecuting role needs to be monitored given "its political and commercial activities".

There seems to be a lot of parallels between what is happening in the United Kingdom and what is happening in Western Australia. I want it on record that I want my RSPCA back.

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals was established in Victoria in 1871. It was established to prevent the mistreatment of horses. Later in that century further branches were set up in Tasmania and other states of Australia, and eventually Western Australia in 1892. Its charter was always animal welfare. However, in the eighties, the RSPCA began to evolve somewhat and took on more of a role and became more political. In fact, its web page, Political Animal Australia, has a load of pictures of puppies with hangdog eyes, which are pretty hard to resist. When we look behind that website, we see that it wants to ban many things, including rodeos and even pigeon racing, and of course it is against live export. My major concern is that the community is losing trust and is starting to view the RSPCA with some suspicion.

Earlier this year, while campaigning in the Agricultural Region and during a few trips I made recently, I talked to many people through the central wheatbelt, including a lot of farmers, people at farm supply depots and other businesses within those small rural towns. It seems to be quite a common thread that people are concerned about where the RSPCA is heading with its charter. They are very concerned that it is beginning to evolve into more of an animal rights organisation, which does not fit with what the community expects. It is not just the community and I who feel that way; in fact, the president of the Pastoralists and Graziers Association, Rob Gillam, expressed his wariness of the RSPCA. On a news item on his website, he states —

"If the RSPCA truly wants to distance itself from the animal liberation activists that have permeated its ranks and are using the organisation as a platform to end all livestock production, then they need to acknowledge that the live export trade is not cruel and inhumane and work with the industry to improve animal welfare standards in developing nations."

I agree with Rob Gillam on that. The RSPCA should not oppose live export; it should work with government to make sure that it establishes the correct protocols and systems of welfare to ensure that the trade operates at an animal welfare level acceptable to the community. Of course, a lot of those destination ports could do with improvement of animal welfare standards, but by banning the trade, Australia loses its influence to improve those ports of destination. The Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association president David Warriner is bitterly disappointed by the media prominence afforded to the RSPCA's call to ban sheep and cattle saleyards. He is also disillusioned by the RSPCA's direction and said that it wanted to shut down everything. He asked where it would stop. So it goes on. Even Narrogin farmer Janet Thompson was very concerned about the RSPCA. In an article in, I think, *Farm Weekly*, the RSPCA responded to her concerns. The RSPCA stated that it was concerned that Mrs Thompson was misinformed about the mandate of the RSPCA and its role in Australian agriculture. Mrs Thompson disagreed and said she believed the RSPCA had had a good past record in advancing awareness of the good care of animals but things have changed. Members can see that there is quite a lot of concern within the community and community groups about where the RSPCA is heading.

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In a question during the estimates hearing a couple of weeks back, I asked the Department of Agriculture and Food whether it granted funds to the RSPCA. Hon Ken Baston said that \$500 000 was granted to the RSPCA each year. I asked how the department reconciles granting half a million dollars a year to an organisation when that organisation openly opposes the department's major initiative, on which it is spending nearly \$300 million, of live export. In fact, the department head, Mr Delane said —

... it is true they also have a lobbying function and they are unashamed about that. I think we are able to successfully work with their regulatory and education areas but clearly there are occasions when we are going in opposite directions.

Last week, the Royal Agricultural Society hosted a wonderful address out in the courtyard and members who missed it certainly missed out. It showcased a lot of the annual agricultural products we have in Western Australia. I was particularly taken by a young lady by the name Stephanie Coombes, who is only 23 years old. Stephanie is a very impressive young lady and she was named the 2013 National Australia Bank Agribusiness Rising Beef Industry Champion. I was very taken by Stephanie's story for such a young person. She grew up in the north metropolitan area and joined Animals Australia, and as a teenager she had a view of animals. Later she ventured to the country and started to work in country areas with livestock and went on to educate herself about the agricultural industry. What was interesting in her speech was her account of her trips on livestock carriers. From farm gate to the port of destination, she experienced firsthand how the live export trade operates. When Stephanie returned, she described on social media her experiences of the live export trade and the positive outcomes she found. What was the response? Hate mail. How do we rationalise that? It seems that a lot of people who are anti-live export or anti-everything do not want to know the truth. As soon as the truth is told to them, they write hate mail. It is appalling.

One thing we also need to be very mindful of is that the RSPCA is in the extraordinary situation of having been delegated certain powers. In fact, I do not know of any other private body that has been delegated that level of power. We have to be very careful that the RSPCA does not abuse that power. An article I pulled from its website states the following —

RSPCA inspectors are appointed under state and territory animal welfare legislation. This legislation gives inspectors a range of powers to investigate cases of animal cruelty and to enforce animal welfare law. These powers are similar in nature to those afforded to police officers. In the course of investigating animal cruelty offences, inspectors are empowered to:

- enter property;
- seize animals;
- seize evidence of animal cruelty offences;
- issue animal welfare directions/notices;
- issue on-the-spot fines; and
- initiate prosecutions under animal welfare legislation.

I do not have a problem with prosecuting people who mistreat animals. I have a major problem with an organisation delegated these extraordinary powers as a non-government body. We all know that government bodies are subject to the Auditor General's scrutiny, estimates hearing interrogation and all sorts of safety checks and balances to make sure that they do not move outside their terms of reference and serve the community in an unbiased and balanced way. I do not believe that we have those checks, balances and safety mechanisms with the RSPCA. I do not for one minute say that it abuses those powers, but the potential is there and many people have described that maybe those powers have been misused.

A large part of our community is disillusioned with the RSPCA and believes that in many cases it has just gone too far. I am very concerned, as are many other freethinking Australians, that the great institution that we once all respected—I confess that in the past I regularly donated to it—is losing credibility. That would be a great shame for the RSPCA in this state. I know that this is a very emotive issue. We talk about animal welfare and little puppies—we heard about Princess and Rex this week—and everybody loves their pets. There is no problem with that. By the same token, we must balance that with sensible accountable systems to ensure that a special organisation like the RSPCA—no other organisation I know of is delegated those sorts of powers or granted those sorts of funds for its operation—is not permeated, in the words of Rob Gillam, or hijacked by extreme views of activists and does not have its integrity diminished. Suspicion and mistrust is starting to build up in the community.

HON KEN BASTON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Agriculture and Food) [10.29 am]: I thank Hon Rick Mazza for this motion that he has put up today. What the member has said is interesting, and my sentiments

would have been along similar lines, at least until I became a bit more involved as the minister responsible for the Animal Welfare Act, which is about 65 pages long—not that I have read the whole act yet.

We need to make a clear distinction between animal welfare societies and the animal rights political activist organisations that are springing up. The two most notable animal activist organisations are Animal Liberation Australia and People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. Animal Liberation Australia was set up in 1976 and is based on the well-known and best-selling book *Animal Liberation* by a gentleman called Peter Singer. The book sells the idea that all animals should live in the wild and no animal should live in captivity. PETA has the simple slogan that animals are not ours to eat or wear. PETA often runs media campaigns with scantily dressed celebrities selling the virtues of being a vegan. Both these organisations are clearly hardcore animal rights activists. We need to be careful to not get that mixed up with the RSPCA.

The RSPCA and I disagree on one thing: I support livestock export and the RSPCA does not. I need to remind members of the purposes of the RSPCA, and the RSPCA needs to stick to this, as Hon Rick Mazza has said. The RSPCA WA constitution states —

The Purposes of the Society shall be to:

- promote animal welfare and kindness to animals;
- prevent or suppress cruelty to animals; and
- do all such lawful acts as the Society may consider conducive or incidental to the attainment of these Purposes.

In fulfilling those purposes, the RSPCA plays a role that government is not able to play. The state government gives funding of \$500 000 a year to the RSPCA. In Western Australia, during the last financial year, the RSPCA received more than 20 000 calls relating to animal cruelty and neglect. There were 2 787 cruelty complaints investigated by inspectors, and 14 routine inspections on pet stores, saleyards, ports and other sites. Prosecution should always be the last resort. There were only eight prosecutions, which I find quite amazing. The RSPCA also provided 102 000 days of animal care. The other role that the RSPCA plays, and for which we provide that funding of \$500 000 a year, is that, last year, the RSPCA adopted 580 animals. That included 151 dogs, 103 puppies, 118 cats, 157 kittens, 13 rabbits, nine sheep, one horse, two guinea pigs, 31 chickens and ducks, and one bull. I assure members that the government and the Department of Agriculture and Food are happy for the RSPCA to take on this role.

DAFWA administers the Animal Welfare Act, which the RSPCA sits under. Responsibility for that act was transferred to DAWFA on 1 July 2011; prior to that time, the Department for Local Government had responsibility for that act. DAFWA has a memorandum of understanding with the RSPCA, and it is currently in the process of negotiating a new MOU.

The only criticism I would have of the RSPCA is about some of the advertising that it put out with regard to the *Pearl of Para*. I did not take umbrage to it, but I believe it was over the top. That ship was in distress, because it had done a bearing on a propeller shaft after it had taken on board a load of live sheep, and it had to return to port to have that fixed, which was the right decision to make at the time. However, the inference was drawn in the press that this was a bad ship because it had broken down on a trip from America to Russia, I think it was, and 400 head of cattle had been lost. However, that ship has been rebuilt since that time. I wrote to the RSPCA to say that I did not agree with that view, and I am pleased to say that after the RSPCA had inspected all the seven levels of cattle on that vessel, it put out a positive media release about that vessel.

I believe that the RSPCA has a major role to play in animal welfare. However, I agree also with the comment by Hon Rick Mazza about the delegation of power and about how power can be used in the wrong way. That applies in many areas, unfortunately. We have seen many cases in which power has been used in the wrong way and people have ended up in jail. So I believe that DAFWA needs to always keep an eye on that.

In 2011, the Western Australian government doubled the funding to the RSPCA to the current \$500 000 a year as a contribution to the RSPCA's activities in promoting responsible pet ownership education and enforcement activities associated with companion animals. Inspectors employed by the RSPCA are not limited in their enforcement activities and can operate in all sectors, including commercial livestock and feral and wild animals. DAWFA and the RSPCA work jointly to enforce the Animal Welfare Act in Western Australia under a memorandum of understanding that describes the exchange of cases, processes for assistance et cetera. All WA police officers are empowered under that act to deal with animal welfare issues. In addition, some staff from other government agencies and local government authorities are appointed as general inspectors under the act, with power to enforce the legislation. The Western Australian government does not have the specific power to investigate the activities of organisations such as the RSPCA. However, the Ombudsman and the Corruption and

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Crime Commission can investigate the activities of a public officer, which includes inspectors employed by the RSPCA. If people overstep the mark and use their power in the wrong way, it is the responsibility of every one of us to make sure they are called to account.

Generally speaking, the RSPCA does an excellent job. However, I can understand why farmers sometimes take things out of context when they see people protesting against a live animal export ship and the RSPCA comes out with a comment against live exports. That is the RSPCA's Australian policy. However, I do not agree with it and I do not support it. I had a look at one of the live export ships the other day. I believe the conditions for the shipping of animals have improved tremendously over the last number of years and they are continuing to improve.

The other point that was brought up is that we need to have a say in the live export trade, as we do through the exporter supply chain assurance system, so that we will have a mechanism for teaching those countries in which there is supposedly animal cruelty—we have all seen the footage—how to better look after their animals. It is important that we have that input. We have put in place livestock inspectors and auditors in the countries to which we export live animals. I was in Vietnam the other day and I inspected a lot of cattle that had arrived the day before from Darwin in the Northern Territory. That was an ESCAS-approved abattoir and it had been inspected by the Australian auditors who had travelled to Vietnam. That supply chain control is very important.

It is very good that this motion has come to the house so that we can discuss these issues. But I believe the two groups that we need to be very cognisant of are the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals and Animal Liberation Australia. Of course, the government is very aware that people change their minds. We have to educate people, as we did just recently at the Perth Royal Show. It is important that people see pictorial evidence of stock on ships, including how they are treated, how much space they have, their feeding facilities et cetera. The animals on these ships actually put on weight; they do not lose it.

Hon Col Holt: They're obviously stressed if they're putting on all that weight!

Hon KEN BASTON: Absolutely! Unfortunately, it is a little like this place!

Most animal cruelty problems are with domestic animals, not farm animals. That is a really important point. I totally support the amount of funding that the state government gives to the RSPCA, because I believe it is important for us to have a say. The board is set up by the RSPCA. In the past, I used to encourage my pastoral colleagues to become members of the RSPCA so that they could have a say and give it the direction that they thought it should have. I thought it would make it a better organisation if it was closely watched by the farmers who are concerned. In that way, farmers can work with the organisation to have an effect on animals in livestock shipping et cetera.

HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral) [10.41 am]: I, too, rise to speak on this motion. I do not support Hon Rick Mazza's motion. Four weeks ago, I, along with other members in this place, was very interested to receive from Field and Game Australia its *Conservation and Hunting* magazine. It is a glossy brochure. It must have been a quiet day, because I brought it into the chamber and read it with interest. An article in the magazine headed "I want my RSPCA back" pricked my interest. I think it is fair to say that, apart from Hon Rick Mazza, other members have seen this article. I think Hon Simon O'Brien may well have alluded to this article in the chamber previously. When I saw this article, I read it with interest. Given that it was probably a quiet day, I immediately went on the internet and did some research on the RSPCA in Australia. What I found while doing that research was that this article does not apply to the RSPCA in Australia and certainly not to the RSPCA in Western Australia. The minister made a very valid point in his remarks a few minutes ago; that is, the RSPCA is not the People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals or the Animal Liberation activist organisation. We simply have to look at the board of the organisation in Western Australia to know that these are not political activists. They are not people who chain themselves to trees or ships; these are real everyday people.

Hon Lynn MacLaren interjected.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Yes; Hon Lynn MacLaren is right to point out that those people are real people, too. That was not my point. The point I wanted to make is that these are not real activists.

The elected members of the board in Western Australia include Lynne Bradshaw, the director of marketing for an ASX-listed healthcare company; Ian Cowie, the CEO of a local government authority; and Jeanette de Landgraft, a farmer and a Lake Grace shire councillor who will be known to many members in this place.

Hon Darren West: And a very successful farmer, too.

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: Indeed. There is also Brad Jolly, a senior government official; and a range of others, including Don Thomson, a farmer at Tincurrin and an agriculture advisory counsellor for the WA College

of Agriculture at Narrogin. Members in this place will have to admit that none of those people is the type of activist I alluded to earlier. These people care about, and have a real passion for, animal welfare, but certainly do not go on about animal rights. They are not hardcore, I would say.

I must have similar notes to the minister because I, too, have some information on the purposes and activities of the organisation, but I will point out that the RSPCA in Western Australia has been around since 1892. The constitution of the RSPCA of WA refers to the fact that it ensures the enforcement of laws protecting animals from cruelty and promoting animal welfare, and it takes whatever steps necessary to educate the community on the humane treatment of animals. It participates in public campaigns, but they are information-sharing campaigns. After debating the Dog Amendment Bill in this place this week, members may well be aware of the Million Paws Walk, a fantastic activity that happens in Perth once a year, whereby members of the general community march their dogs around the river. It involves thousands of dogs walking along the Swan River on a Saturday or Sunday morning. Everyday Western Australians—mums, dads and kids—show their support for —

Hon Simon O'Brien: Does that include restricted breeds?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON: I certainly have not paid attention, but if I go next year, I will be much more focused on that. I will be keen to see whether there are any restricted breeds in light of the chamber's work this week.

The RSPCA holds the Million Paws Walk every year. It raises vital funds for the protection of animals in Western Australia. Some of the things that the organisation spends this money on include providing shelter for abandoned pets and getting veterinary assistance for sick or injured dogs. It lists on its website what some of the money goes towards. It indicates that \$20 will shelter an abandoned pet for one night; \$60 will provide a warm, safe bed for a homeless pet for three nights; \$260 will care for a mum and her newborn kittens for three nights; and \$480 will sterilise, microchip and vaccinate a small litter of unwanted pups. The website goes on to state —

Just by registering and fundraising you helped make a life-changing difference to these animals.

Every dollar you raised helped us towards our \$475,000 target to support our vital work for animals in need through our Inspectorate, Community Education, Animal Care Centre and Veterinary Clinic.

Hon Rick Mazza was quite right to point out that this organisation gets \$500 000 a year in state government funding, but it is my understanding that it uses it wisely. It does not use the money to target large sheep ships or anything as such; it uses it to make a real difference to the lives of family pets in particular around the state. I have looked at the website and I looked for anything sinister I could find. Yes, it refers to how to lobby government to improve animal welfare and it refers to encouraging people to write to their local state or territory MP or to the minister responsible for animal welfare, but is that a crime? It certainly is not. On a day-to-day basis most of us in this chamber would welcome our constituents approaching us on a range of issues. We, too, would tell our constituents to write to other members of Parliament or indeed to the minister to get the laws changed in Western Australia. This organisation is certainly not a hotbed of activism; it is an organisation that cares for animals in Western Australia. Yes, the RSPCA does talk about the humane slaughter of animals; I do not think there is anything wrong with that. Certainly, it holds a strong view on live exports, which I may not share, but I certainly support its right to have a view; I certainly support its right to advocate on behalf of animals, and I certainly support its right to put pressure on us all to ensure that animals are not only treated in a humane way, but also slaughtered in a humane way.

Food labelling is addressed on the RSPCA website to enable consumers to trust their purchases from the shops. If the label implies higher animal welfare standards, then the consumer is getting that. Again, I do not see that as a raging, left-wing action; it is a very fair action. If consumers want to buy free range eggs or whatever this week's fad may be, if they think they are paying for what the label says, then of course they should be getting what they paid for.

Getting back to the organisation itself, if we look at RSPCA WA's mission, it reads —

To Improve the Welfare of Animals through leadership, collaboration with stakeholders and the provision of quality services

If we look at their vision, it reads —

All animals are accepted as sentient beings treated with dignity, compassion and respect

All of these things I struggle to tie with activism. One final point I will make is that the general community supports this organisation. It receives sponsorship from the likes of BHP Billiton, P&N Bank, Channel Ten and 96FM. This is an important organisation; I do not support this motion.

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HON PAUL BROWN (Agricultural) [10.51 am]: I rise to debate the motion into the review of the RSPCA. I agree with some of the comments Hon Stephen Dawson made about the RSPCA; namely, it is a very worthy organisation within our community. But whereabouts in our community does its worth stop? Where is the boundary of its worth placed in its role of supporting community concerns for domestic and companion animals as opposed to livestock and animal welfare?

The honourable member just referred to the RSPCA's mission, particularly in WA. I have a copy of its strategic plan in front of me. As he said —

To Improve the Welfare of Animals through leadership, collaboration with stakeholders and the provision of quality services

Through leadership, certainly—fantastic! However, the collaboration with stakeholders and the provision of quality services? Certainly, with the provision of quality services, again, anyone who has been out to the Malaga shelter or other RSPCA shelters would be unable to question those. Nevertheless, one would have to question their collaboration with stakeholders.

Throughout 2011, after the Indonesian cattle ban, there were numerous articles which contained numerous pictorials. I refer to one showing Andrew Wilkie, Lyn White, Tom Maguire, and Dr Bidda Jones, who is the chief scientist for the RSPCA. They are all standing in front of Parliament House. Tom Maguire, who is a vocal proponent of chilled meat exports and is always ready to highlight the failings of our livestock export industry, is standing there with Lyn White—obviously, a rabid animal liberationist. Obviously, she promotes veganism; does not want factory farming of any animals let alone the farming of animals at all. Again, it shows Dr Bidda Jones, the RSPCA's chief scientist, standing there shaking hands with Andrew Wilkie, who moved a motion in federal Parliament to ban live exports.

When Hon Stephen Dawson says that they are not against stopping livestock export, it has been the RSPCA's policy for 30 years to do so. The RSPCA has long campaigned and even stood alongside the campaigners. I refer to another photograph contained in another article here, again showing Lyn White and Dr Bidda Jones standing with Simon Sheik from GetUp, who is another very active campaigner against live exports. The Animal Welfare Act 2002 is now discharged under the Department of Agriculture and Food. It moved quite recently from the Department of Local Government to the department of agriculture. The department of agriculture is now charged with looking after animal welfare in WA. As part of that role, it also funds the RSPCA to the tune of \$500 000 a year to provide services to the WA public. Part of the RSPCA's funding requirement is that it provides a 24-hour complaints receival call line and response capacity, inspectorate and compliance activities for non-commercial livestock and companion animals, and education and extension on responsible pet ownership. The agreement does not preclude the RSPCA from undertaking compliance activity in the commercial livestock sector, but moneys used for this purpose need to be raised from non-government sources and should not be part of the agreement.

I question our \$500 000 donation to the RSPCA. Obviously, it is quite active both at a federal and state level. Lynne Bradshaw, the president of the RSPCA in WA, has said quite clearly that it will not change its stance on farming practices and live export. My point is that we have an inspectorate within the Department of Agriculture and Food that has six or more—the minister may be able to correct me on that—but at least six, maybe more, inspectors who deal with live export and farm animal livestock welfare.

Hon Col Holt: We increased the funding to them.

Hon PAUL BROWN: We did. Now, it has funding increase of up to \$1.6 million a year to discharge its responsibility. I suggest that the social licence the RSPCA holds is for domestic and companion animals, not the livestock sector. Its expertise and social licence from the majority of the public is to deal with dogs, cats, budgies, domestic rabbits, hamsters and guinea pigs. It does a great job. The RSPCA receives over 70 000 complaints of domestic animal abuse Australia-wide. That is where it should target its skills because its skill set is uniquely targeted to those sorts of complaints.

The agriculture department has a range of people who know livestock and the industry. It should be allowed to administer the livestock, animal export and farming section of the act. Again, I have no problem with the RSPCA administering to companion animals—that is, dogs, cats and domestic pets—but I question the need, given that the Animal Welfare Act 2002 is now back into the agriculture department, to have the RSPCA also performing the same role.

Both the farming and the live export industries have raised serious concerns with the RSPCA about its advocacy, along with that of Animals Australia, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, Animals' Angels and a range of other organisations. RSPCA president, Lynne Bradshaw, has stated quite clearly that she wants to work with the industry to achieve an equitable outcome, but if the RSPCA's policy of 30 years has not changed and it wants

the removal of live animal export as part of its charter, how can it reasonably expect the industry to work collaboratively with it? Without exception within the industry, this is a sticking point; everybody recognises the crisis that the industry faces with the RSPCA. In fact, recently, Dale Park, president of the Western Australian Farmers Federation, called for Western Australian government officials to carry out inspections instead of the RSPCA, stating quite clearly that the RSPCA had become a lobby group and could not fulfil its regulatory enforcement role at the same time. It is the only statute that is administered by a body other than government, so one suspects that a government instrumentality would be a far better source of inspectors than a lobby group. I support what Mr Park says; I think it is an important point to raise and this house and Western Australia has to now question the role that the RSPCA plays within the wider community.

HON COL HOLT (South West — Parliamentary Secretary) [11.01 am]: In my contribution I will follow up on some of the points made by Hon Rick Mazza and Hon Paul Brown. In my view, this issue comes down to the credibility of the RSPCA. We all know the history of the RSPCA and the good work that it does. The Minister for Agriculture and Food highlighted that a lot of acts of animal cruelty occur with domestic animals—pets—rather than those in the agricultural industry. That is where the RSPCA does its greatest work. I think we all appreciate that it is our watchdog for the way in which the community treats animals. I also know that the farming industry is probably the best animal welfare advocate in the state. Not that long ago, the number of sheep in Kojonup was pegged at one million; it is probably not as many as that now, but that does not happen unless our farmers and our industry are the best animal welfare advocates in the state.

For me, it comes down to credibility. The RSPCA, in my view, has a great deal of credibility when it comes to dealing with domestic animal issues, but I think it is at risk of diminishing that credibility when it walks into the sphere of live animal export. I recently had a quick look at its website, and on the main page there is a link with reference to live export, and a further link inviting visitors to help end this cruel trade. I followed that link to find out what was being talked about because I thought there were probably some very valid points being made, and we do want to end cruel trade. The link had the subheading, “A lengthy investigation and scientific report revealed extensive animal cruelty in abattoirs across Indonesia”. Another link read, “Read the full investigation here.” I thought I would follow the link and have a look at it. Perhaps members will be able to tell me who wrote that report. It was Animals Australia. Animals Australia has a report on the RSPCA website; that has to be a balanced view, surely. This is where the risk is to the RSPCA’s credibility—a balanced view from the RSPCA. Is the RSPCA using a well-balanced Animals Australia scientific report? I do not think so. It was an introduction to ending live animal export. I reckon if I had dug a bit deeper, I would find the video that came out of the Middle East not that long ago by someone who called himself a vegan activist—a vegan activist who went into an abattoir with a hidden camera. That has to be a balanced video, surely. I do not know whether it is on the website.

This is the risk that the RSPCA faces, in my view. We want it to continue the good work it does, standing up for animal welfare issues in our state. We do not need it to risk its credibility with the community and the farming industry by tagging itself to activist groups that really do not have a balanced view on any of this. Does the RSPCA really believe that if we withdraw from live animal exports that animal welfare outcomes will improve in other countries? Does it really believe that? If it really believes that, it needs to go and get some more reports from other sectors of the industry that actually portray a different story from the report on its website. I remember talking to an animal activist about this and asked whether they really thought that if Australia were to stop sending live animal exports that we would see any improvement in animal welfare outcomes in Indonesia, and their response was, “Yeah, but at least our Australian cattle would be safe.” That is a really narrow view of the world, to my mind. We want to keep engaging with those export markets and to have a say about how our cattle are treated in those export markets and destinations, and the only way to do that is to maintain our presence in those markets. We do not need the RSPCA risking its own credibility and at the same time risking our industries and animal welfare outcomes in those countries.

For me, this is really about credibility. Moving away from that argument will provide some balanced views, and we can feel much more confident about what the RSPCA can do for our community. We do not want to lose support for the RSPCA, because it plays a vital role; but we also do not want to risk its credibility.

HON LYNN MacLAREN (South Metropolitan) [11.07 am]: I am amazed that we are debating the merits of the RSPCA today. Any cursory examination of the RSPCA would show that it is a charity, with a board, and is a group independent of this Parliament. We are not the board of the RSPCA; this is not the place for us to debate whether the RSPCA’s policy should be that it approves or does not approve of live export, puppy farms or anything else. It is not our role to debate that. If members want to debate the policy of the government and its support of the live export industry, then bring it; but if members want to debate the policies of the RSPCA, they should nominate themselves for RSPCA board membership. As Hon Stephen Dawson explained, there are some pretty expert people sitting on that board already—people who I respect and who are making decisions about the

Extract from Hansard

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Hon Rick Mazza; Hon Ken Baston; Hon Stephen Dawson; Hon Paul Brown; Hon Col Holt; Hon Lynn MacLaren; Hon Brian Ellis

strategic direction of the RSPCA on an annual basis, in cooperation with their membership. By the way, the RSPCA's membership is our constituents! The membership of the RSPCA extends throughout this state, and everyone who belongs to the RSPCA expects it to stand up for animals. They do not expect it only to run an animal shelter out in Malaga—which, by the way, it does a really good job of—but to actually be a voice for animals. That is why I belong, and I am sure that if any members opposite are also members, it is why they belong.

The RSPCA's vision is for all animals to be accepted as sentient beings with dignity, compassion and respect. That is a great vision, and that is why people are attracted to donate to it, year after year, and belong to it and serve on the board. For us to even consider trying to muzzle the RSPCA and stop it from speaking out for animals is not in the best interests of Western Australia. It is our job to speak up for Western Australians. The RSPCA is a community-based charity. What other community-based charities do we know that lobby against government policies? We could look at Anglicare. Why are we not debating Anglicare in this place? That organisation certainly lobbies for the homeless, more shelters and more public housing. Why do we not talk about Anglicare, the Australian Red Cross, the Cancer Council Western Australia, Amnesty International or any one of the 350 or so charities that operate within Western Australia that have reason to question government direction, and have reason to speak up for people who cannot speak up for themselves?

I say to Hon Rick Mazza that, not surprisingly, I oppose the motion. However, I welcome the debate about what advocacy roles are in the community and how the government is involved in them, because Hon Rick Mazza has raised the really important question, as did Hon Paul Brown, of who is better placed to inspect farming activities. Right now our government is failing, and historically has failed, to ensure animal welfare in the agricultural industry and that is why the RSPCA is picking that up.

I want to talk a bit about animal welfare versus animal rights. I think it is great to have animal rights people; they speak up for the animals when no-one else will. There is a place for them in our society. They are not to be disdained and spoken about negatively. Lyn White is a hero to many people in Western Australia, including me. One of the basic tenets of animal rights is that humans do not have the right to use non-human animals for their own purposes, including food, clothing, entertainment and vivisection. That is based on the rejection of speciesism and the knowledge that animals are sentient beings. May I say that Australian ethicist Peter Singer, who is regarded as one of the world's finest, was the father of the animal liberation movement. His name should be revered, not spoken of as though he is some lower-class citizen. He has a chair at Princeton University. He is an ethicist of immense respect.

We are debating this issue of farmed animals because many believe that humans have a right to use animals for some purposes but believe they should be treated better. Members will have heard me talk about this time and again. That is what we are talking about with live exports. The position of treating animals better while using them in farming practices is an animal welfare position. That is exactly the space the RSPCA operates in. Animal rights advocates want to eliminate the use of animals. The animal welfare position seeks more humane conditions for them. The difference between these two positions can be highlighted in the treatment of farm animals. I will list a few issues that are dear to my heart. An animal welfare position is the objection to cruel factory farming practices—a position I know we in this place hold. We should object, as does the RSPCA, to any cruel practice to animals, such as confining calves in veal crates, confining pregnant sows in gestational stalls, de-beaking chickens and, as I raised during the previous term of government, keeping pregnant sows in crates. These are issues the RSPCA works on; it seeks to make animal life within the farming space more humane. Animal rights groups do not want any animals to be farmed anywhere. There is no more powerful animal activist than the Western Australian RSPCA and that is why it is well supported throughout Western Australia.

Among the issues the RSPCA is working on is discouraging pedigree breeding that causes discomfort to dogs. We have seen stories on *60 Minutes* of dogs with faces so disfigured that they cannot breathe properly. That is the type of thing that the RSPCA works to stop, as well as the cruelty inherent in live exports. How can we question that? The RSPCA has stopped the confinement in small cages of laying hens and right now significant changes around Australia are poised to free laying hens from those confining cages because of the overwhelming public support for uncaged hens. The RSPCA wants to also bring an end to puppy farms. What is scary about that? I think that the RSPCA is doing a great thing. Of course it involves public pressure to change the laws. It has every right to do that. We will defend the RSPCA's freedom of speech to challenge laws that cause cruelty to animals or perpetuate cruel practices.

I am amazed that we have not heard from Hon Nigel Hallett, who spoke out last year and questioned government funding for the RSPCA, and spent time on radio promoting that notion. At the time, the public was shocked that any Western Australian parliamentarian would threaten to remove funding from an organisation as significant and well respected as the RSPCA. I cannot believe that that sound bite in the media has become a matter for

debate in this chamber. We will have spent 80 minutes debating this matter in this chamber. I encourage members to lift their sights higher and to think about how we can stop cruelty to animals rather than how we can stop an organisation, the very purpose of which is to stop cruelty to animals.

HON BRIAN ELLIS (Agricultural) [11.16 am]: I had not intended to say much on this motion but there must be something about what Hon Lynn MacLaren says that seems to get me going! And it takes a fair bit to do that.

Several members interjected.

Hon BRIAN ELLIS: I endorse what Hon Rick Mazza, Hon Paul Brown and Hon Colin Holt said; we are on the same page. Let me say from the outset that I believe the RSPCA performs a very valuable function in our society in trying to prevent cruelty to animals. No-one wants to see animals badly treated. However, I believe that the live animal trade to countries that need our produce is not a cruel trade. I suppose that is where Hon Lynn MacLaren and I differ. She believes it is a cruel trade. It is not a cruel trade. That is where I think this whole argument is coming from. The RSPCA is interfering in a trade that is highly regulated. What other exporters are responsible for their produce when it lands in other countries? I do not think any other trade is regulated to the same degree or has the same amount of responsibility for its produce when it gets to other countries. That is why I say that the live animal export industry is so regulated that the suggestion of it being cruel is wrong. That is where I think the RSPCA has overstepped the mark and moved out of its core function. I agree with Hon Rick Mazza; I want my RSPCA to go back to its core functions. I do not like the idea of it interfering in a legal export industry. Perhaps it should think about farmers' economic welfare rather than the so-called welfare of the animals. Getting into bed with the extreme organisations that have been mentioned only reduces the RSPCA's credibility and relevance. The RSPCA receives something like \$500 000 of public funding and it should be aware of the responsibilities that go with that funding. The RSPCA should consider the whole community and not just radical groups that seem to be hell-bent on stopping a legitimate trade. The RSPCA should stop working against hardworking citizens who are trying to make a living. I understand the position the Minister for Agriculture and Food is in: he needs to work with a reputable organisation. The RSPCA must continue to be a legitimate organisation that works with the minister on animal welfare, not an organisation that works against that trade with radical groups. The RSPCA should be working with the agriculture minister to promote this trade. As has been pointed out by Hon Col Holt, even if we stop this trade in Australia, animal cruelty will carry on in other countries. Australia is the only country that has regulations to try to ensure the welfare of our animals is cared for in another country. On that issue, it is in the interests of all those people in the industry—farmers, traders, and exporters—to keep those animals in the best condition they possibly can. If we were to boil it down to just the money, the industry needs to keep these animals in the best condition possible to get the best return on their dollar. I will say, once again, that it is not a cruel trade; it is a legitimate trade. As I said, the RSPCA should be working with the Minister for Agriculture and Food to promote what is a legitimate, highly regulated and well-run trade. I endorse Hon Rick Mazza's motion, and point out to those who oppose the motion that they should not be surprised when we fight back, because they have it wrong.

HON RICK MAZZA (Agricultural) [11.22 am] — in reply: At the beginning of my speech I wanted to make it clear that I believe the RSPCA plays an important role in our community. A lot of that played out in this place today. As Hon Col Holt pointed out, the real concern of members is that the RSPCA is risking its credibility. Unlike Anglicare and other charities, the RSPCA is delegated with special powers of prosecution and investigation into animal welfare—as it should be. We are discussing the RSPCA in the house today because, unlike Anglicare, the RSPCA has been given government powers, along with half a million dollars. If this matter is debated anywhere, it should be in this house. Members need to have the courage to play out these things that are viewed on an emotional basis. Members should not run away from the debate because they might get a call from ABC radio talkback or have a Channel Nine microphone put under their mouth. We need to ensure that, as an organisation, the RSPCA is accountable. That is the whole reason we are debating the motion today. If we extend those powers to the RSPCA, then just like government departments that have those powers the RSPCA should be scrutinised and be accountable.

I am concerned that animal rights ideology is beginning to seep into the RSPCA. With all due respect to Hon Lyn MacLaren, that was evident in her comments today. When we have vegans running around with video cameras, we have a conflict of interest. I ask members to support the motion, and hopefully we can ensure that the RSPCA continues to be a credible organisation when it plays the important role it holds in our community.

Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.