



Hon Brian Ellis MLC
Chair
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Parliament House
Perth WA 6000

Thursday 16 December 2010

Dear Mr Ellis

Petition No 101 – Funding for the Animal Welfare Unit Inspectorate, to employ six permanent full-time General Inspectors

Thank you for inviting me to provide a submission to the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs in relation to this petition. The petition reflects deep community concern about the lack of adequate funding for the work of the Animal Welfare Unit Inspectorate (AWUI). Insufficient funding has effectively resulted in an end to the routine monitoring of the welfare of livestock animals involved in live export, transportation or abattoirs. The Premier, in a letter to WA Rangers Association President, Eric Ayres, acknowledges that routine inspections of livestock animals are no longer conducted by the AWUI. He says:

“It is correct that the Animal Welfare Branch no longer undertakes routine inspection duties at the Port of Fremantle, feedlots and saleyards. I also acknowledge that rangers do not conduct routine inspections at these locations”¹

Over the years, the community has become increasingly aware of the vulnerability of livestock animals, particularly during the stressful processes of transportation and live export when they can be subjected to cruelty and neglect. There is a growing consensus in the community that livestock animals deserve to be treated humanely and that there can be no moral justification for failing to achieve this standard.

The Opposition shares the community's commitment to protecting the welfare of livestock animals. For this reason we circulated two petitions on the issue of the de-funding of the AWUI - more than 1000 people have so far signed the petition which was tabled in the Legislative Assembly and 20 people signed the petition tabled in the Legislative Council. It is anticipated that many more petitions and signatures will be tabled next year as the petitions continue to be returned to my office. Both the Legislative Assembly and Legislative Council petitions request the immediate reinstatement of funding for six permanent full-time General Inspector positions in the AWUI. The background to this important issue is as follows:

In 2002, the Gallop Labor Government acted on the commitment it had shown towards animal welfare while in Opposition and introduced the Animal Welfare Act 2002. The legislation was widely regarded as being amongst the toughest in the nation.

In 2007, the Government set up the AWUI, located within the Department of Local Government. The Unit consisted of six General Inspectors whose job it was to inspect ports, saleyards and abattoirs to identify livestock animals suffering illness or injury, including those which may not have been 'fit to load' in the first place or which became injured or ill during the transportation process. General Inspectors were authorised to examine animals, make a recommendation and, where appropriate, have it euthenased. They were able to assist members of the livestock industry to better understand their obligations under the law. Reports by animal welfare groups about the Unit when it was operating with six full-time General Inspectors are, by all accounts, positive. The consensus it

¹ Letter from Premier to Mr Eric Ayres, President, WA Rangers Association, 5 August 2010 – Premier's Office reference: 24-35992/NH

that the Unit was effective in monitoring the welfare of livestock animals and helping to reduce the incidence of cruel treatment. The role that General Inspectors can play in terms of prevention cannot be understated.

Funding for the AWUI was for two years and at the time the 2008 election was called, recommendations for the inspectorate to be permanently established were under consideration. Labor lost Government and, unfortunately, the Liberal National Government decided not to continue funding the Inspectorate. Contracts for the General Inspector positions were not renewed.

Today, the AWUI employs two full-time General Inspectors – one permanent and one contract. Under the Act, the Manager of the Unit is also authorised as a General Inspector, although the reality is that her management duties prohibit her from working in the field.

Earlier this year in an interview on the ABC's Stateline program, Local Government Minister, John Castrilli, defended the decision not to continue funding for the AWUI, by claiming that there were more than 200 inspectors who are authorised to enforce the Animal Welfare Act.

Technically speaking, the Minister's claims are correct – the Animal Welfare Act 2002 does authorise the Director General of the Department of Local Government to appoint as General Inspectors local Government rangers and members of the staff of the RSPCA and other Government agencies - including the Department of Local Government, the Department of Agriculture and Food WA and the Department of Environment and Conservation whom he or she regards to be suitably qualified or experienced for the purposes of the Act. Police are also empowered automatically under the Act.

However, when you scrutinise whether any of these officers are suitably equipped or capable of fulfilling the requirements of livestock inspectors, it would appear that they are not:

- The Department of Agriculture and Food WA core duty is to support and promote the economic viability of primary producers, not police producers or the operators, such as livestock transporters, which producers necessarily contract. DAFWA can provide advice about animal welfare – but that advice is guidance only, no-one is compelled to follow it;
- The Department of Environment and Conservation is responsible for the welfare of native animals and for the control of feral animals - not for livestock animals;
- The RSPCA can prosecute commercial livestock cases but it is not funded to do so – unlike the AWUI, the RSPCA is also not required by law to focus on complaints regarding livestock animals;
- Local Government rangers do not monitor or inspect the welfare of livestock animals although they can play an initial support role in identifying animal welfare cases or concerns which can then be investigated by the AWUI; and
- The WA Police do not routinely inspect, investigate or prosecute breaches under the Act as part of their day-to-day work and since the stock squad was abolished, they do not receive training or experience in this area.

The community are outraged when they witness or learn about the cruel or neglectful treatment of livestock animals. They are particularly outraged when they ring the Animal Welfare Unit duty inspector on 1300 303 464 only to be told that there is no-one available to investigate their complaint. A similar response is received when members of the public ring any of the above mentioned agencies – no one is available.

The community also understands that a properly funded and resourced Animal Welfare Unit Inspectorate is vital if the systemic issues affecting the welfare of livestock animals are to be identified and addressed.

Thank you for your consideration of this serious issue. I would be pleased to provide further information to the Committee if required

Yours sincerely



Lisa Baker MLA

PUBLIC