



10 March 2016

Hon Rick Mazza MLC
Chairman, Select Committee into the Operations of RSPCA WA
Parliament House
GPO Box A11
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By email: selra@parliament.wa.gov.au

Dear Mr Mazza

Select Committee - Clarification of RSPCA WA evidence (23 November 2015)

RSPCA WA gave evidence to the Select Committee into the Operations of RSPCA WA (Select Committee) on 23 November 2015 regarding the relationship between local government general inspectors (rangers) working under the *Animal Welfare Act 2002* (the Act) and RSPCA WA general inspectors.

In reviewing that transcript, we are concerned that certain parts of the evidence, viewed in isolation, could be seen to be critical of all rangers working with RSPCA WA inspectors under the Act. This is clearly not the case and I write to clarify our evidence about that relationship.

RSPCA WA inspectors enjoy an excellent working relationship with rangers across the State. RSPCA WA is grateful for the support of local government rangers and trust the relationship is mutually beneficial.

I provided evidence that our inspectors work closely every day with local government rangers (transcript page 17) and Chief Inspector Swift gave evidence that RSPCA WA general inspectors and rangers work really well together (transcript page 20). This close working relationship is essential to achieving successful animal welfare outcomes under the Act. This is especially the case in regional areas where our inspectors have to cover vast areas and rely upon the help of local government rangers.

In canvassing the relationship between RSPCA general inspectors and local government rangers, Chief Inspector Swift did seek to raise the following specific concerns:

1. Problems arising from an apparent lack of consistency in the coordination of the activities of general inspectors by the Department of Agriculture and Food (DAFWA).
2. Issues with the conduct of specific rangers working with the City of Wanneroo.

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Chief Inspector Swift has concerns and frustrations regarding inconsistencies in training, common tools and procedures provided by DAFWA to all general inspectors working under the Act. This can lead to problems with coordination between the various general inspectors and affects animal welfare outcomes (transcript page 20).

Chief Inspector Swift also sought to highlight that RSPCA WA has been questioned by the Select Committee in relation to the accountability of its general inspectors under the Act, but there appears to be a lack of consistency in the scrutiny of the work undertaken by all general inspectors appointed under the Act (transcript page 20).

Another concern has been that local government rangers do not always have the infrastructure to fully support their work under the Act. RSPCA WA works daily to support local government rangers with this and remains very willing to do so, but Chief Inspector Swift sought to inform the Committee of this lack of infrastructure for local government rangers.

The Committee will be aware that RSPCA WA participated in the recent Animal Welfare Review which was tabled by the Hon. Ken Baston MLC, Minister for Agriculture and Food, in the Legislative Council on 2 December 2015. The submission by RSPCA WA dealt with the matters outlined above. In particular, RSPCA WA submitted:

Whilst the MOU seeks to coordinate the activities of the LCU [Livestock Compliance Unit within DAFWA] and RSPCA WA under the Act, there is no process in place to delineate the working relationships between the general inspectors from other bodies/agencies.

RSPCA WA works daily with other general inspectors as previously outlined and, in doing so, strives to assist them with their animal welfare role and to work cooperatively to achieve the best care for animals. However, the current delivery models result in coordination issues and inefficiencies.

The following findings of the Animal Welfare Review Panel were significant:

The Panel notes that the model has weaknesses that are apparent in WA and possibly other jurisdictions. For example, the fact that General Inspectors are managed by different agencies can lead to inconsistencies in how the Act is applied. Without sound coordination and planning, strategic goals may not be identified or pursued, and training and education efforts can be disjointed.

These weaknesses are not always well managed and can adversely affect the delivery of animal welfare outcomes in WA.

The Panel is of the firm view that there are opportunities for improving the weaknesses in the current model and have made recommendations accordingly.

The Panel noted strengths in the quality of the people working at DAFWA, RSPCA and in local governments, and that staff in these organisations have expressed a desire to work together. However, the Panel believes that this collaboration has not always been effective, representing a shortcoming that needs to be addressed. (Page 18)

RSPCA WA will welcome improvements in the coordination of the work of all general inspectors under the Act resulting from these findings.

Chief Inspector Swift also sought to address problems that have arisen with specific City of Wanneroo rangers (see transcript pages 18-19). This relates to a number of cases over the last two years as detailed in a letter from Chief Inspector Swift to DAFWA dated 26 August 2015 (see Tabled Paper 2, Hearing 23 November 2015). As I emphasised at the hearing, RSPCA WA is striving to improve communications with the City of Wanneroo rangers in order to avoid such problems occurring. I also observe that a standardised and coordinated approach to the work of general inspectors under the Act may assist to resolve these situations in the future.

I respectfully seek that the Committee publish this letter with the transcript of evidence from 23 November 2015 in order to clarify the position of RSPCA WA on this issue.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. van Ooran', with a stylized flourish at the end.

David van Ooran
Chief Executive Officer