




Speech By
Christopher Whiting

MEMBER FOR BANCROFT

Record of Proceedings, 20 March 2024

STATE DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL INDUSTRIES COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (2.00 pm): I move—

That the House take note of the State Development and Regional Industries Committee Report No. 42, 57th Parliament—*Examination of Auditor-General Report 6: 2021-22—Regulating animal welfare services*, tabled on 30 May 2023.

I rise to speak about the report titled *Regulating animal welfare services*. We on the committee spent a bit of time dealing with this issue. We found that there are Queenslanders who had, over the years, encountered some rigorous actions and legal actions by the RSPCA on behalf of the department. That is because we have a dual system here in Queensland. Basically, the department engages the RSPCA to provide animal welfare services, mostly in coastal communities, while the rest of Queensland is overseen directly by the department through Biosecurity Queensland. The department provides the RSPCA with \$500,000 a year towards the cost of inspectors and vehicles, and the cost of those enforcement activities for the RSPCA each year is reported to be \$4.6 million.

We heard from a variety of people that there were issues regarding the amount of holding fees for animals and the training and suitability of officers. In general there was a premise that there needed to be greater accountability for these Queenslanders. We found that people are facing large costs and are looking for a more active oversight by DAF. The Audit Office conducted an audit and found—

- There was limited oversight of RSPCA Queensland inspectors ...
 - The department did not have effective mechanisms to ensure RSPCA Queensland followed the same procedures for prosecutions ... as Biosecurity Queensland. ... no oversight of RSPCA Queensland's decision to prosecute people ...
 - ... The department had not ensured that there was a transparent process for approving and amending a schedule of recovery costs.
- ...
- ... the department needed to ensure it had regular performance reporting from RSPCA ... to evaluate its performance.

They were fairly direct recommendations and I thank the Auditor-General's people for that. I also want to thank the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries, DAF, for how they have responded to that. I think they have responded really well. It is probably an example of how departments can take on those suggestions and see what they can do to improve their services to Queensland.

Subsequently, an amendment bill was passed in December 2022. We found that the department was clarifying inspectors' accreditation, including requirements for managing conflicts of interest, and having oversight. Recommendation 1 was completed by December 2022. Recommendation 2 was classified as 'in progress' at the time of our report. DAF was overseeing inspectors' minimum performance and creating a register of current inspectors. It was very good to see that DAF was participating in the RSPCA's decisions to prosecute people, and that is very important. That recommendation is still in progress, but the department has now assumed full responsibility for the conduct of all prosecutions under this act.

We found that the department had completed recommendation 3 about overseeing engagement with the RSPCA—being more accountable. They have created performance measures to ensure there is accountability and there is better oversight as well through oversight bodies and they are making those bodies self-assess against better practices.

In this report we found that review is complete. Once again we want to say 'well done' to DAF for taking these on board. I think we have a really good system now. I want to commend Minister Mark Furner for taking on these recommendations and overseeing this valued improvement to how the department does their work. At the end of the day there is more accountability, more accessibility and more fairness for Queenslanders who are facing these kinds of actions.