




Speech By
Tony Perrett

MEMBER FOR GYMPIE

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STATE DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL INDUSTRIES COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr PERRETT** (Gympie—LNP) (2.05 pm): I rise to speak on the examination of the Auditor-General's report titled *Regulating animal welfare services*. The Auditor examined how animal welfare is regulated and how the performance of regulators could be improved. At the time DAF and the RSPCA were delivering animal welfare services. The AO focused on the effectiveness of DAF's oversight of the RSPCA. The RSPCA is an unusual body in that it enforces animal welfare investigations on behalf of the state. It is a private charity which has powers of entry and seizure yet is not directly related to government. It can also use SPER to enforce orders and not have to go through the channels other private organisations use.

The Auditor found DAF's oversight was neither sufficiently proactive nor effective in overseeing the RSPCA and supporting it in the exercise of its powers. It found four themes: appointment and work of inspectors; investigation and prosecution; conflicts of interest; and monitoring and managing performance. The conclusions were very worrying. There were serious concerns about oversight and accountability, accreditation and conflicts of interest of inspectors. The Auditor found DAF had no oversight to ensure the RSPCA had implemented procedures and guidelines and no established codes of practice for the animal types it regulates. DAF did not have visibility checks to balance the RSPCA's investigative powers and demonstrate fair and just process, including applying for and executing warrants, using body worn cameras and seizing personal technology devices. DAF was not involved in and did not oversee prosecution decisions or charge and plea negotiations.

The Auditor recommended clarification of accountabilities and inspector accreditation, and called for regular reports on inspector performance, training and/or independence declarations and to manage conflicts of interest. The parliamentary committee noted that DAF implemented three of the Auditor's recommendations and two were still progressing.

Further progress was needed to clarify and strengthen the department's role. This would be achieved by establishing minimum performance and reaccreditation standards, register of inspectors and control of identity cards, participation in prosecution decisions, review investigations, monitoring complaints, overseeing conflicts of interest, and establishing minimum standards of care of animals.

The other area which required further progress was better managing performance, with DAF partnering with the RSPCA to develop measures for judging the effectiveness of enforcement measures and using financial reports to ensure accountability of the funds. In addition to these outstanding recommendations, the parliamentary committee said it would—

... still encourage the department to formally establish a requirement for RSPCA Queensland to publish its fee schedule for treating and keeping animals. Furthermore, we also encourage the department to apply a similar or applicable level of transparency to any further activity agreements with RSPCA Queensland.

I am frequently wary about the purported motives of animal welfare groups. Groups such as Animal Liberation Queensland and Place Advocacy do not understand what is required to manage rural properties legitimately and responsibly. In a pursuit of unreasonable and ideologically driven objectives, they continually seek to undermine agricultural industries; to criminalise, persecute and destroy the businesses of primary producers; and to undermine community activities in regional and rural towns. As well as carrying the mantle as the moral authority to make comments on and adjudicate animal welfare issues, the RSPCA acts as a lobby group. It needs to be cautious and balanced when it comments on broader animal welfare issues including live animal trade and horse events such as Bull n Bronc, rodeos, campdrafts and horse racing.

In the last few years the RSPCA has faced controversies of maladministration, misconduct and corruption, unfair dismissals, an outcry over hefty executive bonuses, conflicts of interest and concerns about how the organisation was run. There have been complaints about excessive euthanasia of dogs, animals not receiving the appropriate levels of care, unfair targeting of pet shops and breeders, bullying by inspectors and charging exorbitant fees. When people complain, they have been told, 'Go to court.' Nevertheless, the Auditor-General told the committee he focused on DAF as the responsible party for administering the regulation of animal welfare services. He said—

The scope of the audit did not include RSPCA Queensland's processes and governance arrangements.

Over the years I have received several complaints about the RSPCA. While not all complaints are substantiated, the organisation's special status requires transparency and openness. It needs to be beyond reproach. It is integral if we are to have faith in the administration of animal welfare. It is a sentiment that was front and centre of Professor Coaldrake's findings.