

Mr Mark McGowan; Ms Lisa Baker; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Bill Marmion; Mr Vincent Catania; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Joe Francis; Mr Chris Tallentire; Ms Simone McGurk

ROYAL SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS

Motion

MR M. McGOWAN (Rockingham — Leader of the Opposition) [4.00 pm]: I move —

That this house condemns the Liberal, National and Shooters and Fishers Parties for their attacks on the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

We have recently seen, from members of the Liberal and National Parties in particular, some extraordinarily violent, nasty and virulent attacks upon one of the most respected organisations in the world. I am deeply offended—I think most Western Australians would be deeply offended if they were aware of this—by government members' attacks on the RSPCA. The attacks amount to a political witch-hunt by the Liberal and National Parties into the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The way in which the inquiry has been conducted and the behaviour of Liberal and National Parties upper house members of Parliament has been nothing short of disgraceful. The reports that have emerged from the parliamentary committee of belligerence, and of attacks on and the intimidation of good officers of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals are nothing short of disgraceful. The RSPCA is one of the most respected organisations in the world. The international respect in which it is held is up there with the Red Cross and the World Wide Fund for Nature. The RSPCA is one of the great international organisations through which people show their respect and care for other living creatures. We should support and thank the RSPCA for the work that it does. It is a charity—a non-government organisation—that goes about its business for the love of animals and other living things, and tries to prevent them from being mistreated.

The RSPCA has a wonderful history of creation and expansion around the world. It is an organisation that I expect that at least 95 per of Western Australians overwhelmingly support for the work it does. Unfortunately, that support does not extend to the Liberal and National Parties, because they have allowed attacks on this organisation. There are two issues here. First, the government allowed this inquiry—this McCarthyist witch-hunt—to be established by the upper house. Secondly, the Liberal–National government allowed its members on that committee to intimidate and be rude to witnesses, employees and volunteers of the RSPCA who have appeared before the inquiry because they do not like the organisation or they have their own axe to grind against the RSPCA. It is a rotten, disgraceful stunt conducted by the Liberal and National Parties against the RSPCA. The Liberal and National Parties voted for this inquiry.

Mr J.H.D. Day: In the Legislative Council.

Mr M. McGOWAN: They are the member's colleagues in the Liberal and National Parties. What the member had to say there is interesting, and I will respond to it with something that might interest him. It might be a Legislative Council inquiry, but guess who backed it? The Minister for Agriculture and Food, Hon Ken Baston, backed it. An article in *The West Australian* of 7 May 2015 states —

Agriculture Minister Ken Baston has accused the RSPCA of lacking accountability and being driven by ideology.

Mr Baston yesterday backed calls for an inquiry into the animal welfare group to investigate how it spent taxpayers' money and applied unique powers to charge people who breached the Animal Welfare Act.

It is not only the upper house. Hon Ken Baston might be a member of the upper house, but he is also a member of cabinet; therefore, a Liberal cabinet minister has backed this McCarthyist jihad being conducted against the RSPCA by Liberal and National members of Parliament.

The committee's terms of reference state —

On Wednesday, 13 May 2015, The Legislative Council ordered that a select committee be established to inquire into the operations of The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Western Australia (Inc), including an examination of —

- (a) its funding from the government;
- (b) its objectives; and
- (c) the use of its powers.

The select committee is to report to the Council by no later than Thursday, 3 December 2015.

Mr Mark McGowan; Ms Lisa Baker; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Bill Marmion; Mr Vincent Catania; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Joe Francis; Mr Chris Tallentire; Ms Simone McGurk

It turns out that last week an extension of time was granted to the committee so that it can continue its witch-hunt until 6 April 2016. This inquiry will go for nearly a year using parliamentary resources and the no doubt valuable time of Liberal and National Parties' upper house MPs; such busy people that they are. I have seen them in action. They are very busy people. They work incredibly hard sitting around drinking coffee in the Parliament all day. The inquiry has been extended to nearly a year. It is pulling resources out of the RSPCA that it could put into dealing with animal welfare issues in Western Australia. The government has allowed this witch-hunt of the RSPCA to happen.

Those are the terms of reference. The committee will inquire into the RSPCA's objectives. I know that those fellows, Hon Paul Brown and Hon Nigel Hallett, are erudite gentlemen, but one does not have to go too far to find some facts about the objects and the history of the RSPCA. It was founded in 1824 by William Wilberforce, MP, who is famous for his work to abolish slavery. A group of MPs and others met in London to establish an animal welfare charity that provided the opportunity to prosecute those who might abuse or be cruel to animals. We can imagine that prior to that date in 1824, the lives of companion animals or livestock, or wildlife in the care or protection of human beings, would have been a very dim experience indeed. These people got together and decided they would do something about it. William Wilberforce is, of course, one of the most famous British members of Parliament to have ever lived, and he got together with colleagues and established this organisation. In 1829, the RSPCA adopted a uniform for its inspectors to wear while carrying out their duties. It obtained certain powers to issue cautions and warnings to members of the public about what they could do in relation to animal welfare. It obtained statutory powers to bring people and issues before the courts.

The organisation in Western Australia was founded in 1892, some 60 or 70 years after its establishment in Great Britain. The Western Australian branch, unlike the British branch, emerged from a group of women that included Edith Cowan, the first woman ever elected to an Australian Parliament. They met at what was called St George's School in Perth and established the RSPCA in 1892, and the following year the Governor of Western Australia became its first patron. Indeed, Governor Sanderson is the patron of the RSPCA today and I am a vice-patron, as is the Premier of Western Australia. The fact that the Premier of Western Australia is a vice-patron of the RSPCA is instructive. He holds that position but he is not prepared to tell his upper house colleagues not to launch an inquiry into an organisation of which he is a vice-patron. I think the Premier should resign as vice-patron of the RSPCA, considering that he has allowed this witch-hunt to take place.

This inquiry is asking for an examination of the objectives of the RSPCA. The committee could go to its objectives on its website, if it wanted to; they are not hard to find. The RSPCA's objectives are to prevent cruelty to animals by enforcing the existing law; to establish further legislation to protect animals; and to educate the public in responsible animal care. Why would we need an inquiry into those objectives? I do not understand why the Liberal and National Parties would want an inquiry into the objectives of an organisation that has been around since before the beginning of the Swan River Colony.

It is not as though other governments around the world have seen fit to launch an inquiry into the RSPCA. I would expect that if in any other parliament in this country or anywhere in the Westminster system a group of members of Parliament came along and abused a respected charity such as the RSPCA, they would be laughed out of the Parliament. They would be told to pull their heads in and to stop this ridiculousness. However, they have been allowed to proceed, and they are inquiring into the objectives of the RSPCA, its funding from the government and its use of its powers.

The first of the RSPCA's objectives is to prevent cruelty to animals by enforcing the existing law. **The existing law is the 2002 Animal Welfare Act.** That legislation was brought on by the Gallop government and I was the minister responsible for bringing it into this Parliament. I took it through this house and it was, **at that time, the most modern animal welfare legislation in Australia.** It replaced the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1920, which was a very dated piece of legislation that could no longer perform the functions required of it. We brought that legislation in and, at the same time, we brought in ongoing funding of the RSPCA, which was to be used for two purposes: the prosecutorial and educative functions of the RSPCA. We gave it \$250 000 a year, which was a modest sum, in my view—a very modest sum—but back in 2001 or thereabouts, times were tough and the finances were very, very tight. We provided \$250 000 to assist with both the prosecutorial and educative functions of the RSPCA. Following a 2008 commitment agreed to by both sides of Parliament, in 2011 this government, to its credit, increased that funding from \$250 000 to \$500 000. If the committee is concerned about the RSPCA's funding from government, that funding was agreed to by both sides of Parliament. The objectives have been in place for 170 years and the funding has been in place since 2001, and was agreed to by both sides of Parliament, and I respect the fact that the government increased funding to the RSPCA; that was a good decision. What I do not respect is that it has allowed this inquiry and this abuse of RSPCA officers to go on.

Extract from Hansard

[ASSEMBLY — Wednesday, 21 October 2015]

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Mr Mark McGowan; Ms Lisa Baker; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Bill Marmion; Mr Vincent Catania; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Joe Francis; Mr Chris Tallentire; Ms Simone McGurk

I want to make a few more points. The third part of the select committee's inquiry is into the RSPCA's use of its powers. Some committee members are upset about the RSPCA's use of its powers. If members read transcripts of the inquiry and the carrying-on of Hon Nigel Hallett and Hon Paul Brown, they will see that they are upset by the fact that the RSPCA has a prosecutorial function. I think they are upset about the RSPCA, full stop, but they are especially upset that it has this prosecutorial function. If that prosecutorial function is being abused and misused and the RSPCA is so vexatious and is behaving so badly, as those members of the committee allege—that is what they allege, if members care to read the transcripts—why is it that, of the 22 prosecutions it launched in 2013–14, not one was unsuccessful? It prosecuted 22 people or organisations and not one single prosecution was unsuccessful. In 2014–15 it launched 23 prosecutions and, again, not a single one was unsuccessful. Every single prosecution resulted in a finding of guilty, so if the prosecution function is being misused and all these people are being falsely prosecuted, as these guys allege, why is it that they are all being found guilty?

In other words, those committee members have no evidence to back their claims. They just do not like the RSPCA. They have had constituents coming into their electorate offices, probably members of the Liberal or National Parties, saying, "They've conducted an inspection on our property. They've had a look at some of our horses or cattle, and we don't like it", so those members have used their position in the other house to launch an inquiry into the organisation because they do not like it. That is why. I hope the Premier is in his office listening, because he has allowed this to happen.

What has happened? Can members imagine if the Director of Public Prosecutions had a 100 per cent successful prosecution record? Can members imagine if any other organisation with the capacity to prosecute in Western Australia, such as local governments or the Department of Fisheries, had a 100 per cent success record? We would laud them and say, "My goodness, they are brilliant at the job they do." In this case, the Liberal and National Parties have said, "This is shocking. We will launch an inquiry into this organisation. It is doing such a good job that we will launch an inquiry into it and abuse its members before the committee." That is what this government has allowed to happen. I will not accept this rubbish that the upper house is responsible and is somehow an independent entity from the Liberal and National Parties. As far as I know, its members get preselected by members of the Liberal and National Parties. As far as I know, they go before the state council for sign-off and what have you. This government has allowed this good organisation to be bashed around the head by Liberal and National Party members who have bullied and intimidated its members.

I will now refer to some public documents that members will have seen. The RSPCA, following the hearings that took place with this upper house committee, was forced to write to members of the house—I received a letter—and the Chairman of the Select Committee into the Operations of The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Western Australia (Inc). There is one other point I might make in this context: a select committee is inquiring into this issue. We have not launched a select committee into Indigenous disadvantage. We have not launched a select committee into the jobs situation in Western Australia. We have not launched a select committee into the future of the mining industry and how we might diversify it, but this government has launched a select committee into an organisation that receives on an annual basis \$500 000 out of a total budget of \$30 billion. This government has seen fit to launch a select committee into an organisation that gets no more than a drop in a swimming pool of the total budget of the state of Western Australia. It has not launched a select committee inquiry into any of those other issues. I will admit today that the Leader of the National Party raised my visit to Warralang, and I did say that some of those issues, including the housing situation in that community, could be fixed fairly quickly if a person had some political will. I said it would take me a week to make a decision to fix that, and it would. I do not resile from that statement one iota. However, the Leader of the National Party raised an important point: there is extraordinary disadvantage amongst Indigenous people and Indigenous communities across the state. Where is the select committee into that? The Premier has said he will close 150 of them, and has called, without evidence, numerous men in those communities paedophiles. Where is the select committee into the disadvantage faced by Indigenous communities? This government has not launched one of those inquiries; it just says that it will close down those communities. However, it has launched an inquiry into an organisation that receives half a million dollars a year from the state government and, for that money, carries out the prosecutorial function and the education function that the state would otherwise have to carry out. The members of the Liberal and National Parties are geniuses for allowing that to happen.

The RSPCA was forced to put into writing its concerns about the select committee hearings and the behaviour and treatment that its members received before those hearings. It wrote to the chair of the committee, Hon Rick Mazza, on two occasions, both on 13 September, about the fact that RSPCA WA representatives were not given a reasonable opportunity to respond to questions. The letter referred to the RSPCA being uncomfortable with the framing of the lines of questioning and that it is concerned that some of the questions were directed at a specific case that is currently the subject of legal proceedings. These were the actions of some of the Liberal and National Party members on this committee. These are the sorts of things that were alleged.

Extract from Hansard

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The second letter reports that the members of the RSPCA were not given the opportunity to rebut allegations made by members of the committee. They were given neither the opportunity to have access to relevant documents raised during an examination by a member of the committee, nor a reasonable opportunity to respond to some of the allegations made by members of the committee. This is not some rogue organisation writing this letter. This is the RSPCA writing letters of complaint about the way that the hearings were conducted. It then wrote to some members of Parliament—I certainly received a letter and I think others members did too—on 15 September 2015. I will quote from this letter, which is a damning indictment on this inquiry —

RSPCA WA is deeply concerned with being the subject of a Parliamentary Inquiry that we believe has no valid basis. Further, the Inquiry has provided a public platform for a small number of organisations with vested interests (along with individuals who are being, or have been, investigated for animal cruelty) to make false and misleading allegations about us. This is potentially damaging to our good reputation in the community.

That is a damning indictment on the inquiry launched by this government. The letter also refers to some of the statistics on what the RSPCA has achieved in the 2013–14 financial year. I will run through them so that members know exactly what this organisation does. The letter states —

RSPCA WA received 20,749 calls to the cruelty line.

Inspectors conducted 6,113 investigations, involving more than 11,000 animals.

This resulted in 22 successful prosecutions under the Animal Welfare Act 2002.

Therefore, only 0.36% of investigations led to prosecutions in 2013/14—all prosecutions were successful.

Later in the letter it states —

Despite concerns that the Inquiry is founded on misconceptions being promoted by a small number of individuals and groups, we respect the Parliament of Western Australia. We provided a detailed Submission and attended last week's hearing in good faith. We were therefore dismayed to be subjected to a style of questioning that did not provide us with an opportunity to provide the Committee with the best possible evidence on key issues.

Our specific concerns regarding process relate to Standing Orders 181(a) and 181(e) of the Legislative Council Standing Orders. The Standing Orders provide for witnesses to have a reasonable opportunity to rebut allegations of criminal, improper or unethical conduct and also to be afforded the benefit of access to relevant documents during an examination. We have since found it necessary to raise these matters with the Committee Chair, the Hon. Rick Mazza MLC, and to notify the President of the Legislative Council, the Hon. Barry House MLC, and the Clerk of the Legislative Council, Mr Nigel Pratt.

In other words, the Western Australian branch of this respected, worldwide organisation has had to go to those lengths to defend and protect itself against some of the behaviours and allegations being made about it before this select committee that the Liberal and National Parties have set up in this Parliament.

What is more, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals—it has said this publicly—has had to use its scarce resources in this effort. There is no doubt that it has engaged legal counsel, although I do not know that for a fact. This would have been a very expensive exercise for this organisation. There is no doubt that when some government members stand and try to profess that they are friends of the RSPCA, they will mention the fact that the government gives it half a million dollars a year. That is half a million dollars out of a \$9 million budget the government uses for animal welfare services, as it puts it. It is covered by tens of thousands of donors and supporters of the RSPCA. The government provides that tiny little bit out of a budget of \$9 million it has for animal welfare services. For that tiny little bit of money, the government has launched a select inquiry into one of the most respected organisations in the world. What is next? Will the Salvos be its next target? Will the Red Cross be its next target? Is it the next one the government will go after? Will the World Wildlife Fund be next? What respected worldwide organisation will next be the subject of an inquiry, and abuse and bullying from Liberal and National Party members? What will be next, simply because some government members do not like them?

There is no evidence of any impropriety, there is no evidence of any corruption and there is no evidence of any misuse of money; there are no claims of any of those things. The claims I have read before this committee relate to some people who have been subject to an investigation. We read in the RSPCA's advice that in 2013–14, its inspectors conducted 6 113 investigations involving more than 11 000 animals. If members asked me, I would

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say that is a good service to the state. If the RSPCA was not doing it, the expectation under any reasonable government would be that the government has to do it. In other words, we have a non-government organisation that saves taxpayers a fortune and the government's response to that is to launch an inquiry into it. It is frankly disgraceful that it would do that.

Our objection is that the inquiry was established on spurious grounds. There is no evidence of any corruption or impropriety. I have not seen any evidence of extremism; some members opposite will probably allege that. The RSPCA has a policy position whereby it does not like live export—it is an organisation for all creatures, great and small—but it accepts that it occurs and it wants to improve the conditions of sheep and cattle that are subject to live export. I think that is a reasonable position.

Dr A.D. Buti: That is what the government reckons too, so why is it complaining?

Mr M. McGOWAN: Because the Liberal and National Parties, apparently, do not like the RSPCA. The Premier should resign his vice-patronship.

Dr A.D. Buti: Resign his premiership!

Mr M. McGOWAN: That is one argument that could be made!

One member of the committee said that the inquiry is necessary because there was no evidence that extremism had not permeated the RSPCA.

Several members interjected.

Mr M. McGOWAN: As members know, many farmers are members of the RSPCA. Many members of the community are members of the RSPCA. I am a member of the RSPCA; I am a strong supporter of the RSPCA. I grew up in a family who loved animals and wanted to care for them. If we do not care for them, no-one else will. We live in a society in which we are wealthy enough, we have the right morality and we have the right attitudes that we should support an organisation such as this. We are not a poor state and we have people who deeply care about these issues. For the government to launch a witch-hunt on this organisation is disgraceful. When members opposite say, “It’s not us; it’s the upper house”, just remember that every single member of the government voted in favour of this inquiry. The Leader of the Upper House, the Minister for Education, voted in favour of this inquiry. The Minister for Agriculture and Food called for this inquiry. The Minister for Mental Health in the upper house voted for this inquiry. If the Premier wanted to stop it, a range of ministers in his cabinet are members of the upper house and they could have exercised their authority. Unfortunately, they did not do that, so now the RSPCA is in this very unfortunate position. I know it does not want to be in this position. It is an unfortunate position for a volunteer organisation of this stature to be in, whereby in one state in Australia it is subject to this sort of vilification and vituperation. I say to the government that it is not too late to disband this select committee and to call off this witch-hunt and do the right thing by the RSPCA. I urge every single member and supporter of the RSPCA around Western Australia to send a message to the Liberal and National Parties that this inquiry is a disgrace. It should never have occurred and the government should call it off now—do the right thing by animals in our community.

MS L.L. BAKER (Maylands) [4.36 pm]: We moved a motion to condemn the Liberal, National and Shooters and Fishers Parties for their attacks on the RSPCA. I will put on the record the specific terms of reference for this farcical nonsense that is being called an inquiry. They are —

... to inquire into the operations of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Western Australia (Inc), including an examination of —

- (a) its funding from the government;
- (b) its objective; and
- (c) the use of its powers.

Looking at that, I want to comment on to the vision, mission and objectives of the RSPCA before I go on. The RSPCA’s vision in Western Australia is that all animals be respected as sentient beings that are treated with dignity, compassion and respect. What does the government have against that? What does it not like about that? Does it not like the fact that animals are being treated as sentient, or with dignity, or with compassion, or with respect? Which one of those gets up government members’ noses the most? The mission of the RSPCA is to improve the welfare of animals through leadership, collaboration with stakeholders and the provision of quality services. Do members know who the stakeholders are? They are farmers and the industry. In its broadest sense, the stakeholders are agribusinesses that engage in animal husbandry and the production of animals in an economic supply chain. The RSPCA works really hard to make those connections. What are the objects of the RSPCA? All RSPCA members abide by these seven objectives —

Extract from Hansard

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- To prevent cruelty to animals by ensuring the enforcement of existing laws at federal and state level.
- To procure the passage of such amending or new legislation as is necessary for the protection of animals.
- To develop and promote policies for the humane treatment of animals that reflect contemporary values and scientific knowledge.
- To educate the community with regard to the humane treatment of animals.
- To engage with relevant stakeholders to improve animal welfare.

There it is again, I might add—relevant stakeholders. The final objectives are —

- To sustain an intelligent public opinion regarding animal welfare.
- To operate facilities for the care and protection of animals.

Quite frankly, I do not think that is that sinister. If we had a government that respected the dignity of all creatures, great and small, it would support the RSPCA, not attack it with this horrendous witch-hunt.

Let us look at the make-up of the board of the RSPCA—these outrageous alleged animal activists. Lynne Bradshaw is the founder of a medical technology consultancy; not really what we would expect of an activist. Ian Cowie is a chief executive officer of a local government authority. Heidi Shields is a team leader in the petroleum industry. Megan Dare is a procurement manager for the state government. Jeanette de Landgraft is a farmer and shire councillor; she is a well-known activist, I say sarcastically. She is a farmer and member of the council of the Shire of Lake Grace. Michelle Mackenzie is an executive director for the state government. Giselle di San Marzano is a senior lawyer. The list of appointed members includes financial executives, CEOs of iron ore companies, resource industry consultants and a couple more lawyers. Renata Paliskis, who was first appointed in 2015, is an interesting addition. Renata is a former chief executive of the Western Australian Meat Industry Authority; I think she would bring a fair amount of understanding and knowledge of the livestock business with her to this so-called radical board of the RSPCA that this government seems so intent on disbanding and discrediting. It is absolutely appalling nonsense. The government should be deeply embarrassed about attacking this organisation. It is one of the oldest charities in Western Australia and Australia. It is highly respected and has hundreds and hundreds of members, and millions of contacts on Facebook.

As for the \$500 000 the government puts into the RSPCA, I think it is worthwhile for me to talk about the inspectorate function it funds. I have in front of me the submission the RSPCA put to this ridiculous, mock inquiry—this witch-hunt. The submission reads —

The Inspectorate provides education, compliance, and enforcement services under the Act, which is administered by DAFWA.

I will talk about the Department of Agriculture and Food of Western Australia in a minute. The submission continues —

The Inspectors conduct their work in the field following up on cruelty reports, conducting animal rescues and educating the community on the appropriate care of animals ... the Inspectorate operates the animal cruelty call service, which operates 24 hours per day, 7 days per week.

The inspectorate covers the state; from Albany and Bunbury in the south west, Kalgoorlie in the east, and Broome, Geraldton and Karratha and the Kimberley in the north. The submission continues —

The Inspectorate incorporates a Chief Inspector, Deputy Chief Inspector, six Metropolitan Inspectors, four Regional Inspectors, one Administrative Support Officer and one Education Coordinator.

That is the inspectorate function for which the RSPCA receives a specific-purpose grant of \$500 000 from the state under a memorandum of understanding and a grant agreement with DAFWA. However, a true costing of the expenditure on enforcement far exceeds that amount. The actual cost of the inspectorate function is currently in excess of \$3 million. That includes neither the pro bono legal work provided by law firms and barristers nor the cost of the infrastructure like kennels, cat facilities and vet clinics. The grant money that this government generously provides, that is now under scrutiny and has a question mark over it, equates to 16 per cent of the actual expenditure, and this government has had the audacity to tie this organisation up for nearly a year! It is disgusting by anyone's measure. Do members know what will happen during the time the RSPCA is attempting to defend itself from these scurrilous claims and outrageous assault on its reputation? Animals will go without being attended to. Cruelty will not be investigated. There will be a direct impact on the possibility of this organisation continuing to deliver its operational services because of what the government is doing to it. The government should rue the day it allowed this to happen.

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But let us just look at why the government is having this stupid inquiry. Were specific complaints raised to justify it? What was happening? It is my impression, having looked at the publicly available transcripts of evidence given to the committee and prepared by Hansard, that clearly there are two cases that this committee of assassins is using to try to undermine the RSPCA. The two cases I refer to are that of the horse shade in Greenough and a cat hoarding case that is particularly close to my heart because it is in my electorate. I make it quite clear that when the director general of DAFWA was asked about this, and, indeed, forced to apologise to the chief inspector of the RSPCA, he stated that DAFWA took the information it received at face value and formed an opinion. I am sorry, but this is DAFWA, which is meant to be a regulator, failing dismally at procedural fairness. The government has allowed, without question, the complaints by two aggrieved people who have been accused of breaches of the Animal Welfare Act, as has this ridiculous select committee, and allowed this inquiry to progress.

I do not even know where to start in describing the history of the cat hoarding case, but if members would like a little information, they can find it in the evidence given to the committee. I asked my staff to find out how long the office of the member for Maylands has been dealing with this issue, and it goes back well before my time; I think the first entry was in 2004. Complaints were levelled against a particular household for having an excessive amount of cats, and for feeding pigeons and other birds. I will refer to a letter from a former councillor on the City of Bayswater. Back in 2004, while this person was a councillor, he was approached by two neighbours of a particular household regarding a problem of offensive odours coming from the house. The adjacent properties were very distressed by what was happening. The councillor visited the house. The peculiar smell was not always evident—usually it was at night—and further investigation by the City of Bayswater's security officers thought there might be something dead in the house, but could not find any reason for it. The councillor pursued the matter and found that doves and pigeons were being fed; hundreds and hundreds of them would line up on the powerlines at the front and back of the house on a daily basis. They would descend into the backyard and eat the grain that was being fed to them, creating a very bad odour. The council's senior health officer at the time, James Riley, was asked to attend. It was thought that the odour was coming from a putrid duck pond that was not being cleaned, but it seems that that was not the cause because it was cleaned subsequent to that complaint. The pipes were checked and there were no leaks, but the smell continued. Eventually, the senior health officer gained access to the house and found it to be in a disgusting state. There were hundreds of cats and other animals inside, and the floor coverings and soft furnishings were destroyed and ordered to be removed. That all happened as a consequence of a neighbour reporting the intolerable situation to the City of Bayswater. As a result of that, someone who now appears to be a very vexatious resident took out a restraining order against the neighbour.

The result of the court case that eventuated was a decision in favour of the neighbour and against the vexatious person, who then declared herself bankrupt to avoid the fines. The other neighbour could not tolerate the situation any longer and sold his house and moved to an address unknown. A man named John Grant purchased one of the properties next to this premises but moved after a few months. He still owns the house but cannot rent it because of the smell and the rats; tenants leave after a few weeks. The lady who lived adjacent to the house in question has had her roof damaged so badly by the pigeons and doves pecking away at the mortar under the ridge cap that she has been forced to pay \$1 400 to repair this—she is a pensioner—and she is also considering selling her house. This letter was signed in 2014—it is a historic record—but my records go back to 2004 and substantiate these kinds of complaints.

We are talking about someone who has had a longstanding issue to deal with. I am not a psychiatrist, so it would be inappropriate for me to label this person as a hoarder because I do not have the correct medical training. However, when the RSPCA eventually entered that premises a few years ago, there were over 100 cats there. This vexatious claim was laid against the RSPCA on the strength of this woman's testimony that the RSPCA had done the wrong thing. This has a history of over 10 years. It is not something that just popped up overnight and the RSPCA thought it would go and pick on a lady living in my electorate. This is a 10-year history of these kinds of complaints being alleged and nobody doing anything about them. There is absolutely no justification for the claims that due process was not followed. One-hundred-and-forty submissions have been made during this witch-hunt, and not one of them has substantiated claims that the RSPCA has done the wrong thing.

I would like to tell members a bit about why the RSPCA is struggling with the conduct of the Select Committee into the Operations of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Western Australia (Inc) and why it feels that it has to write to members of Parliament to express its concerns in relation to the Department of Agriculture and Food directly. The chief inspector of the RSPCA was written to by DAFWA in 2013. I will read out the paragraph that Rob Delane signed. DAFWA wrote to Amanda Swift, the chief inspector of the RSPCA, and said in this letter dated 18 April —

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Based on the information provided by the RSPCA recently, you appear to have failed to meet your statutory obligations under section 41(2) and may also have exceeded your powers in other areas. My concerns relate to some of the actions that you have taken in relation to animals seized from Ms Marianna May on 19 December 2012.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms L.L. BAKER: Remember that paragraph because this document was FOI-ed from the Department of Agriculture and Food by the RSPCA's lawyer. What they found was very interesting. The actual letter received by the chief inspector is different in a very fundamental way from the letter it got back when they FOI-ed. In this letter, a different paragraph is included, and it is quite defamatory and horrendous in my view. The extra paragraph in this mysterious letter, by the way, was FOI-ed by the legal team that is looking after Ms Marianna May and the cats. They got a copy of the letter. No wonder they thought it was okay to beat up on the inspector. The director general of DAFWA says —

In future, unless you —

“You” being the inspector —

demonstrate a high regard for your responsibility under the Act and act accordingly, I may need to consider the options available to me in relation to your appointment. Please note that if you are found to have acted contrary to the legislation, it is possible that you could be subject to charges for disobeying a statute law.

That paragraph is completely missing from the letter that went to Ms Swift—a completely different letter! If that is not grounds for serious misconduct by a department for bullying and threatening behaviour and bad practice and bad process, I do not know what is.

Let me read the subsequent letter of 12 January this year that DAFWA's director general, Rob Delane, then wrote to Ms Swift, two years after she had received that dreadful, bullying, awful, accusatory letter. He writes —

Mr Pierre has now ... reviewed your complaint, and has provided me with three recommendations:

1. That DAFWA agree we ought to have provided you with an opportunity to respond to the issues that gave rise to the 18 April 2013 letter being written;
2. That DAFWA apologises to you for any distress caused by shortcomings in our investigative process; and
3. That DAFWA withdraws the 18 April 2013 letter on the basis of the evidence you provided in your complaint of 17 September 2014

I have agreed to implement all three of Mr Pierre's recommendations. To that end, I apologise for any distress DAFWA may have caused you by the process we undertook in attempting to resolve the complaint against you. I agree that our process was deficient in that we should have discussed our concerns with you informally prior to writing to you. Please rest assured that DAFWA has amended its processes in relation to similar matters ...

Blah, blah, blah! Why is the department not being called before an inquiry? Why is the department not being told it has to answer accusations of gross misconduct, bullying and abuse? This is absolutely unconscionable. We wonder why the RSPCA turns up at this inquiry, and the chief inspector, Amanda Swift, is again put in front of a panel of parliamentarians and bullied and attacked again. This is not okay. The member opposite can look at me like that, but he should read the transcript. He was not in the room when this questioning occurred. He should have been there and seen these people being attacked. It is not okay. It was so bad that I assume the committee went in camera. After it came out of camera, one of the members was forced to apologise for their behaviour. The member opposite cannot defend the committee's actions in that instance at all. I will not take that interjection. It is not substantiated in any form.

This inquiry has been pulled together on the strength of complaints made by the person I have just referred to. My office has on record complaints that started 10 years ago. Finally, something was done. When investigations were continued, with no evidence whatsoever, just the strength of a vexatious constituent, DAFWA attacked the RSPCA, and next we see a farcical committee trying to throw bombs at the RSPCA—trying to destroy the RSPCA. Well, I have got news for them; they do not have a chance. This is an organisation that has a 70-year history of performing in the interests of the Western Australian community and the animals that we all keep, whether we be farmers or have companion or performance animals. No matter what their involvement is with animals, people will have heard of and have respect for the RSPCA. They must have respect for the RSPCA.

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There is further evidence of what needs to be done. It will not come about by attacking the RSPCA but by providing appropriate funding so that the RSPCA can do the job that the government has asked it to do effectively—to increase its coverage of animal welfare issues. I am aware that in Broome and in the West Kimberley proposals have been given to the government around strategies that are required urgently, because of the higher-than-average incidence of severe animal neglect and cruelty that have been found after working in consultation with organisations such as Saving Animals from Euthanasia and other inspectors and community relation officers on the ground in the Shires of Derby–West Kimberley, Broome and the like. There is an urgent need for the RSPCA to be better funded to do that work. It is simply not possible to cover an area and prosecute the inspectorate functions as well as it should be done with \$500 000. The amount of \$500 000 will just not cop it.

The final issue I want to raise is puppy farming; something that has become more and more topical in the community. There is an urgent need, if we want to stop the mass breeding of puppies and the supply chain of puppies illegally bred in intensive farming environments into pet shops in Western Australia, to fund the function for that to be somewhere. We have to fund the investigative function, the follow-up and the prosecutorial aspects of that. We actually have to make a difference in this matter. I am smiling as I say this because it is so incredulous: it is clear that the Department of Agriculture and Food Western Australia would not be capable of doing it. DAFWA's mission statement quite rightly states that it is for the economic strengthening of agribusiness in this state—and that is exactly how it should be. The Department of Agriculture and Food should be about maximising the economic viability of agribusiness. It is not, however, about animal welfare; it is clearly not about animal welfare. Look at the number of prosecutions conducted since this farcical arrangement was put in place by the Premier back in 2011. This incredibly important community work was taken away from local government and put into the Department of Agriculture and Food. Look at the prosecutions. There has been one small prosecution, which was a case handed over from the previous animal welfare inspectorate, and one failed case. There has been one very small success and one failed case. It has been four years. This will never happen. The prosecutions will not be forthcoming because the Department of Agriculture and Food has to keep farmers onside and it has to support agribusiness. That is the way it should be. Take animal welfare and the protection of animals out of the remit of an organisation that is hopelessly conflicted.

I do not understand why this is such a difficult message to understand. Developing countries around the world have heard the message clearly. They have taken the administration and application of the laws around animal welfare away from agribusiness and placed it into a much more independent regime, into a stronger place where it can stand outside, with industry input, and monitor what is going on and plan effective interventions. The government should have an animal welfare plan for the state of Western Australia. It should manage what is going on far more intelligently in a conflict-free environment.

I cannot comprehend why the government thinks it is okay to attempt to victimise and further denigrate in any way the reputation of one of Western Australia's oldest and most respected charities. The government will pay for it. There is massive support for the RSPCA out there, and the government has entered into this terrain at its own risk. I hope it comes back to bite the government fairly and squarely where it hurts. Stop this witch-hunt now. Move to strengthen the RSPCA. Give it more support and the opportunity to do what it is meant to be doing under the memorandum of understanding it has with DAFWA.

DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale) [5.05 pm]: The Leader of the Opposition and the member for Maylands have talked about the absurdity of the inquiry of the Select Committee into the Operations of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Western Australia (Inc) and the behaviour of some members of the committee in the investigation into a very well regarded and well respected organisation, the RSPCA. Before I come to the specifics of the inquiry, it is interesting to consider, firstly, why the committee was established in the first place, and, secondly, the behaviour of some members of the committee of inquiry. The behaviour of two members in particular, Hon Nigel Hallett and Hon Paul Brown, has come into question. The Leader of the Opposition read out a letter that all of us received from the president of the RSPCA regarding their behaviour, but I want to look at the possibility of the conflict of interest of Hon Nigel Hallett and Hon Paul Brown.

I do not want to concentrate on Hon Nigel Hallett the person, I refer to his annual return. All members would be familiar with annual returns. In his annual return, Hon Nigel Hallett states under "Income from trade, profession or vocation" that he is a farmer, a director and trustee of the Hallett Farm Trust, and also a director of "Aqua Salts". Hon Paul Brown's annual return, which members are obliged to comply with according to the Members of Parliament (Financial Interests) Act 1992, mentions under "Income from trade, profession or vocation" that he is a director—I think it says, P&R Brown Nominees P/L—and that he is also director of another proprietary limited company, which I think states "Maywell P/L". I cannot read the writing, so I may not be correct in that. If members go to the National Party's website, it states this about Hon Paul Brown —

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Paul joined The Nationals WA Parliamentary team following the March 2013 election. He will represent the Agricultural Region in the Legislative Council.

He has been involved in business and agriculture all of his life and is a veteran of the live export industry, having worked for various live export companies throughout Australia and the world.

Mr P. Papalia: These guys put that clown in here!

Dr A.D. BUTI: The website continues —

In these roles, Paul was in charge of shipping livestock to markets in the Middle East and Asia.

He also worked for the WA Department of Agriculture.

Withdrawal of Remark

Mr R.S. LOVE: This is irrelevant to this discussion. This is a personal attack against another member of Parliament in another place. I would ask the member for Armadale to withdraw the inference he is making about Hon Paul Brown.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms L.L. Baker): I am sorry; it is not a personal attack. My understanding is that the member for Armadale is reading from a website. There have been no personal slights that I have heard; it is merely being read out.

Mr R.S. Love: What about what the member for Warnbro said?

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Warnbro, did you say something offensive?

Mr P. Papalia: I said he could be a “clown”. Is that offensive?

The ACTING SPEAKER: It probably is. You need to withdraw that.

Mr P. PAPALIA: I withdraw.

The ACTING SPEAKER: The member for Moore can rest assured that that is not a point of order and he can rest assured that if there is any personal imputation, I will stop the member.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The member for Armadale did not just read out information from the website; he openly said that there was a conflict of interest and he used publicly available information. There is no conflict of interest.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Moore, that is not a point of order. The member for Armadale is entitled to give his opinion on this issue.

Debate Resumed

Dr A.D. BUTI: I only read out what is on Hon Paul Brown’s website. I will go on —

Paul is currently —

Not previously —

co-owner and Director of Jennacubbine Livestock Services, an agricultural company that provides services throughout the live sheep and cattle export industry. He also co-owns an AQIS accredited live cattle export depot in South Hedland, which was heavily affected by the Federal Government’s suspension of live export in 2011.

I believe that the membership of Hon Paul Brown on this committee —

Point of Order

Mr R.S. LOVE: The member is continuing to attack a member of another house for carrying out his parliamentary duties.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Thank you; I understand that.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The member has no right to carry on this attack.

Mr M. McGOWAN: Further to the point of order, the motion relates to attacks by members of the Liberal and National Parties on the RSPCA. The member for Moore is raising a debating point. Members regularly raise issues in this house about the conduct of others. I think the points that the member for Armadale is making are very relevant to this debate.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I just remind members that it is my job to protect members from personal attacks and the like, and I will do that.

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Mr W.R. MARMION: The Leader of the Opposition is correctly reading the motion, which does mention parties. However, the member for Armadale is not talking about members; he is talking about an upper house member of Parliament, and he has to be very, very careful.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I think I just said that, minister. I appreciate you clarifying what the Chair said. Be careful, member.

Debate Resumed

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is interesting. All I am reading is publicly available information. I am reading what is on the website. Of course all members have to be very careful to not engage in a conflict-of-interest situation.

With regards to what Hon Paul Brown has declared on his annual return, what he has also made publicly available on the National Party website places in question his ability to carry out his duties on this select committee. I believe that his membership of this committee should be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges. How can a member of Parliament sit on a select committee that is engaging in an investigation of an organisation that has a stated position on the livestock export industry in which he has an economic interest? It is absurd. It is absurd for any member of this house to try to silence me in stating the obvious about the potential conflict of interest that needs to be examined. How Hon Paul Brown can remain on this committee is beyond any measure.

Mr V.A. CATANIA interjected.

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is interesting that the member for North West Central should even interject at all. He should be a supporter of the RSPCA because I am sure it even protects rats. He is the last person who should interject.

Point of Order

Mr R.S. LOVE: This is turning into a series of personal attacks against members of the National Party and it should stop.

Debate Resumed

Dr A.D. BUTI: I have made my point on the position of Hon Paul Brown, in particular, and Hon Nigel Hallett. I think they need to have a very close examination of themselves and their continued presence on this committee. The matter should be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I am not sure that you should continue talking about referring things to the procedure committee.

Dr A.D. BUTI: This committee —

Mr V.A. CATANIA interjected.

Dr A.D. BUTI: It is absurd that the member for North West Central would seek to interject when we are talking about anything relating to the proper procedure of Parliament when we know that his record of loyalty and being a person of great character is an absolute disgrace.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member, I refer you back to the motion.

Dr A.D. BUTI: I make it clear that I am not taking the interjections.

The select committee's inquiry into the RSPCA is nothing more than a witch-hunt. It is an incredible waste of time and an abuse of parliamentary privilege. There have been numerous examples of bullying. It is an absolute disgrace. When the Leader of the Opposition was on his feet, he said that the upper house decided on this. He does not want a bar of it. He has run away from it. The Leader of the Opposition is a man of character and integrity. He does not want to be associated with this inquiry, which the executive has agreed to, so we cannot run away from it. It is an absolute disgrace that this committee was ever established. Why would we establish an inquiry to investigate the RSPCA? In a survey, 97 per cent of Western Australians said that they have a positive view of the RSPCA. The Leader of the Opposition went through the history of the RSPCA. I am sure that most members on the other side would agree that it does a good job. When it was mooted that this parliamentary inquiry would be established, the Premier himself stated that he was not in favour of it. The Premier, who is a vice-patron of the RSPCA, said that it does a good job. A report from the ABC dated 7 May 2015 states —

But Mr Barnett today cast significant doubt over the inquiry going ahead.

“I think the RSPCA does a very good job, it’s a highly respected organisation ...

“Its care for abandoned and injured animals and shelters ... Lyn —

The Premier's wife —

and I have been supporters of that for a long time,” he told ABC 720 Perth Mornings.

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“However, I am aware sometimes farmers feel threatened and even intimidated by RSPCA inspectors ... there are clashes that occur there and there are some policy issues.

“We will continue to support the work they do.”

This is the Premier supporting in public the work of the RSPCA. Why would a select committee established by the upper house—the other place—be wasting parliamentary time and resources, not to mention the resources of the RSPCA, in such an inquiry? It is nothing more than a witch-hunt. It is something that we would expect of the Tea Party in the USA. It is probably something that Donald Trump would think is a good idea. I would not think there would be such extreme views in the Western Australian political system, in which of course we have differences between the Liberal, Labor and National Parties, as those espoused by the Tea Party in the USA and by people such as Donald Trump. This would equate to them. The Tea Party would love something like this.

Where are the grounds and the justification for this inquiry to be established? The Leader of the Opposition quoted someone from the upper house—I am not sure who it was—who said they do not know that the members have not abused their powers; therefore, we will have an inquiry and hope that we do find some abuse of power! How absurd that we would seek to instigate a witch-hunt to find something for which we have no evidence has occurred! There is no evidence that the RSPCA has gone beyond its powers, there is no evidence that it has abused its powers and there is no evidence that it has gone on a folly of its own. This comes down to the fact that in large measure it has a policy position against live exports but it knows that it exists and it wants to ensure that it is done as humanely as possible. We always hear the farmers, the National Party and the Liberal Party espouse the view that they will ensure that animals that are subject to live export are treated as humanely as possible, which is the position of the RSPCA. Why would we hold an inquiry into that to try to argue that the RSPCA is an animal welfare activist group? What an absolute joke! The RSPCA is a historically respected organisation that has the support of the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition. I would bet my house that the Minister for Corrective Services believes that the RSPCA is a good organisation, because it would ensure that if Rex were subject to any cruelty, he would be looked after. It would ensure that that is the case. We still do not have a legitimate justification for the establishment of this inquiry.

Mr V.A. Catania: That is a debate for them.

Dr A.D. BUTI: The member had a debate. Are they going to find a justification post facto? Are they going to hopefully find some evidence in the inquiry?

In financial year 2013–14, RSPCA Western Australia received 20 749 calls to the cruelty line—over 20 000 calls—and inspectors conducted 6 113 investigations involving more than 11 000 animals, which resulted in 22 successful prosecutions under the Animal Welfare Act 2002. Only 0.36 per cent of investigations led to prosecutions in 2013–14. All the prosecutions were successful, so the RSPCA did not engage zealously in prosecutions; every prosecution was successful. Prosecutions were undertaken for only 0.36 per cent of investigations, so any argument or accusation that the RSPCA is a zealous organisation is not backed up by the statistics, the figures and the empirical evidence.

[Member’s time extended.]

Dr A.D. BUTI: At the time the inquiry was established, in 2013–14, there had been 22 successful prosecutions and zero unsuccessful prosecutions. For 2014–15 to date, there have been 23 successful prosecutions and zero unsuccessful prosecutions. The RSPCA has a much more successful prosecution record than the Department of Agriculture and Food. What are the arguments that justify this inquiry being established? What are those arguments? There are none. There is no empirical evidence that justifies this inquiry being established. The Western Australian Parliament has reached a new level if it is going to hold inquiries on the basis that there is no proof that abuse has occurred. We are holding an inquiry unless it can be 100 per cent proved that no abuse has occurred. The RSPCA has come pretty close—there is no evidence at all that it has gone beyond its mandate and objectives established by William Wilberforce in the United Kingdom, and in Western Australia in 1892. The RSPCA’s objective is to ensure that animals are not subjected to cruelty and to ensure that animals are accorded the living conditions they deserve in any decent civilised society and in accordance with the law. That is why we have the animal welfare law.

There are members on the committee who do not necessarily support attacking the RSPCA. The RSPCA is one of the most respected organisations in Western Australia. It is pretty hard to find an organisation of which 97 per cent of the population has a positive view. We as politicians would die for an approval rating that was half of that figure. We are wasting money. We could have all the interjections we like, but the interjections are just trying to deny the possibility and the probability that this committee inquiry was set up for reasons that are clouded by people’s political and commercial interests. It is a shame that members in this house are trying to shoot the messenger. Hon Paul Brown on his own website refers to his current business interests in the live export trade. He states that he was affected by the federal government’s suspension of the trade in 2011.

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Mr Mark McGowan; Ms Lisa Baker; Dr Tony Buti; Mr Shane Love; Acting Speaker; Mr Paul Papalia; Mr Bill Marmion; Mr Vincent Catania; Ms Rita Saffioti; Mr Joe Francis; Mr Chris Tallentire; Ms Simone McGurk

Hon Paul Brown is sitting on a committee inquiring into an organisation that has the stated position that it opposes the livestock export trade. How is that not a conflict of interest? I do not know. The other day, the Minister for Local Government talked about the Lord Mayor having a possible conflict of interest. How is this not a conflict of interest? I am very proud to say that the RSPCA is a fantastic organisation that has a fantastic objective to protect the welfare of animals. We should not have a committee that is out to try to destroy, attack and bully it, and we should not have a committee with members who have economic interests that are affected by the RSPCA's stated policy on the live export industry. The RSPCA does not have the power to stop the export of livestock, so I am not sure why people are up in arms over it; the RSPCA is stating its position. I would be quite surprised if an organisation such as the RSPCA was not against livestock exports.

How can we have members who have an economic position in a company engaged in live sheep and cattle exports on a committee inquiring into an organisation that has a stated position that it is opposed to such practices? If that is not a potential conflict of interest that should be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges, I am not sure what should be referred to that committee.

This is nothing more than a witch-hunt and an abuse of parliamentary processes. There have been numerous examples of bullying. The Leader of the House has run away from the inquiry. The Premier supports the RSPCA and is a vice-patron, as is the Leader of the Opposition, and the Governor is the patron. It is a very well respected organisation that has a 100 per cent successful prosecution rate, at least over the last two years. When the RSPCA takes a case to court, it has it right. Are members saying that the RSPCA should not exist or it should not engage in these prosecutions? If the prosecutions are successful, I think it means that animals have been suffering. The people who have been prosecuted have violated the law and acted contrary to a provision of the Animal Welfare Act. The RSPCA has a 100 per cent successful prosecution rate. It has received 20 000 calls and inspectors have conducted over 6 000 investigations on more than 11 000 animals, but in 2013–14 only 0.36 per cent of those investigations led to prosecutions. It does not sound like a zealous organisation or an organisation that is out of control. It sounds like an organisation that is very measured and very professional, complying with its objectives, staying within its powers and staying within its parameters, which has led to 97 per cent of the Western Australian public, according to one survey, being supportive of the organisation. There was a comment made by interjection by the Leader of the House, Hon John Day—a very seasoned parliamentary performer and a person of great character—that, “It was the upper house that decided this; don’t blame us!” He did not say, “Don’t blame us”, but that was the implication. That comment tells me that members like Hon John Day are not supportive of such a committee. We also know that the Premier has stated publicly on the ABC that he thinks the RSPCA does a great job. As the Leader of the Opposition said, what about all the other important issues that select committees have not been established for? The RSPCA has been picked on, and there are two members sitting on that committee who have agricultural interests, one of whom—if his website is to be believed—has current business interests in the live sheep and cattle export industry. How that cannot be a conflict of interest or a potential conflict of interest, I do not know; it has to at least be a potential conflict of interest. But do not take my word for it; have it referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges. That is where it should go, and if it does not, this select committee can have no credibility.

I believe Hon Bill Marmion, the member for Nedlands and Minister for Mines and Petroleum, indicated that he might make a comment on this motion. I am not sure when that will be. I will be surprised if he can ground any defence of this committee. I would find it really surprising if the minister—another member whom I believe is a person of character—could stand up and defend this select committee. It is nothing more than a witch-hunt; it is a shame and it is a disgrace, an absolute disgrace, that the resources of this Parliament are being wasted on such an inquiry. It is an absolute crime that the very precious resources of the RSPCA are having to be utilised in dealing with this inquiry. The conduct of certain members of this select committee is nothing more than harassment and bullying, which led to one of those members having to apologise to someone from the RSPCA after one hearing. That is disgraceful.

Shame on anyone who stands up in this place today to support this inquiry. They can do it; if members think they are justified, they can get up and do it, but I say shame on them if they do, because there is no justification for this inquiry and no justification for this select committee. It is an absolute disgrace and witch-hunt.

MR V.A. CATANIA (North West Central — Parliamentary Secretary) [5.33 pm]: I was not going to rise and speak to this motion, but given the commentary by members opposite, I will. I have been in this Parliament for nearly 11 years, and this is the first time I have seen members from one house attack members of another house, particularly a select committee that was formed by another house. I am not speaking about the RSPCA; I am speaking about how the houses function, and I do not believe that this motion should be presented in this house. This is a motion that is fit for the upper house, given that this select committee originated in the other house. For members opposite to character-assassinate members of that committee is unfair. Like I said, this is the first time I have seen this happen in this house, and I find it unacceptable that members from the other place do

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not have the ability to defend themselves. The upper house works a lot differently from how we work; we are party-based and it is individually based. Members are called by their names. The point is that members opposite have attacked members of a committee from the other place. I find it extraordinary that that has occurred. It is the first time it has happened since I have been in this place and the other place; never before have I heard members attacking a committee from another house.

The member for Armadale said that this should be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and Privileges. I ask the member: of which house? It can only be referred by the house from which the select committee has come or by an individual.

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The member has been here only a short time and has a lot to learn about the functions of the two houses. Members opposite clearly do not have any understanding of or respect for the two houses. This is very important; we have a system that has been around for a long time, but members opposite are going against that system. There is a difference between the Legislative Assembly and the Legislative Council.

Dr A.D. Buti: The upper house should refer it to the procedure and privileges committee.

Mr V.A. CATANIA: The member never actually said that during his speech. He never actually specified that. This is about a select committee that belongs to the other place. I know the Acting Speaker (Ms L.L. Baker) is very supportive of the RSPCA, so if we want to talk about people leaning one way or the other, Madam Acting Speaker is very supportive of the RSPCA.

Point of Order

Dr A.D. BUTI: I think the member might be casting an aspersion on the Chair, Madam Acting Speaker.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms L.L. Baker): Member, that is fine, thank you; you can sit down. You are not meant to involve the Chair.

Debate Resumed

Mr V.A. CATANIA: Okay; sorry about that, Madam Acting Speaker.

I just want to make the point that this motion reflects upon the parties and is probably too cute by half by condemning the Liberal, National and Shooters and Fishers Parties when this is about a select committee formed in the other place and composed of members from that house. It has nothing to do with the Legislative Assembly. It is quite clear that members opposite do not have any confidence in their own colleagues in the other place to raise their concerns, and I probably share that sentiment! But we have to respect the difference between the two houses. Like I said, it is remarkable that after 11 years on the hill, this is the first time I have heard and seen such disdain for our systems and the differences between the two houses. All I can say is that I think members opposite should retract this motion because it is not fit for this house.

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan) [5.38 pm]: I just want to make a short contribution to debate on this motion; there are a lot of members on this side who want to speak. I would like to specifically talk about—I know sarcasm does not work in this chamber—the outstanding contribution made by the member for North West Central.

This motion is all about exposing the hypocrisy of members of the Liberal and National Parties in this place. They go around supporting the Million Paws Walk and pretend to be friends of the RSPCA —

Several members interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: No, you can all stand and make a contribution.

However, it is designed to continually expose the hypocrisy of the Liberal and National Parties. They pretend to be the great friends of the RSPCA and then they let their colleagues off the leash to act in a way that basically attacks the RSPCA at every turn. The RSPCA is based in my electorate and I have visited it many times. The majority of people in Western Australia—98 per cent of people—would support the RSPCA and what it does. The fact that the conservative side of politics chooses to attack RSPCA members and bully and intimidate them out of doing their job is a disgrace and we need to make it public. Too many times this government has been all things to all people. Its members go to the Million Paws Walk with their little doggies, and then they are out with their other constituency saying, “That RSPCA is really, really bad. They should not be that aggressive.” This government tries to be all things to all people on this issue. Let us call it for what it is: members opposite condoning and supporting their colleagues in their attack on the RSPCA. There is an idea that members in this house have never attacked members in the other house—give me a break! The former Minister for Transport, or the previous one to that—I cannot remember which one—Hon Troy Buswell used to say things about

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Hon Ken Travers every day of the week. The Premier has said things about other members in the Legislative Council such as Hon Kate Doust. Every day of the week government members have made accusations that are far worse than what has been said today. The idea that members in this house do not provide commentary on members in the other house is absolutely ridiculous—honestly!

Dr A.D. Buti: He said they have not done it.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: He has been here for 11 years—both houses, both sides.

Dr A.D. Buti: He said it has never happened.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: It has never happened! I have been here for seven years and I have heard it said dozens of times by government members. This motion attacks parties —

Mr V.A. Catania: The motion is attacking the other house.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Members opposite can stand up and —

Several members interjected.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: Seriously! Honestly!

Mr V.A. Catania: It is an excuse to sit down. You are making a fool of yourselves.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: This is about the RSPCA. I wonder why he is concerned about the issue with animals.

This motion is exposing the hypocrisy. This issue has been around for a while and there was some discussion within our own party because we know and understand that the RSPCA does not like to enter the political debate. To tell members the truth, we were quite surprised that the RSPCA did not comment on this matter earlier. It then wrote this letter that basically outlines what the RSPCA thinks about the attack on its credibility and its operations. I am sure the letter has been read out in some detail already and I might go through a few things in it soon. Basically, it outlines how the select committee is attacking its operations and is operating in a political way. The RSPCA has accused the state parliamentary inquiry of wasting thousands of taxpayers' dollars on an insulting and politically motivated probe into its activities.

Mr V.A. Catania: Oh, dear.

Ms R. SAFFIOTI: I know that the member does not like the RSPCA; we know that because when the member spoke to the motion, he had the opportunity to defend the RSPCA but he did nothing. He defended his colleagues who are attacking the RSPCA.

This motion is about exposing this government's hypocrisy. What I cannot stand is when government members say that they are friends of the RSPCA every day of the week, and then in their party room they go for it and play to their little constituency here and there. They let their colleagues do what they want and denigrate the RSPCA just because it wants to protect animals. This is what this motion is about. Time and again this government says anything it wants to in this house: we are a friend of small business but we will increase tax; we are a friend of the agricultural industry but we will sell the Perth Market Authority and not guarantee its future; we are a friend of this and that. This government does not stick with it and have a debate in the party room to sort out these issues. As I said, the government has let the select committee attack an organisation that probably has the most credibility of any organisation in the community. This government has spent its time, through a government-dominated committee, attacking that organisation. It has used it to create suspicion about the RSPCA and its operations and to undermine its credibility. As I said, I do not want to go into too much detail because many of my colleagues want to talk and I know that members on the other side are also motivated to speak, and I do not want to repeat all the comments that were made, I am sure, by my colleagues who have spoken.

The RSPCA does a fantastic job in WA. It has limited resources and anyone who has been to its headquarters in Malaga knows what it does with the limited resources it has. This government has provoked an organisation that is very bipartisan and non-political. As I said, I was very surprised that the RSPCA had not spoken earlier. However, the method of operation by this government's committee members provoked this response by the RSPCA to all of us, which shows me just how hard this committee has pushed it.

The motion is pretty clear: this government is attacking the RSPCA and trying to undermine its credibility. The government and its members are upset that we are exposing its hypocrisy on the matter. If they had any guts, they would distance themselves from what is happening. They cannot stand up and say that they love animals and believe they should be protected, and then in any way endorse what is happening. Members opposite cannot allow what their parties have allowed, instigated and are urging to happen; it is clear hypocrisy. Members opposite should stand and support the motion or distance themselves from what their colleagues are doing.

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The ACTING SPEAKER: Minister, are you the lead speaker on this motion?

MR J.M. FRANCIS (Jandakot — Minister for Emergency Services) [5.47 pm]: I am not the lead speaker on this motion. The Minister for Mines and Petroleum representing the Minister for Agriculture and Food is the lead speaker for the government. I am not quite sure what the process is but I will declare my obvious conflict. I have been a life member of the RSPCA for 22 years now, give or take a couple of months. I became a life member of the RSPCA New South Wales when I was 21 years of age, so perhaps I have been a member for maybe 23 years. When I moved to Western Australia 15 years ago, the RSPCA transferred my life membership to the Western Australian RSPCA. I have always supported the RSPCA. I have heard the accusations about fairweather friends and the Million Paws Walk. I remember turning up to the first Million Paws Walk in Perth 2001 with my then dog Sasha. Since 2000 I have been to every single Million Paws Walk, unless I was at sea, underwater on a submarine —

Dr A.D. Buti: That is not an excuse.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: How dare the Navy take these things off me! Since being a member of Parliament, I have got to know the personalities in Western Australian politics and I know which members have been to the Million Paws Walk. I would be guessing that I have seen the member for Gosnells there. I think I have seen the member for Fremantle there. I have seen Hon Ken Travers there and I have seen the Premier there. The member for Maylands is in the Chair; I am not reflecting on you, Madam Acting Speaker (Ms L.L. Baker), but I have definitely seen you there. This is not about who goes to what, when and where because if it was some kind of competition, I would humbly say that I think I am going to win this one. When it comes to supporting the RSPCA, I have always been very passionate about it. It is a wonderful organisation.

Not long after I was elected to this place, the member for Maylands and I formed—because we did not want it to be politicised—the Parliamentary Friends of the RSPCA. We tried to get any interested members to come together. We invited the RSPCA and different people in on a couple of occasions. If the member for Maylands was not in the chair, I would not ask for an interjection, so I am not going to ask. I think we should continue to try to do that again, member for Maylands. I would be happy to continue that because I think it is good that the leaders in animal welfare get to front members of Parliament and decision-makers from both houses and explain what their organisations are doing. The RSPCA, particularly, has been an institution in Western Australia. I went to I think it was the 100th anniversary celebration about two years ago and there were a couple of members of Parliament there. I count Lynne Bradshaw, the state and federal president of the RSPCA, as a close personal friend. I caught up with her yesterday; I talk to Lynne on a regular basis. She is a lovely lady. I do not want to brag, but when I was first elected here in 2008—I will give credit where it is due—the Labor Party in government under Premier Carpenter made an election commitment that if it was re-elected, it would double the state government's contribution of funding to the RSPCA from \$250 000 a year to \$500 000 a year. The Liberal Party did not match that contribution; I accept that. However, when I was elected in late 2008, early 2009, I went to see the Premier—backbencher Francis from Jandakot—and said, “Can we do this anyway?” I made the case and he did it. Since 2009, which I think was the first budget after the election, the state's contribution under this government to the RSPCA has continued to be \$500 000. In fact, I am happy to make the case that it should now be further increased because of inflation; the cost of wages has increased and the RSPCA has to pay wages to inspectors.

That brings me to another issue. The state contributes \$500 000 a year to the RSPCA. The RSPCA—I do not have the annual report here—probably pretty accurately spends around \$5 million enforcing the Animal Welfare Act in Western Australia. As a simple return on investment for a taxpayer, looking at it purely from a financial point of view, we get a pretty good deal. If it was the other way around—if we gave the RSPCA \$5 million a year and it spent only \$500 000 a year on its core role, which obviously is administering the Animal Welfare Act—I think we would have even more reason to be concerned. However, it does not; we give it a small contribution and it raises a hell of a lot of money through cupcake days, the Million Paws Walk and a whole host of different ways. A lot of people bequeath their estates to the RSPCA. I would like to recognise those wonderful human beings who are no longer with us who have made that contribution through their generosity in their passing.

I do not want to see animal welfare become—I never have; but I have always feared it would—some kind of city–country fight. I also acknowledge that there are an awful lot of farmers out there who pride themselves on doing things in a way that supports animal welfare. We can see branding now on everything from pork to eggs to chicken that is RSPCA approved. In other words—I am not an expert on the standards—the animal was raised free range, slaughtered at the end and packaged in a way that is as friendly as possible and as cruelty-free as possible. A lot of people—such as myself—only buy products with that logo on it to support the RSPCA in our small way because we have a philosophical belief in the way that humans should treat animals. Obviously, I am not a vegetarian but sometimes I almost want to be on ethical grounds. A famous person once said—I forgot who

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it was, so they cannot have been too famous—that if abattoirs had glass walls, we would all be vegetarians. We have to keep in mind that the attitude of us city slickers towards animal welfare, in some cases, is different from people in the country, but not everyone in the country. There are a lot of people out there in agriculture and primary production and, obviously, the meat business who do absolutely the right thing in the way in which and with the standards they treat their animals. At the end of the day, I will make it perfectly crystal clear: I do not support, at all, what the Legislative Council committee is doing. I cannot see the need for it. However, I do respect its right to do it. It is a bit like saying, “I don’t agree with what you’re saying but I will defend to my deathbed your right to say it.” We have a very controversial speaker from the Netherlands in Western Australia at the moment. Even the Premier has made the point and the member for Willagee very powerfully made the point last night that although we do not agree with what he may be saying, we do defend his right to say it. I think it is an interesting debate on some of these issues that we have to have.

I do not want to be provocative, but looking back on personal experience in the last term of this Parliament at some of the issues that committees, such as the Public Accounts Committee, has looked into, I see the amount of money spent looking into \$10 000 payments of former staff members. We can do an honest self-assessment as to whether or not taxpayers’ money was wisely used by a number of different parliamentary committees, whether they be select committees or standing committees with members from both sides when they dominate the committees with their numbers. We can look at whether there is any value whatsoever to the taxpayer in some of the things they look at.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: This is taking up RSPCA resources. This is costing them big-time.

Mr J.M. FRANCIS: Sure, and I accept that is not right and I certainly hope it is not costing the RSPCA in any way. I think the public of Western Australia are big enough and smart enough to see that it should not be costing the RSPCA anything in its reputation. In fact, if anything, I think it might be rallying support for the RSPCA, to be honest. But every single time a parliamentary committee does an inquiry and asks someone to respond, it costs the respondent money. Maybe I am wrong; maybe I am not that across the ability of committees to reimburse organisations that they ask to appear before them, but I do not think it has happened, ever, to any organisation. Whether a parliamentary committee in this state is dragging in Serco over Fiona Stanley Hospital or any single organisation to give evidence before it, either in the upper house, lower house or joint committees, I do not remember anyone ever being compensated for that. I accept the member’s point that it is costing the RSPCA money and it should not be. The reality is, as I said, that committees look at things from time to time and the question should be whether we turn around and ask: because we are philosophically opposed to what it is trying to say, do we say it cannot go ahead? If that was the case, then whoever wins the next election and controls every single committee would be able to shut down every single inquiry.

As I said, I do not like the path the committee is going down. I have made it crystal clear; I am a very passionate supporter of the RSPCA. I am not a fairweather friend; I do not accept the member for West Swan’s criticism that we just turn up to be seen with the RSPCA when it suits us. As I said, I have supported this organisation for much longer than I have been a member of the Liberal Party—continuously for 23 years. I was turning up to fundraisers way before I ever thought I would become a member of this place. I have turned up to every single one since I have been elected, so I do not accept that criticism. I have only ever seen the Leader of the Opposition turn up to one fundraiser and it was this year when I think he smelled some politics in the air. I have not seen him at all in the last five years. I have seen the member for Gosnells and I have seen the member for Maylands, but I had never seen the Leader of the Opposition until this year when he turned up and gave a speech on the RSPCA inquiry. He handed out Labor Party flyers. I have to say, I kind of respect his right to do that but I did shirk at that. We talk about not politicising the RSPCA and issues of animal welfare and I thought that might have been a step too far. I just want to make it crystal clear that I do not accept the point that we are fairweather friends and supporters of the RSPCA. Lastly, I want to reiterate that I do not accept what the committee is doing but I will defend, absolutely, its right to do it, just as I would expect every other member of this place to do. What the Legislative Council does, quite frankly, is its business. I want to place my continued support for the RSPCA on the record, now in its 123rd year in Western Australia.

MR C.J. TALLENTIRE (Gosnells) [5.59 pm]: I rise to support this motion that this house condemns the Liberal, National, and Shooters and Fishers Parties for their attacks on the RSPCA. Members opposite have tried to suggest that this inquiry is just beyond their control. The fact is that they are members of the Liberal and National Parties and they have remained silent on these attacks. They let members of their own party, indeed, a minister of their own party, go ahead and make outrageous attacks on the RSPCA.

Sitting suspended from 6.00 pm to 7.00 pm

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I resume my speech in support of this motion put forward by the Leader of the Opposition —

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That this house condemns the Liberal, National and Shooters and Fishers Parties for their attacks on the RSPCA.

Make no mistake, government members, these were attacks authorised by your parties. The National Party and the Liberal Party authorised this attack on the RSPCA.

Mr W.R. Marmion: How do you know that?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: It was authorised because the ability to do this sort of thing has to go through the party rooms.

Mr W.R. Marmion: Are you sure?

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: If the Minister for Mines and Petroleum wants to tell me that it was two members who were off on a frolic of their own, if that is his position, what does it say about the discipline of the Liberal and National Parties that they just allow people to do this sort of thing? If the Minister for Mines and Petroleum wants to argue that they were off on a frolic of their own, how is it that their endeavours were supported by the Minister for Agriculture and Food? It is a matter of public record that the Minister for Agriculture and Food, Hon Ken Baston, supported this attack. He supported this attack and he is a member of the government's cabinet.

Mr W.R. Marmion: You talked about the party room. The president of the Liberal Party is Hon Norman Moore.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: What?

Mr W.R. Marmion: You said this motion says this house condemns the Liberal Party.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I will read the motion to the minister again. It states —

That this house condemns the Liberal, National and Shooters and Fishers Parties for their attacks on the RSPCA.

We have very clearly before us, when we look at the evidence of the hearings, the disgraceful behaviour of Hon Paul Brown and Hon Nigel Hallett when they had representatives from the RSPCA appear before them.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr N.W. Morton): Just quickly, member, two things. Firstly, can we desist with the interjections across the chamber? I have let a couple go, but I want to try to sit here for the next hour and listen to the member who has the call. Member, just a caution: the advice I have is to be very careful about referring to individuals. This motion refers to parties, not individuals.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: This motion condemns the Liberal and National Parties for their outrageous attacks on that venerable institution the RSPCA, the institution that has been around for well over 100 years. In the United Kingdom it has been in existence since 1822, when it was created by William Wilberforce. In Australia it has been in existence since 1892. This is an institution that has a strength and longevity of service that adds to the sense of respect that all Australians have for it. The RSPCA is recognised as being a very moderate and sensible voice—a voice that is there for all creatures great and small. That is where we see members opposite start to get a bit uncomfortable, because they are inclined to say that they are happy for the RSPCA to be about looking after the welfare of companion animals, but they do not want it to get involved in the welfare of animals that might be involved in agricultural production, so-called performance animals or any of those things. They just want the RSPCA to confine its activities to dogs and cats and other domestic animals—to keep an eye on those animals and they will be happy. It is on that basis that some members opposite feel okay when they attend events such as the Million Paws Walk because they just go along to support an organisation they think should be looking after the interests of domestic animals only. They are uncomfortable, and they should be, about attending events such as the Million Paws Walk because they are showing themselves to be outrageous hypocrites. How can they go along to the Million Paws Walk and say that they support the RSPCA when in fact their colleagues and party machines are condemning and attacking the RSPCA? It is an outrageous hypocrisy that they are allowing that to happen. For the Minister for Agriculture and Food to be central to this shows how members are just off on a frolic of their own; this is a position that is central to the thinking of the Liberal and National Parties. Central to their thinking is the idea that somehow the RSPCA is operating beyond what they would like it to do.

I want to talk a little about what the RSPCA does. It provides an animal welfare inspectorate service. One would have thought that this would be something the Barnett Liberal–National government would support wholeheartedly because it fits with the idea that that side embraces—shifting services out to non-government organisations because it recognises that often a job can be done cheaper when it is done by the NGO sector. We have heard much about how the government has done that in the social services area. Social services that were previously provided by arms of government are now provided by those in the non-government sector. The idea of putting out to the non-government sector various animal welfare inspectorate services would seem to be consistent with the government's ideology, that if something can be put out, then it would do that.

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Let us look at how cost effective that service is. I understand that the overall annual budget for the RSPCA is somewhere around \$9 million per year. The actual amount of that service that goes towards animal welfare inspectorate services is closer to maybe \$6 million a year. The contribution from the Barnett government to the RSPCA is \$500 000 a year. Members can see that little bit of a contribution—that \$500 000—goes a long way, because the RSPCA has the capacity to raise funds because it is so widely supported. It has a capacity to raise funds right across the community. A lot of it comes from private individuals donating to support the organisation. Some bequest wealth is probably a part of that and there is perhaps some degree of corporate support also. The fact is that this is a very cost-effective mechanism for the government to claim that it is providing an animal welfare inspectorate service. It is a remarkably cost-effective model. I am not about to debate the merits of that, but I think it shows that if the government is going to attack the RSPCA, it is actually something that it really does not understand; it does not understand the benefits and the cost effectiveness of what the government is paying for. That says a lot about those opposite.

Those opposite seem to get particularly hot under the collar when the RSPCA dares to talk about various policy matters. We accept that all kinds of organisations get involved in policy discussions. Such organisations include peak bodies that represent industry groups in which very wealthy businesses are self-interested in funding those peak bodies so that they can then advocate for that industry, and that have the financial capacity to pay for all manner of advocacy. We could include in that organisations such as some of the food industry, some of the alcohol and tobacco industries, the Western Australian Farmers Federation and the Pastoralists and Graziers Association of WA. These are industry bodies that are well resourced and well placed to make comment on behalf of their industries. Whenever there is an issue of interest to the community about agriculture, members can be sure that journalists will go to the PGA or WAFF for comment. It is reasonable then that other groups are involved in public policy discussion. I think that the RSPCA's involvement in public policy discussion around animal welfare is something to be welcomed. The RSPCA has been very clear that its work on public policy is not funded at all out of the government's tiny contribution that goes towards its animal welfare inspectorate service. Let us look at the facts. We are talking about a service that costs around \$6 million a year, with a \$500 000 government contribution. There is no extra money available beyond that \$6 million for public policy work. It is clear that that public policy work comes from other sources, because so much of the money that is available to the organisation has to go towards animal welfare inspectorate services.

What has really amazed me about this whole debate is that when I have looked back at those outrageous attacks and that bullying style of inquiry used by Hon Paul Brown and Hon Nigel Hallett from the other place, I have noticed that it was very much directed —

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member, just a reminder that this is about parties, not individuals.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I question that ruling—no; it is not my right to question a ruling, but I observe that on numerous occasions members opposite have commented about members in the other place. It is essential for good debate that we have occasional reference by name to a member in the other place who has made comment on an issue.

The ACTING SPEAKER: That is the advice I have received from the clerks, member.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: The issue is the comments made by National Party and Liberal Party members of an upper house inquiry. Their attacks have been focused on the RSPCA's animal inspectorate service, which is very interesting. For all that, they are probably most upset by the RSPCA's legitimate role in public policy discussion, the issue on which they sought to bully the members of the RSPCA who came along to the committee hearings was around some of the animal welfare inspectorate work that it does. They are, on the one hand, highly upset about the public policy work of the RSPCA, but then they want to attack its animal inspectorate work. We have seen over the years that the animal inspectorate work has been done in a highly effective way. Whenever the RSPCA has embarked on a prosecution, the number of cases in which it has been unsuccessful with that prosecution is zero. In the 2013–14 financial year, there were 22 prosecutions, with zero being unsuccessful. In 2014–15, there were 23 prosecutions, of which zero had been unsuccessful. It is clear that this is an organisation that knows how to go about animal welfare inspectorate services, and when it detects unlawful activity when an offence has been committed, the RSPCA prosecutes and gets results. The RSPCA is to be commended for that, yet when we look at the inquiry that is being conducted by a committee of the other place, we find outrageous attacks suggesting that the RSPCA's inspectorate services people do not know what they are doing or that they have not been properly trained. There was a definite bullying style in the way those questions were put to people, such that at one point the committee had to suspend and conduct a session just with the committee members. Then one of the members—a National Party member—had to issue an apology to the witnesses from the RSPCA. I think that is outrageous.

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There is no acknowledgement of the great work that the RSPCA does with the industry in a very collaborative way. We would like to think that those opposite would be the first advocates for our agricultural industries to move away from being price takers and commodity producers into producers of distinguishable products that would command a premium price. That is exactly where the RSPCA has been trying to help the sector. When I look at the RSPCA's work on the certification of various farm produce to ensure that it actually meets RSPCA-approved farming schemes, I see that, in fact, the RSPCA is doing all it can to work with industries such as the egg industry and the chicken and meat industry and pork producers to provide the opportunity for consumers to ask whether a product has been produced whilst meeting the best animal welfare standards; and, if so, how do they know? It is always quite bewildering to go into a supermarket and see an array of eggs. We want to know which ones have been produced through best practices and which are the genuine free-range eggs. It is very confusing. One way to try to be guided is to look at the price. That is hardly satisfactory. To look for some sort of independent certification is an excellent way to do it, and the RSPCA is providing that kind of independent certification.

The RSPCA is certainly not an extreme animal rights organisation that those opposite want to characterise it as; it is actually a very progressive, moderate organisation that is trying to work to get the best welfare standards possible for animals. But it is also very mindful of that desire amongst farmer producers and consumers to have product that meets the highest standards of animal welfare. There are many other areas of farming practice that should be open to good public discussion.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: I take, for example, the discussion around the mulesing of sheep. This is a very complex issue. It is really challenging. When we see a flyblown sheep and the agony that that animal must be in when it has a gaping wound in its side caused by a fly laying eggs and those eggs becoming maggots and eating into the flesh of the animal, we can imagine that it would be suffering an enormous amount of stress. This is just the time of year when I imagine many sheep have flystrike. We need to have that discussion. What is the solution? I know there are all sorts of technological solutions but for a very long time the only option put forward by woolgrowers was for farmers to mules sheep. I have been involved in mulesing. It is an awful bloody practice. Young lambs are put in a mulesing cradle and a sharp knife is used to cut the skin away from around their rear end. It is certainly a very, very savage approach to that issue, yet it has been done for years on I do not know how many millions of sheep. Whatever our flock number has been would give us some way of determining how many millions of sheep have been subject to that kind of animal cruelty. The argument has been that that is a better alternative than allowing sheep to suffer from flystrike.

We need this sort of public policy discussion. We need organisations such as the RSPCA that have access to veterinarians, that understand the pros and cons and that have the capacity to look for alternatives to engage in that kind of public policy discussion; similarly, for the discussion on live animal export. This is probably the issue that has made those opposite the most anxious, because there are so many alternatives. There are clearly alternatives to live animal export. A chilled carcass trade would give us employment opportunities as well as the capacity to control the animal welfare standards under which animals are slaughtered. Of course, it would also give us the capacity to eliminate the need for animals going on excessively long journeys on ships in extreme heat to arrival ports where the facilities are even beyond the control of Australian animal welfare observers. That issue is one on which we must constantly challenge ourselves. But those opposite, just as they will be dragged kicking and screaming to some alternative to mulesing, are reluctant to even consider that there may be a better way than the live animal export trade. They think that because that is the way their farm was run in the past when previous generations owned the farm, that is how it should be run now and into the future. No other business sector runs like that. Other business sectors accept that they must constantly ask themselves: What is the market after? What is the market really asking us about here? What is technology providing us? What are the alternatives thanks to different technologies? That is the way all other business sectors run.

Those opposite who are pandering to the ultraconservative elements in the agriculture sector are holding back the agriculture sector. There are many wonderful, progressive minds in the agriculture sector who embrace new technological solutions, who want to look at new marketing opportunities and who want to be involved in abattoirs here on Australian shores so that they can provide chilled meat to overseas markets. They are fascinated by the opportunities, they are passionate about the opportunities and they can see that there are profitable opportunities open to them, but there are those old-schoolers over there who hold back the whole industry, and that is a great shame. We have to embrace new ideas for Australian agriculture to go forward. How do we source new ideas? It is by having great people in the industry. It is also by having great people who may be just outside the industry, which is exactly the space in which the RSPCA is able to operate. Yet we have seen those opposite attack the RSPCA in the most outrageous of ways and not be rebuked in any way. The Minister for Agriculture and Food, who is the minister responsible for all of this, has happily let this upper house select

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committee inquiry come into being and go ahead. He has let it all happen and he has supported it. He has sat around the Liberal–National cabinet table and not been reprimanded by others sitting around that cabinet table. That should be a great embarrassment to those opposite—a great embarrassment.

I read some of the transcripts of the hearings of the select committee inquiry and saw the spurious nature of some of the complaints made about the RSPCA. The inquiry used the pathetic and disgraceful technique of putting accusations to people without actually giving them much background. Suggestions were put to Lynne Bradshaw, the president of the RSPCA, that she was campaigning for some New World Order. They were obscure, stupid comments put to somebody as respected as the president of the RSPCA is here in WA. One has to wonder what the tactics and level of behaviour are among those opposite and what standards people will really tolerate. The RSPCA has been told that this select committee inquiry is likely to be extended for another six months. RSPCA staff will be expected to appear as witnesses before hearings for another six months, which is just an unacceptable impost on that organisation's time. It is an outrageous distraction to the RSPCA when, clearly, it has far better things to do than appear before people who have a manic desire to attack the organisation. That is why there is really only one satisfactory response to this motion calling on the house to condemn the Liberal, National and Shooters and Fishers Parties for their attacks. If members opposite vote with us to condemn these attacks, which I think they should, they have to act. It is not enough to just condemn these attacks; the government has to act, and its only response can be to terminate the activities of this committee. The committee has been corrupted by the three majority members and it is being used as a means to attack the RSPCA, such that it has been distracted from its main work.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member, I think you used the term “corrupted” and said that some of the members had corrupted the process. I am advised that you should withdraw that.

Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE: Thank you. I will clarify: I think that the process has been corrupted. The process of the inquiry has been corrupted and the attacks are outrageous and totally unnecessary. To attack an organisation such as the RSPCA in this way is totally unacceptable. It gives an indication of where the government is headed on animal welfare. Perhaps this is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the Liberal and National Parties' attitudes towards animal welfare. I note that we have a national standard agreement for animal transport that has been signed by every state except Western Australia. For some reason Western Australia, under the Barnett Liberal–National government, is refusing to sign up to the “Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines: Land Transport of the Livestock”. Why is that? Is it because the government finds that the standards are too rigorous or too onerous? They are acceptable to every other state in the nation, but not to Western Australia. I struggle to understand why we would not agree with the other states and make sure that we have the best animal welfare standards possible when transporting animals.

I am very concerned that members opposite either want to disown those members in the other place who are the perpetrators of these nasty, bullying tactics and attacks on the RSPCA or perhaps the truth is that they support what they are doing. Either way, we will find out their position on this issue. We will wait to see which way they vote on this motion, but their actions and their behaviour is to be condemned.

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Parliamentary Secretary) [7.28 pm]: I would like to say up-front given the imputations about conflicts of interest raised here tonight that if a member were to look at my declaration of interest form, they would see that I am a farmer from Badgingarra. It does not state on the form that I own livestock, but I do; I am a beef producer for both slaughter and live export. That is now on the record. If that does not disqualify me for having an opinion, I will now proceed to discuss some of the issues raised by this motion, which is not an attack on the RSPCA or a discussion about the merits of the RSPCA. It has been a discussion, if we like, about the conduct of various political parties. There have been some disgraceful attacks on members of the Legislative Council, by name, impugning that by virtue of their experience in livestock, either production or handling or supply chains, that in some way should disqualify them from having a position on an inquiry into a body that is charged with regulating the conduct of that same industry.

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr N.W. Morton): Member for Armadale!

Mr R.S. LOVE: I cannot think of any people who are better qualified to sit on that inquiry than those people who have been impugned here tonight. I am sure they have been doing their very best to carry out their duties as parliamentary members.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Order! This is the Parliament, and you are allowed to have differences of opinion. But at this point in time I am listening to the member for Moore, who has the call. I would like to listen to the member for Moore in silence, thank you.

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Mr R.S. LOVE: As I have said, this is not really about the RSPCA at all. This is a scurrilous attack on the right of the Legislative Council to hold an inquiry into any matter that it chooses to hold an inquiry into. It is not for the Premier, and it is not for the member for Armadale, the member for Gosnells, the member for Maylands or any other member in this place, to direct the Legislative Council as to what it should and should not inquire into.

Mr C.J. Tallentire interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Gosnells!

Mr R.S. LOVE: It is entirely up to the Legislative Council —

Ms L.L. Baker interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Maylands, I call you to order for the first time.

Mr R.S. LOVE: We have heard suggestions that there should be a report to the Procedure and Privileges Committee about the conduct of members of the Legislative Council. I am wondering whether there should not be a report to that same committee about the conduct of members of this house in attacking the processes of this Parliament and attacking the right of the Legislative Council to hold an inquiry into whatever matter it sees fit —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members, please! I would like to listen to the member for Moore. I do not want to have to continually call people to order. I would like to listen just to the member for Moore. Member for Fremantle, I see that you indicated before that you are trying to get the call. You can have your say shortly once the member for Moore has finished.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Whether we like it or not, the RSPCA is a body that has been given a great deal of authority in this state. It is entirely proper for members of Parliament to inquire into its conduct in carrying out those duties that it has been given authority to carry out.

Ms L.L. Baker interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Maylands!

Mr R.S. LOVE: That is all that is happening in that house. That is not the only inquiry that is taking place at the moment into the RSPCA. The government is doing an inquiry itself into the best use, or the efficacy, I suppose, of the current arrangements. Given the fact that the RSPCA is given a substantial amount of funding from the government every year to carry out its functions, that inquiry again is right and proper. I am sure that both those inquiries will come up with well-considered and instructive reports that the government will be able to move forward on. I think members opposite should wait until the end of this parliamentary process before they raise such concerns. In fact, I do not know that the members who have been complaining about this would like to see that same sort of approach taken to what members of this house can inquire into. I am sure that the Legislative Council would respect the right of members of this house to inquire into any matter as they see fit.

Dr A.D. Buti interjected.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The Parliament can look into whatever it wants to look into. The members of that committee have been appointed by their house to carry out that inquiry.

Ms L.L. Baker interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Maylands, I call you to order for the second time.

Mr R.S. LOVE: For members opposite to suggest that there is anything improper about that is completely scurrilous.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members, please!

Mr R.S. LOVE: I would also like to talk a bit about some of the other things that have been said in this place tonight about the arrangements with the RSPCA. I am not making any judgements on the RSPCA. Two inquiries are being undertaken in this state into the RSPCA at the moment, and it does not need me to inquire into it as well. However, it does seem odd to me that a body that has been paid to be the inspector of animal welfare holds a view contrary to industry and contrary to government about the long-term future of the live export industry. That in itself sets up a conflict, and I think that is where some of the —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members! Member for Maylands! Member for Maylands, I am going to call you to order for a third time. Member for Armadale, you are on two calls and you are getting very close to a third. I do

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not want to have to evict members from the chamber this late into the sitting. Could we please listen to the member for Moore.

Point of Order

Dr A.D. BUTI: During my contribution, the member for Moore and the member for North West Central interjected constantly and were not called; they were not called once, and it just seems a little unfair that now we are being called as the member for Moore is speaking.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr N.W. Morton): Member, as you will appreciate, I was not in the chair at that time. I will Chair as I see fit. When the member for Gosnells was on his feet, I asked members to not interject across the chamber, and that was directed at both sides of the chamber. I will Chair as fairly as I see fit, member. Member for Moore, you have the call.

Debate Resumed

Mr R.S. LOVE: In fact, most of the time I was on my feet I was raising, I think, a legitimate point of order, not interjecting on what he was saying.

The ACTING SPEAKER: If you could direct your comments through me, thank you, member for Moore.

Mr R.S. LOVE: There has been some discomfort amongst livestock producers because there is this conflict between the aims of the industry and the aims of the state government in promoting live exports and promoting our agricultural industries overseas, and the stated aim of the RSPCA to see the eventual cessation of that trade. That trade plays a very important part in Western Australia and, in fact, has energised the Kimberley and Pilbara cattle industry into a highly profitable cattle industry. These are areas that, 30 years ago, were not travelling too well, when they relied upon the old meatworks in Broome and other places to process their cows at very, very discounted rates. Their product now commands a very high price throughout Asia and is a highly prized commodity. It has made the Kimberley a very profitable beef-producing area.

In terms of what the member for Gosnells has been talking about —

Mr M.P. Murray interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Collie–Preston! Member, I have just asked members not to interject. I am going to call you to order for —

Mr M.P. Murray interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member! I am on my feet. You can seek the call when the member is finished. I call you to order for the first time.

Mr R.S. LOVE: The member for Gosnells more or less said that livestock producers in this state —

Mr M.P. Murray interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member for Collie–Preston!

Mr M.P. Murray interjected.

Mr R.S. LOVE: I am quite happy for livestock to be processed onshore or to be exported, depending on whatever brings the highest price to the producer.

In terms of what the member for Gosnells was saying about livestock producers living in the past and not being progressive, nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, he impugned an entire industry in saying it was backward.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members! I am not going to tolerate this. Member for Moore, direct your comments through me. Member for Gosnells, please stop interjecting.

Mr R.S. LOVE: Far from being backward-looking, agriculture in Western Australia is in an exciting phase of development and this government has put forward a \$300 million package to energise agriculture and to go forward. Part of that innovative package is the Sheep Industry Business Innovation project that is being developed in Katanning with a \$10 million investment, and the Northern Beef Futures initiative in the Kimberley, with a \$15 million investment. Just today an announcement was made about a \$23 million program to develop three new Doppler radars in Western Australia. This is not a backward-looking industry and this is not a backward-looking state. Live export plays a part in our markets and especially plays a part in the pastoral industry in providing an outlet for our beef. That is not to say that the Western Australian government does not support the processing of livestock onshore, and we are indeed quite supportive of efforts to develop abattoirs

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throughout the state. Just recently members may have heard the announcement of a new abattoir to be constructed in Cataby, in my own electorate. That is a great announcement and, I think, a great step forward in furthering the development of this industry. It is all about options. It is about markets for different types of Western Australian produce and finding the best market for our producers. We should not seek to cut off any market based on a philosophical ground. This is not a debate about the RSPCA; this is a debate about ideology, about whether primary industry is able to do what it needs to do to be profitable, and to treat animals in the best possible way to maintain that profit. It is not about live —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members, I am on my feet. Member for Maylands, I continue to hear your voice. I understand that there is a lot of passion around this subject. Please, can we just listen to the member for Moore while he has the call.

Mr R.S. LOVE: It is not about live export and it is not about mulesing. It is not about any particular practice; it is about giving the industry the right to do what it needs to do to be profitable and maintain adequate humane conditions. That is what we seek to do in this state. Nobody is arguing against that. To hear people who have very little appreciation of agriculture and very little appreciation of what actually takes place in the industry, and whose understanding of the RSPCA seems limited to the Million Paws Walk, shows that they do not quite understand how difficult it can be for primary industry to live with this conflicting situation between an RSPCA that is committed to the cessation of the live export industry and the continuation of what is a profitable and necessary —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I am getting a lot of exercise in this stint in the chair. Can we please listen to the member for Moore. The member for Moore has the call. If other members wish to seek the call during the course of this debate, they can do so.

Mr R.S. LOVE: It is a very necessary part of the industry in Australia. Not only is it necessary for Australia, but also our presence in the live export industry throughout the Middle East, South-East Asia and other parts of the world means we are lifting the animal welfare standards in those countries. We understand that there have been practices in the past that all Western Australian farmers would have been ashamed of. Actions have been taken to raise the standards for not only the livestock coming from our shores, but also all livestock that is processed through Australian-accredited abattoirs. That is having a great effect on raising the standard and the outcomes for animal welfare all over the world. Is it okay if a Western Australian sheep does not suffer but five sheep in some other country do? If we can take our product and get our industry into those other markets, we can help raise animal welfare outcomes right throughout the world. We are doing that; it is happening right now.

In conclusion, I think we are getting a bit over the top here. I am certainly not seeking to either condemn or condone the actions of the RSPCA. I simply do not know enough about the RSPCA to do that. What I do know is that members of this house have every right to discuss the matters frankly, as do members from the other house, to hold inquiries into any matter they see fit, and to have those people who come before their inquiries answering questions properly and fully. I do not think anything improper can be impugned from them calling that inquiry or from carrying out the inquiry. I do not condone any maltreatment of animals. I do not condone attacks on people who cannot fight back, which is what I witnessed against members from the other house this afternoon. I think it was a shameful episode. Opposition members should all take a good, hard look at their conduct this afternoon.

MS S.F. McGURK (Fremantle) [7.43 pm]: I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this issue. I appreciate being able to follow the member for Moore because he spoke quite extensively —

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr N.W. Morton): Members, please. With these interjections going on, I cannot even hear the member for Fremantle. The member for Fremantle has the call; thank you.

Ms S.F. McGURK: The member for Moore spoke extensively about the right of members from the other house to conduct an inquiry into whatever they see fit. I remind him what the motion before us states. It states —

That this house condemns the Liberal, National and Shooters and Fishers Parties for their attacks on the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

This debate is about the hypocrisy of the Liberal, National and Shooters and Fishers Parties and their attitude to the RSPCA. On the one hand we have the Premier, the member for Jandakot and other government members in this house—members of the parties that I referred to—saying that they support the RSPCA, but on the other hand they allow members of their parties in the upper house to engage in what I think is an outrageous attack on the RSPCA. The terms of reference for the inquiry into the operations of the RSPCA that is being conducted by

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the upper house committee include the examination of its funding from government, its objectives and the use of its powers. The terms then refer to the membership of the committee. We have since heard that the committee will not report by December 2015 and that that date will now be extended. What is frustrating is that the terms of reference for that inquiry include the examination of the RSPCA's funding from government, but we know that the Minister for Agriculture and Food has commissioned the Department of Agriculture and Food to undertake its own inquiry into the funding that the RSPCA receives from the department. I understand that that report was due in August 2015. We are now towards the end of October and we have not seen that report. Considering the amount of debate that has occurred on this issue, it is interesting that the department and the minister responsible have not seen fit to release that report into the funding that the RSPCA receives for, as I understand it, two aspects of work: one is to assist in the inspection and prosecution of instances of animal cruelty, and the other is an education function.

The motion for the upper house to hold an inquiry was moved in March this year and followed an earlier attempt in the upper house to conduct an inquiry into the RSPCA generally. In 2013, Hon Rick Mazza from the Shooters and Fishers Party moved the following motion —

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.

That motion really went to the heart of what Hon Rick Mazza wanted to instigate, and he was supported in that by the speakers in that debate, including Hon Paul Brown. That motion really goes to the heart of what some members of the Liberal, National and Shooters and Fishers Parties think about the RSPCA. If it was Tony Abbott speaking, I guess he would say that its members should stick to their knitting, but those members I referred to say that the RSPCA should stick to looking after the welfare of companion animals such as dogs, cats, budgerigars and guinea pigs, and when it comes to livestock or any other animals, that is not in its remit. However, when we look at the objectives of the organisation, nothing could be further from the truth. There is no distinction in the rules of the RSPCA that say that it should be concerned about the welfare of only companion animals. It is quite the contrary; it talks about the welfare of all animals. The RSPCA's submission to the Legislative Council committee inquiry into the operations of the RSPCA outlines the objectives of both the Western Australian organisation and its national counterpart. As I said, it could not be clearer that its objectives, as have already been outlined by others in this debate, are very clear about its need to consider the welfare of all animals. For instance, the RSPCA WA rules state —

The Purposes of the Society shall be to:

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

Similarly, clause 4.2 of the RSPCA's rules refers to procuring the passage of such amending or new legislation and policy as is necessary for the protection of animals. The RSPCA has similar clauses in its objectives.

Members of the Liberal, National and Shooters and Fishers Parties might not like those objectives, but they are the objectives of the RSPCA WA and the RSPCA Australia. This organisation fulfils any requirements it has as an organisation under the Associations Incorporation Act. I have never seen anything in any of the debates or contributions in the upper house that I have read or heard anything from members in this house in which they have questioned whether or not the RSPCA is operating within its rules and in accordance with the act. The organisation properly acquires the \$500 000 in funding that has been given to it since 2011 to carry out inspection and education functions. Again, the RSPCA's submission to the upper house inquiry, with the permission of the department, included the terms of the memorandum of understanding. This government entered into that arrangement to have the RSPCA assist in the inspection and education functions. As other members have pointed out, particularly the member for Gosnells and the Leader of the Opposition, the government cannot have it both ways; it cannot contract out functions to the not-for-profit sector and then complain when the not-for-profit sector maintains its advocacy roles. Very recent examples of that in the not-for-profit sector were critical of the government's decision to withdraw funding to financial counselling. Anglicare, the Western Australian Council of Social Service and a number of specific service providers were very firmly critical of the government's decision to withdraw funding for financial counselling. Often after a state budget, whether it is under a Liberal-National government or a Labor government, the not-for-profit sector will take a critical view of the budget. It might think some measures are good; it might think some measures are not good. That is an important function that those organisations play in our civil society. It is pretty astounding that members opposite do not understand that distinction with the RSPCA.

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People should be under no illusion in this debate that members on this side of the house say that that is a good thing. Members on this side of the house say that the RSPCA is supported. The RSPCA plays an important role in the welfare of not only companion animals, but also all animals. Member for Moore, I understand that, on agricultural issues, the debate about live animal export is very complex. It is quite likely that I, along with many people in my electorate who have deep, deep concerns about live animal export, do not, perhaps, understand all aspects of the industry. I appreciate that people's livelihoods are dependent on that industry, but I also have concerns that it compromises animal welfare. I am concerned that we are, despite public opinion on animal welfare and live animal export, increasing the number of cattle and sheep exported. It would be very remiss of me to not place very clearly on the record the people of my electorate's opposition to and concern about live animal export. They see the animals coming in and out of Fremantle. I notice that the carriages of trucks used to transport those animals are now configured differently, meaning we cannot see the animals as easily. I think that is because people felt quite distressed when they saw animals slipping over or in distress. We could say the debate about live animal export is for another day, but it is in fact germane to this debate. The upper house members who instigated this inquiry were, essentially, annoyed that the RSPCA has taken such a clear position against live animal export, as I believe it should because it is entirely consistent with the organisation's aims and objectives. It is not only on live animal export that the RSPCA has taken a clear position that has been, at times, contrary to that of the government. Perhaps that may have raised the ire of particular members of the upper house.

Mr R.S. Love: Don't you see that is —

The ACTING SPEAKER: Member!

Ms S.F. McGURK: My point, member, is that it is not unusual for not-for-profit organisations that receive funding from the government to carry out certain duties to have a view contrary to that of the government. That is an important element of civil society. It is a bit rich, coming from a Liberal-National government that has embraced the contracting out of government services to both the for-profit and not-for-profit sector, to complain that the not-for-profit sector could be critical of the government on some views. That has happened to not only the animal welfare sector, but also a number of aspects that the not-for-profit sector has an interest in.

We can look at the RSPCA's position on other issues that has run contrary to that of the government, including the extension of recreational shooting on public land. The RSPCA came out with a very clear position against that, and I refer to an opinion piece written this year by Lynne Bradshaw, president of RSPCA Western Australia. The piece is titled "Hobby hunters the real feral beasts in WA bush", and in it Lynne Bradshaw argues that —

RSPCA WA wants to see the State Government invest more resources into targeted, well-managed feral pest eradication programs, ...

The opinion piece continues —

Amateur hunting (outside authorised pest eradication programs) in national parks, conservation parks and nature reserves is illegal. RSPCA WA does not want to see these activities made legal, but that is just what our State Government is looking at right now.

Mr R.S. Love: Is that the article that had the animal that is not even found in Western Australia as one of the pests?

Ms S.F. McGURK: The RSPCA has been critical of the government on a number of policy items. In this case, not only the Shooters and Fishers Party, but also individuals from the National and Liberal Parties in the upper house supported a trial of recreational hunting in public lands. In my view, they supported a trial because they knew that there was not much support for a general extension of shooting. To his credit, the Minister for Environment rejected that proposal, and has said that there will not be any extension of recreational shooting.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.