

ANIMAL WELFARE ACT — ENFORCEMENT

Grievance

MS L.L. BAKER (Maylands) [9.49 am]: I rise today to make my grievance to Minister Castrilli.

The SPEAKER: Is that to the Minister for Local Government?

Ms L.L. BAKER: To the Minister for Local Government. By the way, I would like permission to lay some photographs on the table.

The SPEAKER: Yes; if the member wishes to do so, for the remainder of the day's sitting.

[The paper was tabled for the information of members.]

Ms L.L. BAKER: In 2007 the Carpenter government set up a six-person inspectorate to respond to reports of livestock animals subjected to cruel treatment during their transportation to ports, saleyards and abattoirs. I repeat, minister, that six inspectors were employed full-time by the Carpenter government in the Department of Local Government's animal welfare branch—six! Today there is one permanent general inspector and one contract general inspector.

The Carpenter government's animal welfare branch achieved excellent results in its first 12 months, and recommendations for the inspectorate to be permanently established were under consideration when the state election was called in 2008. We lost government before that could happen. Officers employed in the branch are either general or scientific inspectors—it is important to make the difference. General inspectors are responsible for the welfare of livestock animals, particularly during transportation. Scientific inspectors are accredited differently under the Animal Welfare Act and are not responsible for the welfare of livestock animals. The job of general inspectors is to inspect ports, saleyards and abattoirs to identify livestock animals suffering illness and those that may not have been fit to load in the first place or those that have been injured during transportation. An inspector can then examine the animal, make a recommendation and, where appropriate, have it euthanased. Inspectors can assist members of the livestock industry to better understand their obligations under the law. The objective of inspectors is not always to prosecute. Through their scrutiny, inspectors are capable of making the livestock industry more robust, and they alleviate much of the responsibility placed on saleyards to identify and euthanase sick or injured animals. I encourage the minister to look at the photographs that are laid on the table; they are photographs taken in the past 12 months of incidents that demonstrate the kind of cruelty that is going on.

The Premier has confirmed that the welfare of livestock animals is not being monitored under this government. The Premier, in a letter to Eric Ayers, the president of the WA Rangers Association, said that it was correct that the animal welfare branch no longer undertakes routine inspection duties at the Port of Fremantle, feedlots and saleyards, and he also acknowledged that local government rangers do not conduct routine inspections at these locations. The Premier believes that there are three full-time general inspectors at that branch. Although that might be technically accurate, it is light years away from what is happening on the ground. The branch currently employs one permanent inspector at level 5 and one contract inspector at level 4. The permanent incumbent has been away from work and that position has been filled on contract for six months, and I think that contract has been extended to December.

The head of the animal welfare branch, Dr Jeni Hood, is a general inspector. Her job is to manage the branch and to ensure that the state's animal welfare laws are upheld. Expecting Dr Hood to inspect saleyards is the equivalent of asking the Commissioner of Police to walk the beat every day. According to the Premier's letter to Mr Ayers, the Premier believes that somehow the jobs previously undertaken by six experienced, fully trained inspectors employed full time by the government can be done by other agencies. Let us have a look at that, shall we?

The Department of Agriculture and Food gives advice about animal welfare, but that advice is guidance; no-one is compelled to follow that. The Department of Environment and Conservation is responsible mainly for the welfare of native animals and for the control of feral animals, not for livestock animals. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, a fine organisation, is funded by grants and is a charity; it relies on donations from the public to work on behalf of companion animals. It can prosecute commercial livestock cases, certainly, but it is not funded to do the work of the animal welfare branch. Unlike the animal welfare branch, the RSPCA is not required by law to act on complaints about animal welfare or cruelty; it can choose which cases it will or will not investigate. We have seen in writing to the Premier from the WA Rangers Association that Department of Local Government rangers will not monitor or inspect the welfare of livestock animals. The WA police do not routinely inspect and prosecute breaches under the Animal Welfare Act as part of their day-to-day work. Since the loss of the stock squad, the police do not get the training or experience to do that work. The

Australian Quarantine Inspection Service is a federal agency with responsibility for the standards of livestock for export. AQIS is concerned only with the health status of animals for the purpose of their trade, not for their welfare. There are not currently enough staff or resources to enforce the act. I cannot make it any clearer. There are not enough staff to conduct routine experiments, attend emergency call-outs, make prosecutions, investigate cases, gather evidence, take cases through to prosecution, train and develop capacity across the industry, and liaise and collaborate with other agencies to improve animal welfare, minister.

I have been advised that the Department of Local Government has had to use taxpayers' money to contract the services of private investigators—a company called Pace Henley—at a cost of \$110 an hour, to investigate at least one serious complaint. The animal welfare branch was also forced to second two police officers to investigate a major livestock cruelty case.

In his letter, the Premier goes on to state that he hopes that state and commonwealth arrangements can be developed to fix this problem. I say to the Minister for Local Government that hoping is not acceptable, nor is it a valid excuse for this government to opt out of enforcing this act. When members of the public phone and ask for help, to whom will the minister send them? I have read the list to the minister. None of those agencies does this work. How long does the minister intend to continue with the charade that his government cares about the welfare of these animals? I repeat: given the pleas that Minister Castrilli has received from thousands of people who care about this matter, when will he provide the resources required by the animal welfare branch to reinstate a full and proper inspectorate of six inspectors to protect the welfare of Western Australia's livestock animals?

[Interruption from the gallery.]

The SPEAKER: Before the minister responds, I will give two directions, one of which is to those in the public gallery. You are absolutely welcome here—it is great to see you here—but, unfortunately, you are unable to make any sound whatsoever. I understand where you are coming from.

The other point I make once again to all members of this place is that every member has a title in this place; for example, the Minister for Local Government or the member for Kwinana, and that is the way to which they must be referred.

MR G.M. CASTRILLI (Bunbury — Minister for Local Government) [9.56 am]: I acknowledge the people in the public gallery and also the member for Maylands. I thank the member for Maylands for her grievance. I understand where the member for Maylands is coming from. I am not worried about which title I get.

Ms L.L. Baker: Thank you.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I thank the member for Maylands for her grievance.

There has been a fair bit of misinformation put around, and I will take a few moments to respond. I understand where the member for Maylands is coming from, but there is a lot of misinformation about and it is important to put it on the record. The member, in her press statement of 12 August, made assertions that were totally incorrect. She said that 175 000 more sheep died when they left the port of Fremantle than the number that died the previous year. That number is more than the total number of deaths that occurred in the whole of Australia.

Ms L.L. Baker: Minister, that's not relevant.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: No. I am just telling the member that there is a lot of misinformation out there —

Ms L.L. Baker: But that's not relevant.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I did not interrupt the member.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Albany!

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I am trying to be a bit civil here.

Mr P. Papalia: Explain that on *Inside Cover*. You put me to sleep, so I count sheep!

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: Yes, I know. I hope the member for Maylands did not get the information from the member for Warnbro, because if she did, he led her up the garden path.

I understand that animal welfare is an issue for the member for Maylands. It is an issue for me and it is a priority for me in this government; I think I have said that to her before. The Animal Welfare Act came into vogue in November 2002 under the previous minister, Hon Tom Stephens. He said that the animal welfare branch had been established to provide advice to the government on animal welfare issues and to work closely with the RSPCA and other welfare groups to promote the best standards in animal care and management. That is what he

said. At that time when the act was established by the then honourable minister, two staff members were appointed: one a manager and one a research and administrative officer. The member is right; in the 2006–07 budget, funding was made available by the previous Labor government for six general inspectors for two years only. The then Minister for Local Government and Regional Development, Hon Jon Ford, stated in November 2006 that these general inspectors would take on the role of improving animal welfare compliance in the livestock export chain. The 2006–07 budget papers show the creation of those six general inspectors for two years. That funding finished in June 2008 —

Ms L.L. Baker: I have explained that, minister.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: — not in December 2008, as the member said in her public statement.

Ms L.L. Baker interjected.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: The member did; I have it here. She said that and that is not right. Labor did not make any funding available to continue with those six general inspectors. **Labor stopped that funding from June 2006.** **After June 2008, there was funding for only the manager and the support officer.** That was confirmed by the shadow minister's statement, which I also have here.

Mr P. Papalia: Read it all out.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I have his statement here. He said that when it became apparent that there was a need, Labor created six positions for general inspectors in the animal welfare unit in 2006 and funded the unit for two years. He also said that funding for the animal welfare unit ended in July 2008 and that, at the time, there was no evidence of breaches of the act. Labor lost office in 2008. Does this government think that that was good enough? No, it does not. I do not think that is good enough. While I have been the minister, the Department of Local Government has reallocated resources to give the animal welfare unit the profile and resources it needs. But, as I have said, I am still going through the process. I have six staff in the animal welfare branch within the department, three of whom are general inspectors. The number has increased from two to six under my watch. Last year there were 128 —

Ms L.L. Baker interjected.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I am telling the member that the number of staff has increased from two to six under my watch.

Ms L.L. Baker: Minister, only two of them can do this work.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I am telling the member that the number increased from two to six. I am not saying that that is adequate by any means.

Last year, 128 animal welfare complaints were received by the unit. As I have said, I care about animal welfare, as does this government. In 2007–08 there was one prosecution, in 2008–09 there was one, and in 2009–10 there were two. I understand and appreciate that animal welfare issues are very important. In allocating those additional resources, I am trying to improve partnerships and get better coverage. I will continue to look for better ways to fund animal welfare services and to improve those services right across the state. Yes; I do not think it is quite adequate. We have increased the number of staff from two when Labor was in government—I know that the member was not here then—to six now. I would love to have more staff. I am looking for ways to improve and better resource these services.

The member also mentioned the RSPCA. It does a fantastic job. It regularly carries out routine inspections of livestock saleyards and similar facilities.

Ms L.L. Baker: It does not.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: I have the article that the RSPCA put in the paper.

Ms L.L. Baker: I know.

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: The member has read the article. She and I both agree that it is a fantastic organisation.

Ms L.L. Baker: It is, but that is not its core business.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Mr G.M. CASTRILLI: As I have said, I am looking at ways that we can improve these services.

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Mr D.A. Templeman interjected.

Extract from *Hansard*

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Ms Lisa Baker; Speaker; Mr John Castrilli

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Mandurah, if you want to talk, can you please sit in your seat.