

**ANIMAL WELFARE AND THE AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION FOR THE WELFARE
OF ANIMALS**

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INTRODUCTION

Australian society is heavily dependent on animals. It is dependent for food production, for major medical and veterinary advances through animal experimentation, for education, and for recreation. It is dependent on animals for employment and for an export income that has allowed Australians an enviable standard of living for so long. The export income from the sheep industry alone is around four billion dollars per annum and animal-dependent employment, although not documented statistically, extends far beyond the rural scene into many aspects of urban life, especially the food and transport industries.

The scientists, extension specialists, animal breeders and animal producers that make up the Australian Association of Animal Breeding and Genetics (AAABG) are all dependent on animals, yet many of them, like members of other animal-dependent groups, will be unaware of the threats posed to their livelihood by the animal protest movement, and will be poorly informed about events and issues in the contemporary social debate about the use of animals in society. This paper aims to remedy the deficiency and to inform delegates about a new body of animal-dependent groups, The Australian Federation for the Welfare of Animals Inc., that deserves their support.

There were two reasons why the Federation was formed. The first was the growing recognition amongst animal-dependent groups that, with the population drift to the cities, community awareness of the dependence of Australians on animals had declined - that an educational void had developed and was being occupied by the animal protest movement, including extreme groups opposed to any form of human use of animals. There was need for an organization to remind society and its elected representatives about the importance of animals to human welfare, and to seek to be consulted by decision-makers.

Secondly, community sensitivity to animal welfare issues has increased, and animal-user groups recognised that there was a need for them to scrutinize and improve existing standards of animal care that fell short of community expectations.

THE ANIMAL WELFARE DEBATE

Debates on the way in which humans treat animals have surfaced periodically over the centuries and resulted in pioneering "Cruelty to animals legislation" being passed in Britain last century. The comparatively modern concern for animals probably had its origin in animal experimentation in Europe last century in the form of major surgery without anaesthetic. Today this would be regarded as horrific and gave rise to the term "vivisection", but nonetheless provided the basis for modern medicine. Today the term is largely used in a derogatory sense to decry animal experimentation.

The debate about animal treatment has given rise to the term "animal welfare", a topic that is concerned with the prevention of pain and distress; and this concern for animals has resulted in the establishment of community groups with the objective of preventing cruelty to animals. The RSPCA is an example with a practical policy of rescuing and caring for animals in distress. The debate also resulted in publication of a series of protest books such as Ruth Harrison's "Animal Machines" (1964) and philosopher Peter Singer's "Animal Liberation" published in the mid-seventies. Singer labels human exploitation of animals as "speciesism", which he regards as ethically wrong as "sexism" or "racism". In essence he states that humans have no moral right to give precedence to their interests, in the form of animal experimentation for medical advancement for example, over and above the interests of "sentient" animals - animals that feel pain and suffer like humans. As an extension of Singer's philosophy, some groups claim that animals have rights similar to human rights - ethical, emotional, spiritual, and even legal rights. Other philosophers and medical researchers such as Peart (1987) have put the contrary view. In particular, one American philosopher, Cohen (1986), has attacked Singer's argument as "worse than unsound, it is atrocious. It draws an offensive moral conclusion from a deliberately devised verbal parallelism that is utterly specious." Cohen concludes that the wide and imaginative use of live animal subjects (in research) should be encouraged rather than discouraged, and that encouragement is our obligation to the infinite future generations of humans and animals. This accords with the generally accepted theological view that animals were placed on earth for human use (Anon. 1988).

Closer to home, Prof. John McCloskey (1979), of La Trobe University, concludes that animals cannot have rights, but that humans have an obligation to provide high standards of care for their animals. McCloskey also argues that it may be extremely misleading to assume that animals suffer and feel pain in the same way as humans.

A very practical approach is that of Jonathan and Margaret Stone (1986), a physiologist and a lawyer, who emphasize the need for community consensus on the treatment of animals and who argue that rights are given, not found, and that the assertion of animal rights is not helpful in the search for consensus.

It is important, however, for the community in general, and animal-dependent groups in particular, to recognise that there are two separate and distinct issues in the animal welfare debate:-

The animal rights issue is concerned with whether it is morally right for humans to use animals for human benefit, and the animal welfare issue is concerned with the quality of care given to the animals being used by humans; it covers animal health, handling, feeding, housing and other procedures to which animals are subjected.

THE ANIMAL PROTEST MOVEMENT

Singer's book launched a crusade for "animal rights" by the protest section of the community that took the name "Animal Liberation". The animal rights/animal liberation movement has spread through the western world, and is now represented by a large variety of separate bodies.

There can be little doubt that the aims of the more extreme groups are to abolish most, if not all, forms of human exploitation of animals, as a variety of articles and actions by the movement in Australia reveal. Particularly telling documents are the recommendations of the movement to the Senate Select Committee on Animal Welfare (AFAS 1984) and a paper by Ralph Blunden (1986).

In Australia the animal protest movement, embodied in Animal Liberation, Animal Rights and some other groups, has promoted the formation of the "Australian and New Zealand Federation of Animal Societies" (ANZFAS). This body, claiming some 50 member groups, has effectively usurped the role of spokesperson on treatment of animals from the traditionally non-militant RSPCA, a pragmatic group that accepts human use of animals. The ANZFAS is commonly known as an umbrella for "animal welfare" societies, thus obscuring its true abolitionist agenda. Clarification is required about whether these societies share the policies and public statements of ANZFAS and its mouthpiece, Animal Liberation. These policies and statements are likely to be those of a very small number of people rather than of ANZFAS as a whole, and the member groups should be prepared to indicate where they stand in regard to the animal rights issue, and about which, if any, forms of human use of animals they regard as morally acceptable.

The effectiveness of these protest groups in propagating their message (Brownhill 1986) has been catalysed by recent communication developments; events in any part of the globe can be viewed simultaneously at any other place. In this and all other areas the protesters make extensive use of the media, and widely distribute literature that is frequently based on misinformation and emotion. In addition, there is the not so new tendency of the media to concentrate on sensationalism and outrageous acts. Indeed, outrageous acts have become the stock in trade of many of the protest groups.

ACTIVITIES OF THE ANIMAL PROTEST MOVEMENT

While protest groups can serve a useful function by raising issues that merit community consideration, the philosophy and actions of the animal protest movement have such important implications for human welfare that I feel obligated to discuss these in some detail, even at the risk of being branded reactionary and defensive. Some of the

activities of the movement, such as turning the classroom into an ideological battleground, or infiltration of government departments are not readily proven, but there are other activities that are well-documented.

Medicine and biomedical research

Some of the adherents of the movement effectively place animal welfare above their concern for human welfare when, for example, they recklessly proclaim that the development of medical procedures through animal research has resulted in no worthwhile improvement in human health, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary (Paton 1984; Boura 1986; Widdowson 1986). Examples of medical developments due to animal experimentation have been summarized in a pamphlet by the Australian Physiological and Pharmacological Society and include vaccines, antibodies and other drugs, anaesthetics, blood banks, organ transplants and microsurgery, artificial pacemakers for hearts, insulin and other hormones, and vitamins.

Benefits to animals themselves can be added to the list (Silver 1987), and the list of unsolved problems that will require animal research is just as long.

The antisocial animal rights view is irresponsibly put in a video horror film, "Hidden Crimes", produced by the movement in America and circulating within Australia; for example, it has been shown several times by Animal Liberation to impressionable 14-year-old school girls in one Sydney high school. The film attacks medical research and medical ethics and attempts to discourage young parents from having their children vaccinated for fear of side effects - effects which are far less likely to occur than serious complications of disease. The film does contain sequences that are indefensible, but much of it is outdated and not applicable to Australian conditions.

In the United States, Barnes (1986) and Holden (1986) have documented how biomedical research has become extremely difficult, largely for bureaucratic reasons that arise from activities of the movement. Animals have become costly and difficult to get, facilities are prohibitively expensive due to legislative and security requirements, and the red-tape is formidable. In Australia the safety testing of drugs and various commercial products for their toxicity to humans is also threatened through animal rights' lobbying about certain toxicity tests and about the establishment of a toxicology laboratory in Victoria.

The antisocial aspect of the animal protest movement was brought home to me personally when a member of the movement recommended to CSIRO that a collaborative project between myself and a Westmead Hospital obstetrician be stopped. The project made use of my experience with sheep to produce a sheep model for the study of human foetal growth retardation, a major cause of human infant mortality today. The objection was based on the Animal Liberation cliché that because of differences between humans and animals, animal experimentation cannot provide useful medical information; but the activist failed to consult the collaborating obstetrician.

My own research (Alexander 1962) provided the basis for the sheep weather alerts, which have the potential to benefit present and all future generations of shorn sheep and lambs; yet the work has been attacked by animal protesters with lies and distortions about it being cruel and pointless, because lambs were exposed to simulated cold weather in the laboratory.

An animal liberation newsletter has related how a NSW Premier was pressured into causing cancellation of a licence to trap possums for a University of NSW research project on neuro-anatomy; the possum brain lacks the classical anatomical connection by which the right and left hemispheres of the brain of "higher" animals communicate, but Animal Liberation regarded the studies as purposeless.

Animal products and agriculture

The movement attacks animal-based industries through the media and also attempts to induce boycotts of animal products in the market place at home and abroad. Eskimos were deprived of their sole source of income by a successful boycott in the European market of seal skins, from a seal harvest that the Canadian Government regarded as necessary and had overhauled to minimize animal suffering (Woods 1986). That judgement is being vindicated by the consequent decline in the fish harvest. The campaign was typically an emotional one based on TV pictures of the killing of "cute and cuddly" seal pups. It would not be unreasonable to question whether the scenes depicted were typical or highly selected to convey the worst possible impression, or indeed were orchestrated in the same way as "Goodbye Joey" that told brazen untruths about the kangaroo cull, yet proved to be the most successful documentary ever produced when it gained acceptance on networks worldwide.

Threats to the livelihood of North American farmers have also been documented (Elliot 1986). The situation in Australia is less serious as yet, but there are sufficient examples for serious concern.

Australian animal liberationists have attempted to halt the live sheep trade by recommending a European embargo on Australian sheep products and, more recently, to halt the kangaroo cull by embargos on beef imports to North America with unsubstantiated claims of contamination of beef with kangaroo meat. The activists also attempted to discourage visits to Australia by North American tourists.

Australian sheep and kangaroo industries are grossly misrepresented by the protest movement - for example, in American animal welfare journals. One, in reviewing "Pulling the Wool" (Townend 1985) said that mulesing was "ostensibly" done for blow-fly control, and that Australian Merinos lived a life of "suffering, pain and fear". Another said that kangaroos were on the verge of extinction, and more recently claimed that the kangaroo industry was in the hands of organized crime.

The movement is implacably opposed to mulesing, despite its welfare advantage, and displays pictures of the operation without balancing pictures of blow-fly struck sheep; and recently an animal liberationist

recommended to CSIRO that work on biological defleecing be stopped because sheep "need contact with shearers". In fact, the procedure has clear animal welfare advantages of no cuts, no tetanus, and the avoidance of "off shears" deaths due to cold exposure.

The Australian fur industry is at present under attack despite the fact that it adheres to the international treaties on endangered species, that 85% of its furs are from farmed animals, while the rest comes mainly from pest species, and despite restriction of importations to countries where the use of steel-jawed traps has been banned.

Pressure on government

The skill of the small vocal minority of the animal protest movement in applying pressure to Government (Brownhill 1986) has been particularly evident at local Government level. Some local Councils have been pressured into banning circuses from their municipalities without seeking community views, and banning the supply of impounded dogs to universities, for purposes that include training of veterinarians in surgery, despite the fact that the dogs are not allowed to recover from the anaesthetic. The alternate fate, regarded as preferable by some protest groups, was for the animals to be uselessly destroyed in the pound, at the rate of 50 or more per day in Sydney alone. The argument that these animals are treasured pets is contradicted by the marked increase in abandoned dogs during holiday periods. The use of pound animals has already been banned in Britain where new graduates lack surgical skills, and Australian vets are in demand. Blacktown Council, one of the few remaining Councils whose pound supplies dogs to Sydney's universities, was recently petitioned with 10,000 signatures by the animal liberation/animal rights movement, but has stood firm. Penrith Council capitulated in 1986.

State Governments have been pressured into banning, or severely restricting, the keeping of whales and dolphins in captivity, on the basis of a report by the Senate Select Committee on Animal Welfare, with which all members of that Committee did not agree, and which has been discredited by a document signed by more than 60 Australian scientists. A write-in poll by skindivers showed 95% in favour of keeping dolphins in captivity to encourage sympathetic understanding of the species by the public (Anon. 1986).

Toxicity testing involving lethal dosing of animals with toxic materials to safeguard human health has also been legislated against in Victoria without any consultation with University toxicologists and the relevant scientific societies. Professor Alan Boura of Monash University claims that in his laboratory this has resulted in increased rather than decreased use of animals.

The regulations governing deer hunting in Victoria were also under threat of being altered without any consultation with responsible deer hunting groups.

Representatives of the animal protest movement also sit on State and Federal advisory committees, including a CSIRO committee advising on community attitudes on animal experimentation. On the Federal level the previous Senate Select Committee chairman has a self-admitted bias

towards the "animal protest movement", and to the dismay of animal scientists, has publicly stated that he does not favour animal experimentation for purposes of fundamental research - the foundation of so many practical advances in medical and veterinary science (Silver 1987).

Infiltration by sympathizers

The infiltration of media groups, of Government Departments and organizations by members of the movement appears as a plank of its manifesto. Animal-dependent groups could be excused for believing that certain sections of the media are biased in favour of the movement when they find that it is virtually impossible to have letters published in response to articles in certain newspapers and when television stations fail to give balance to animal welfare issues by depicting scenes designed to horrify, without adequate explanation. For example, in June, 1987, the ABC's 7.30 Report featured shot after shot of calves being killed and bled, without emphasizing that the animals had already been stunned. The producers' response to claims of bias was that presentation of the balancing argument would be tedious. This perception of bias was recently enunciated by the president of the Australian Veterinary Association.

Illegal activities

Activist wings of the animal protest movement operate in Australia and overseas. They publish newsletters detailing their illegal actions. These include graffitiing of property, bomb and other threats to the safety of animal scientists, livestock producers and their families, break-ins and damage to research and hospital laboratories, poultry farms and the premises of makers of farm surgical equipment. Myers in Melbourne suffered half a million dollars worth of damage during a fur promotion campaign last year, and recently butchers' shops have been graffitied and damaged. In Britain, some activists claim that "vivisectors", meaning animal scientists, should be killed (and incidentally that the keeping of pets is an act of self-indulgent oppression (Henshaw 1986)).

Australian groups, including Animal Liberation, attempt to dissociate themselves from these activities, yet praise their efforts, publish their letters and policy, report their activities, with photographs, and provide inflammatory material in their national magazine, "Animal Liberation".

FORMATION OF THE AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION FOR THE WELFARE OF ANIMALS

People, of course, are free to hold whatever views they choose, but when their views and actions are antisocial, such as in placing animal welfare above human welfare, when they break recognised standards of human ethical behaviour in disseminating misinformation, especially to young people, and when they support illegal acts perpetrated in the name of animal liberation, there is bound to be a response.

The Australian response came in 1986 in the form of two meetings of delegates from some 120 animal-dependent groups representing livestock producers and processors, medical, veterinary and agricultural

scientists, custodians of captive wild animals, animal traders, teachers, recreational groups, and industries supporting these groups.

These concerned users of animals were well aware that they could not claim that the human use of animals has been free from abuse, or that activities of the animal protest movement had not heightened community sensitivity about cruelty to animals, but they had also become conscious that an attempt must be made to restore rationality and balance to the animal welfare debate. They also recognized the need for their voice to be as loud as that of the animal protest movement, and to be heard by the 95% of Australians in the urban community where they buy their food and clothing in the sterile atmosphere of the supermarket and department store, widely removed from any contact with farm animals.

Discussions revealed a wide consensus that animal users had more incentive to see that animals are properly cared for and managed than any other group, and that an animal users' body should be formed with the object of promoting high standards of animal care and the development and adherence to Codes of Practice of animal use. It was affirmed that the use of animals for human welfare is morally acceptable, provided high standards of animal care and welfare are maintained.

A constitution embodying these principles and a code of ethics was drawn up and accepted by a general meeting in December, 1986, at which the name The Animal Welfare Federation of Australia was accepted and a representative controlling Council elected. The Federation was incorporated in NSW in December, 1987. At the time of writing 80 groups have been accepted as members. The Federation was officially launched in May, 1987, by Mr Gardiner Murray on behalf of the Minister for Primary Industry, the Hon. Mr John Kerin.

The Federation has adopted the policy of admitting to membership any animal-dependent group prepared to accept the Federation's code of ethics and which has a code of practice emphasizing animal welfare and acceptable to AFWA Council. AFWA Council has already insisted on amendments to codes of applicants for membership. The Federation believes that member groups are more likely to heed its voice on improving animal welfare than the voice of protest movement or Government.

Some potential member groups remain uncertain about having strange bed-fellows as co-members of the Federation, but Council is convinced that having such a wide mix of member groups will prove to be a major strength of the Federation.

The Federation's philosophy is that an informed community and its elected representatives, and not the Federation, must decide on which forms of animal use are morally acceptable and which are not - to decide on whether it is legitimate to breed immunologically incompetent mice for cancer research, to sell furs, to run egg-producing hens in cages, or to perpetuate dog breeds with inherent genetic defects, or to put fistulae in the side of sheep to allow collection of digesta for development of drought-feeding strategies, to keep big cats in cages in zoos and circuses, to mules sheep for blow-fly control, and so on.

A relevant question about livestock breeding is: How far should breeding programs go in increasing the productive capacity of livestock? Can cows produce too much milk and so place their health at risk, and is it justifiable to breed highly fecund sheep when the mortality of large litters can exceed 50%?

Major objectives of the Federation are to ensure that the debate on such issues is a balanced one, and that animals on which humans depend in various ways are well treated. A third objective is to redress misinformation and unethical actions by the animal protest movement.

The Federation accepts John Kerin's challenge, delivered at the Federation's launch, to promote effective self-regulation within each animal-dependent group.

Amongst the activities of the Federation are the publication of a newsletter every 4 months, the exchange of information between diverse groups, the provision of speakers on request by community groups, the promotion of meetings and symposia on animal welfare, the seeking of representation on advisory bodies on animal welfare, the lobbying of politicians and the establishment of good relations with other animal welfare groups that accept the legitimacy of the human use of animals. A court action over the name of the Federation has been amicably settled with the NSW Animal Welfare League. The objectives of the two groups, to improve the lot of animals, were recognised as similar, and the Federation agreed to make a minor change to its name, now the Australian Federation for the Welfare of Animals, as a gesture of goodwill.

Understandably, the formation of the Federation has met with an adverse response from the animal protest movement, but the movement should be prepared to reserve judgement and allow the Federation to establish its bona fides. The movement should also ensure that it has its facts right and should be prepared to assist in funding of animal welfare research.

LIVESTOCK BREEDERS AND ANIMAL WELFARE

Animal welfare is usually thought of in terms of "distress" due to conditions imposed on animals by human activity, but there is, of course, an important genetic component to animal welfare which will in turn influence productivity and profitability. This component has probably not received its due consideration by animal breeders generally, in their quest for increased productivity and maintenance of show standards.

The most obvious example is the use of polled cattle to reduce injury and bruising during transport. Likewise there is scope for the improvement of temperament to facilitate handling and reduce injury. There is scope for the improvement of maternal behaviour in sheep, especially in Merinos with litters that suffer a high mortality. Effort is much needed to increase resistance to the painful and debilitating foot disorders of foot abscess and footrot in sheep, and to increase the resistance of sheep and goats to internal parasites that are becoming resistant to one chemical after another. The scourge of the sheep industry, blowfly strike, and the need to mules,

could also be answered, at least in part, by a genetic approach (Sandeman 1987), though it seems unlikely that merely breeding to remove wrinkles would suffice, because smooth-bodied sheep are also subject to fly-strike and respond to mulesing.

It may also be possible to increase further the adaptability of animals to intensive husbandry, but even in the absence of evidence of distress would the anthropomorphists be satisfied?

The question of maximum acceptable productivity levels has already been mentioned. Practical limits will probably be set by economic factors such as the need for veterinary attention to high-yielding cows, or a decline in the crop of surviving saleable lambs with increasing litter size, but the ethical questions of costs to the individual high-producing cow or lamb that dies should remain a consideration that sooner or later will have to be faced by the AAABG.

Finally, ethical questions are being raised by the animal protest movement about the genetic engineering and patenting of animals, but of more importance is the need for the genetic engineers to remain sensitive to the need for the engineered animals to be able to lead a healthy normal life.

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