

# Legislation & Regulation

## Australian Senate Inquiry into Animal Welfare

For the first time, the Australian senate has begun a serious and comprehensive inquiry into the whole gamut of problems that fall under the general rubric of "animal welfare." Five general problem areas related to the well-being of animals have been identified and allotted to one of two Standing Committees, according to a scheme proposed by the Australian leader of the Democrats, Senator Don Chipp.

The Standing Committee on National Resources will investigate (1) interstate and overseas commerce in animals and (2) codes of practice of animal husbandry. The Standing Committee on Science and the Environment will look into (1) wildlife protection and harvesting, (2) animal experimentation, and (3) the use of animals in sport.

The specific issues to be examined by these committees do not appear to differ very much from those that have become the focus of proposed legislation in other countries. Yet, as expressed in the statement on "animal rights policy" adopted earlier by Mr. Chipp's party, the language and philosophical argument reflect much of the work of Peter Singer and other Australian animal liberationists:

*While man is, or should be, responsible for the welfare of all life on the planet, he is himself both part of that life and dependent on it for his survival. He shares with other higher animals both consciousness and sensitivity to pain. A difference in species does not, any more than a difference in race, justify a limitation to this respect for other animals, or his concern about the responsiveness to their suffering. Animals do not have a vote, but concerned people do. The Democrats must present*

*strongly and clearly an advanced and enlightened policy on animal welfare.*

Also, in speaking before the senate, Mr. Chipp stressed that it was vital that any new regulations relative to animal welfare be enforced uniformly throughout the nation. He asserted that current legislation is not only inadequate, but also differs considerably from one state to another. He also stated that, the Democratic policy statement notwithstanding, that work of the Select Committees must reflect a balanced perspective, and not simply represent an "ad hoc reaction to a particular situation." Animal liberationist requests, he said, must be weighed against "the practical considerations of animal husbandry."

Senator Evans of Victoria, in responding to Mr. Chipp's remarks, echoed the increasingly prevalent feeling that animal welfare is no longer merely the "preoccupation of little old ladies in tennis shoes." Rather, "in talking about animal welfare, we are talking about something that is very much a legitimate preoccupation for ordinary, concerned citizens. I think there is a growing appreciation that the basic issue involved in the campaigning of increasingly visible animal welfare lobby groups is a very basic issue of suffering which deserves attention and compassion by all civilized human beings."

The specific areas of concern to be covered by the two Standing Committees, as expressed in Mr. Chipp's statement to the Australian senate, are summarized below.

### *Overseas and Interstate Trade and Commerce in Animals*

Among other concerns, problems are created by the fact that, while each state does have its own regulations on

animal transport, there is no general stipulation on the maximum duration that animals may be held in transit. Nor are there any requirements to make "one person responsible for the animals at each point in the journey, and so responsibility for injury and death is abnegated or denied." So an inquiry is urgently needed to determine how best to supervise journeys of stock animals, improve sale yard conditions, and learn more about the various types of transport currently in use for moving animals, "to prevent unnecessary injury and stress."

#### *Wildlife Protection and Harvesting*

At present, Australia has no endangered species act, yet it is known that about 30 species are currently threatened with extinction. Therefore, some sort of legislation to protect these animals is desperately needed. Concerning international trade in animals and pelts, Australia, as a signatory of CITES, will require funding for an inspection service to help halt the illegal traffic in wildlife.

Export of kangaroo products has been prohibited until recently, but now the new government is working to repeal this prohibition; in May 1981, for example, an agreement was reached with the U.S. government to permit the importation of kangaroo skins and products. But it is important to couple the trade in these products with careful population estimates, so that overzealous "harvesting" does not come to threaten these animals with extinction.

#### *Animal Experiments*

In this area as well, there is virtually no legislation pertaining to the protection of animals. There are some regulations on experimentation with animals in the various states, but these tend to be woefully inadequate: "anything can be done to a dog or a cat behind closed doors, without the researcher being answerable to anyone except his own peers." There is, though, a code of practice, which is promulgated by the National Health and Medical Research Council. This code states that procedures likely to cause pain must include use of an

anesthetic. But it is highly probable that the code is largely ignored in most laboratories.

The government should also encourage use and development of alternative techniques, as well as promote the idea that animal welfare representatives should be a regular part of all committees that oversee animal experiments.

#### *Codes of Practice on Animal Husbandry*

A draft code of practice on animal husbandry has already been prepared by the Sub-committee on Animal Welfare.

However, this code fails to deal with an important element in factory farming—the ethological and behavioral needs of pigs - in particular, the kinds of diseases that are caused by the frustration of confinement.

#### *Animals in Sports*

Rodeoing, with its attendant high level of stress and painful injury to the animals involved, should be thoroughly investigated, as well as the use of whips in horseracing and more exotic events like wild-cow milking.