

RSPCA marks milestone with need great as ever

■ Wayne Martin



In a year of celebration, when the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals will reflect on 125 years of service, the organisation is expanding its work to cover the growing population in metropolitan Perth as well as to rural WA.

Currently, just 11 dedicated RSPCA WA inspectors cover the entire State, doing a remarkable job, but it is simply not enough for a State of this size. Additional inspectors are required, including in regional areas not presently covered, such as the Kimberley.

RSPCA WA has launched its biggest-ever appeal to raise the funds necessary to increase the number of its inspectors to 20, and all households in WA are now receiving letters requesting support.

When the appeal material arrives in letterboxes around the State, I expect many West Australians will be shocked at the extent and brutality of some cases of animal abuse revealed. This simply reflects an unfortunate reality which has to be faced by inspectors on a regular basis.

The inspectors are split with seven in the metropolitan area and an inspector each in Bunbury, Albany, Geraldton and Kalgoorlie. They receive complaints, provide education and advice where necessary, conduct investigations and prepare evidence to support prosecutions for breaches of the Animal Welfare Act. Prosecutions

are not brought without good cause, and 96 per cent of prosecutions result in a conviction.

Over the past 125 years, the nature of the services required by, and provided to, the community by RSPCA WA has changed. Since 1892, the RSPCA in WA has been dedicated to the prevention of cruelty to animals. In 2017, the organisation pursues that fundamental objective in many ways, which can generally be grouped into three areas:

- Law enforcement.
- The promotion of informed public debate and sound public policy based on science.
- Educating the public in responsible animal care.

RSPCA WA receives funds from the State Government in recognition of its performance of responsibilities which would otherwise fall to government and the taxpayer.

However, those funds are only a fraction of the cost to the RSPCA of performing this important role, and the organisation bears the lion's share of those costs, using funds generously donated by the public.

Enforcement costs are reduced by the pro bono support of more than 60 lawyers, many from WA's top law firms, who donate their time and expertise.

It is an impressive model and the results of RSPCA WA's law enforcement activities are to be highly

commended. The public trust and confidence in this arrangement is reflected in the 40 to 50 calls for help and advice on animal welfare made to the organisation every day.

Law enforcement is, of course, vitally important, but so is the development of community values of respect for animals and their welfare. All reasonable people are opposed to animal cruelty, but views may differ as to what constitutes cruelty to animals. For example, reasonable people may hold different views about the mulesing of sheep. RSPCA WA aims to lead thought and promote the development of public policy informed by science and study in areas of controversy, and to lift general public awareness of steps which can be taken to reduce animal suffering.

To have an independent organisation advocating for animal welfare is important.

A large part of RSPCA WA's work is preventing animal cruelty and neglect through education and advice to people connected with animals in a wide variety of settings in homes, sports grounds, on farms or in the wild. An organisation like the RSPCA advocating for animal care is part of the fabric of a compassionate and civilised society.

The organisation provides a wide variety of information with respect to the responsible care of pets and livestock. That information is of great value to the many who only want their animals to live healthy lives.

The need for RSPCA WA is every bit as great as it was 125 years ago.



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■ Wayne Martin AC is Chief Justice of Western Australia and RSPCA WA Patron