

**MINUTES  
OF THE 140<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING  
OF  
THE ROYAL SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF  
CRUELTY TO ANIMALS (VICTORIA)  
held on  
FRIDAY, 21st OCTOBER 2011  
at  
RSPCA HEAD OFFICE EDUCATION CENTRE  
3 BURWOOD HIGHWAY  
BURWOOD EAST  
VICTORIA 3162**

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**PRESENT:**

(See attendance sheet)

**MINUTES:**

**1. OPENING AND WELCOME TO MEMBERS AND GUESTS**

The Chairman Dr Hugh Wirth, declared the meeting open at 11.00 am, and welcomed members, volunteers and staff to the 140th Annual General Meeting of RSPCA (Victoria) Incorporated.

He particularly acknowledged the presence of the following guests:

- Ms Maria Kerhoulas and Elyn Creer (Tress Cox)
- Dr Liz Walker (Lort Smith Animal Hospital)
- Dr Stephen Tate (Biosecurity Victoria) (although absent)
- Prof. Paul Hemsworth (Animal Welfare Science Centre, Univ. of Melbourne)
- Mr Nigel Watson (National Australia Bank)
- Mr Peter Brown (Tony Hargreaves and Partners) (although absent)
- Ms Sue Glasgow (DOGS Victoria) (although absent)
- Mr Stewart Anderson (Bell Potter)
- Ms Isabelle Lefevre (Deloitte)
- Ms Jenny Gray (Zoos Victoria)

Dr Wirth noted the quorum of 25 voting members at the meeting had been exceeded.

**2. APOLOGIES**

The Chairman indicated that forty-five (45) apologies had been received including: Patron, Dame Elisabeth Murdoch; The Hon. Peter Walsh, Minister for Agriculture; Dr Judith Slocombe, President, Lort Smith Animal Hospital; Mr Andrew Fairley, Chairman, Zoological Board of Victoria; and Dr Hugh Miller, Department of Primary Industries.

**MOTION # 1**

That the apologies be received and accepted.

Moved: Ms Cynthia Neubecker

Seconded: Dr Bronwyn Neubecker

**CARRIED**

### **3. PRESENTATION OF THE DIRECTORS' ANNUAL REPORT**

#### **a. President's Report**

The President spoke to his Report as follows:

#### **Celebration of 140th years of service**

The RSPCA (Victoria) celebrated its 140th year of service to the Victorian community and its animals in July. He elaborated, that the founding purposes of the Society were:

- to enforce the existing law to protect animals;
- to ensure that the law was regularly amended; and
- through effective advocacy, educate the community with regard to the humane treatment of all animals.

Dr Wirth explained that the new Strategic Plan refocused both the Board and the organisation on achieving these objectives, adding that the Society's Vision is that it be the trusted advocate for animals and leads to social change, so that all animals live according to the Five Freedoms. He noted the new Strategic Objectives as being leadership; stakeholders and partnerships; education, awareness and outreach activities; legislation and policy; animal care models; and, organisational resilience.

#### **Governance**

The President explained that the Board had worked well as a team during the year, with directors being engaged in setting the direction for the organisation, and monitoring its progress. The year 2010/11 saw them undertaking professional development, with workshops covering their Corporations Act responsibilities, occupational health and safety, and the Board's role in monitoring the health of the organisation, including governance and Board assessments, through expert facilitators presenting to it. In addition, he noted a comprehensive organisational risk assessment with the assistance of Deloitte and the management team. Implementation plans for the final assessment report from December 2010 have been formulated, to eliminate or mitigate all identified risks to the organisation. This regularly reassessed process, he said, was something the Board looked forward to further developing, including that of the committee structure, and assessing the Society's effectiveness over the next year.

#### **Government relations**

Note was made of the election of a new Victorian Government in November 2010, and that the Minister for Agriculture, Peter Walsh, had met with the Society many times prior to his appointment, he being aware of the Society's objectives. Resulting from this, the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee has been reactivated, resulting in a number of legislative improvements. New legislation to address the issue of puppy factories or puppy farms is being awaited. Inspectors, he said, had already been given increased powers to enforce the relevant Code of Practice under the Domestic Animals Act, but no mention has yet been made as to the scope of proposed changes to the Code.

In addition to the above, he said the Victorian Government supported a workshop to develop a national plan to assist companion animals, including horses, caught up in natural disasters, which was facilitated by the Royal Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPCA), and disaster relief officers from London and Bangkok. There are issues of disagreement with the Minister, he added, related to jumps racing, duck shooting, live animal exports, transportation of bobby

calves, slaughter of non-stunned animals, and intensive farming of chickens, cattle, pigs and sheep. Poorly conceived law, as seen by the Society, he said was the pit bull legislation, with a need for governmental consideration more holistically of underlying causes and with education and subsidised training for dogs and their owners, reduced registration fees for dogs properly trained, and better matching of pets with household. The failure of breed specific legislation was highlighted by him. Additionally, he noted that the commitment to develop a Victorian Animal Welfare Strategy based on the National Australian Animal Welfare Strategy was yet to be announced.

Regarding the Federal Government, Dr Wirth indicated it was reluctant to accept a leadership role as an honest broker in the animal welfare debate. However, the Minister, Joe Ludwig, had acted to restore animal welfare to the national debate, with the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy being reviewed and relaunched, with a National Implementation Plan. However, much was still to be done, he stressed, such as the Animal Welfare Unit being understaffed, residing in the animal production division instead of animal health, to enable full effectiveness. Governments, he added, were still, after 35 years of disasters, unable to adopt a considered phase-out policy about live animal exports for slaughter.

## **Campaigns**

Dr Wirth highlighted that the Victorian community will continue to judge the success of the Society on how it delivers fundamental welfare services on a day-to-day basis. The RSPCA, he highlighted, is now the fourth biggest charity in Victoria since its foundation in 1871. However, some community members questioned the rationale for the movement, including the view the long-held RSPCA philosophy of animal welfare and the Five Freedoms for Animals were out of date, lacking widespread community support, particularly from farmers. In evaluating such criticisms, the President spoke to:

### **The RSPCA philosophy on Animal Welfare**

Dr Wirth spoke to the need for humane treatment of animals by humans, and the need to bestow a level of care befitting human dignity as rational, intelligent, compassionate beings. This level of care, he said, was merited by the nature of the animal being a sentient creature capable of responding to human care and attention. The Society's philosophy, he outlined, was that humans may make use of animals provided it is justified and humane.

### **The Five Freedoms for Animals**

The President outlined the Five Freedoms to the meeting, being:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst;
2. Freedom from discomfort;
3. Freedom from pain, injury and disease;
4. Freedom to express normal behaviour;
5. Freedom from fear or distress.

He spoke to these five freedoms as being better provided for by those who have care for livestock practice, have caring and responsible planning and management, are skilled, knowledgeable and conscientious in animal management, have appropriate environmental design, considerate handling and transport, and undertake humane killing. He asked members here and outside the meeting to judge whether the Five Freedoms were out of date.

## **Recent campaigns**

Dr Wirth spoke to the success of recent campaigns at state and national level related to the national live export of animals for slaughter, with 243,000 people signing a petition to ban live export. Outdoor billboards and postcards reached, he said, more than 102,000 households, with

key messages on jumps racing (although now the State Government has announced its intention to invest \$2m on this, he highlighted, so-called sport, which he said was legalised cruelty.) Other campaigns included that on recreational duck shooting, but that the State Government had continued the season this year and increased the bag limit per hunter to 10 ducks per day. He spoke generally to the campaigns undertaken by the Society, along with the Coalition Against Duck Shooting, including the collection of 30,000 signatures on a petition to ban duck shooting.

Concern over the owner breeding of puppies in puppy factories was stressed, with the campaign continuing to gain momentum, together with assistance from Oscar's Law. He noted some statistics on this campaign, which included 136,00 people visiting the close puppy factory website; 22,000 joining the Facebook page; 90,000 postcards and 100,000 posters being distributed, in addition to 4,000 people demanding action outside Parliament House. He anticipated forthcoming action on puppy farming, but said jumps racing and duck shooting were continued to be supported by government Ministers that ignore the cruelty involved.

### **International issues**

The restructure of WSPCA was noted by the President, with WSPCA Australia now heading up the Asia-Pacific region, with country offices in Beijing, Delhi, Bangkok, Sydney, and Auckland. He spoke specifically about some of the work that is being carried out to educate people on humane slaughter, controlling rabies, relief for animals in natural disasters etc. He also spoke to the work of the Society with other organisations, such as United Nations, the World Health Organisation, AusAID.

### **Acknowledgements**

Dr Wirth paid tribute to the work during the year by fellow RSPCA (Victoria) Board members, the management team and CEO, and the Victorian community. [Received with acclamation.]

## **b. Chief Executive Officer's Report including Annual Financial Report and Auditor's Report**

### **Opening remarks**

The Chief Executive Officer, Ms Maria Mercurio, spoke to her report, assisted by overhead slides, highlighting the past year as one of change and renewal, driven by a board and management team and the new strategic directions.

### **Planning for the Future**

The new plan for 2012 to 2014, the CEO highlighted, provided a strong focus on education, partnerships, and advocacy, all necessary to enable the Society to be an effective agent for change. She stressed that working together increased the reach of the Society, education increased the impact, and advocacy, the influence.

Note was made by Ms Mercurio that the strategic plan spoke to revisiting the animal care shelters, and that there was a need to take models of animal welfare and care into the community, with national campaigns being germane to the RSPCA's identity and what supporters expected. The new plan also, she highlighted, will continue to strengthen the organisation and its staff.

### **Better outcomes through positive interventions/targeted efforts - cat welfare**

The CEO spoke to 2011 having been a year characterised by strong effort to drive better outcomes through positive interventions, many of which were hoped to have long-term benefits. Some noted items were a comprehensive welfare strategy for cats, and the cat population,

addressing a number of welfare issues such as indiscriminate breeding by undesexed cats, absence of widespread microchipping, reuniting strays with their owners, dealing with high surrender rates for cats and the devaluing of them in society.

A key element in this area of intervention, she explained, was the strategy in relation to the cat fee waiver and *I Love Cats* promotions. In three days, 121 cats were adopted across Victoria, compared to 18 for the same period last year. Free and subsidised desexing programs were run for cats in the state, as well as free microchipping promotions, resulting in 1,478 cats being desexed; 3,091 were microchipped. Another promotion related to targeting older animals, some run by the animal behaviour team, promoting Happy Cats.

### **Targeted efforts - adoptions**

Animal profiles on the website were improved during the year, with increased online promotions and expanded twilight adoption hours and venues.

### **Animal care results**

The standard foster care program assisted to save and rehome an additional 600 animals, concentrating on under-age puppies, kittens, rabbits, animals recovering from surgery, and animals recovering from treatable conditions.

The CEO said that, despite all the above efforts, 35,607 animals entered the shelters over the year, but the good news was that this represented a 5.4% decrease from the previous year; nearly 83% of all dogs being either returned to their owners or rehomed. Compulsory microchipping - which was introduced in 2007 - resulted in the number of dogs reunited with their owners continuing to steadily increase.

However, Ms Mercurio noted the cat statistics were still not good, with only 5.4% of them coming into the shelters being reclaimed by owners. That is, 819 out of a total of 14,885 cats coming into the shelters were reclaimed. Stress was placed on the obvious need to do more to educate the community. The adoption, reclaim rates for cats was up slightly from 36 to 37% compared to last year, she noted. It remained an unacceptable statistic

### **Education**

The CEO spoke to education being a key tool in proactively addressing welfare issues. She elaborated that the formal education program had expanded its reach, by building on strong, previously established relationships with Victoria University, Marcus Oldham College, and establishing new ones with the Victorian Department of Education and Training, and the Australian Apprenticeships Training and Information Service.

Training of education officers reached over 12,000 participants and delivered 440 sessions, she noted, and the secondary programs had been expanded. The issue of children perpetuating animal cruelty was also explored, and practical resources were used to assist people who are dealing with children who have mistreated animals.

### **Welfare outcomes - clinics**

In 2010/11, Ms Mercurio noted vets cared for over 35,000 animals, performing 4,550 surgeries and 7,951 desexing procedures. Continual expansion in this area will occur, with the addition of specialist services for orthopaedics, skin conditions, eye conditions, and ultrasound diagnosis. The clinic welfare discount scheme was successful, resulting in new positive welfare outcomes, including discounts to desex animals and helped to explore other treatment plans.

## **Welfare outcomes - Inspectorate**

The Inspectorate, Ms Mercurio indicated, dealt with 14,000 cruelty complaints over the ensuing year, with 6,400 related to cruelty to dogs; 1,700 to cats; 1,733 to horses; 1,521 to livestock. The most frequent complaints related to inadequate shelter, food and water. However, 50 offenders were prosecuted during the year, and inspectors expanded their reach to work with Victoria Police, the Department of Primary Industries, the Department of Sustainability and Environment, and other government agencies.

## **Welfare outcomes - behaviouralists**

The animal behaviour team, which is supported by skilled volunteers, expanded its program, to include post adoption training, and more work has been undertaken pre-adoption and shelter to increase the number of rehomeable animals. Some statistics in this area included: 222 one-on-one consultations being delivered; 54 puppy pre-school classes being conducted with over 250 participants; 36 classes for post adoption training, with 109 new owners participating.

## **Community engagement**

The CEO spoke to the continuing campaigns being conducted in relation to puppy factories, jumps racing, duck shooting, and live animal exports. She highlighted that, despite opinions expressed by a number of groups, the RSPCA was not and never had been, just a cat and dog Society, but had much, much broader objectives. In particular, the Society, she said, was strongly advocating the changing of the Code of Practice for the management of dogs and cats in pounds and shelters, and an updated Code had not been introduced by the State Government, which she expanded on in some detail to the meeting.

## **Organisational health**

Ms Mercurio spoke to the continuing work that had occurred during the year in relation to improving systems to develop staff, as well as the improved infrastructure to ensure sound welfare outcomes for animals in care. Regional facilities at Bendigo, Hughesdale and Wangaratta had benefited, and a major redevelopment at Burwood East. Other areas that were being improved included, she said, a new website and Intranet. Staff training and development is benefiting through the generous support of the Amsden Management and Leadership Scholarship and the Wotherspoon Scholarship for vets.

## **Acknowledgments**

The CEO spoke to her gratitude for the assistance provided to the Society by volunteers, staff, and the Board.

## **Annual Financial Report and Auditor's Report**

The Chief Executive spoke to the tabled and distributed report as contained in the Annual Report 2011, highlighting the following areas:

- ≈ The majority of expenditure during the year went to directly supporting animals, and exceeded \$20m for the first time.
- ≈ The Bushfire events finished this year and so the cost has dropped significantly.
- ≈ Campaigns costs have increased with jumps racing, duck shooting and other campaigns being well funded during 2010/11.
- ≈ Bequests provided a major income source again representing \$9m. The second largest source of funds is fees for services such as adoption and veterinary services. Fundraising made up the third biggest income activity, and represented 20% of the income.

- ≈ The Statement of Comprehensive Income was referred to (formerly called the Profit & Loss Account.) The overall trading result was a modest surplus of \$151,379, which included the income and expenses related to the Bushfire Appeal. The operational surplus, when the Bushfire Appeal income and expenses is excluded, amounted to \$406,633.
- ≈ The income generated during the year had increased by \$775,085 compared to the prior year, primarily due to an increase in fundraising of \$706,650. Dividends and franking credits also increased, as did profit on disposal of non-current assets.
- ≈ Operational revenues from activities other than bequests or the Bushfire Appeal increased to \$1,258,253 year-on-year.
- ≈ Retail sales proved challenging during the year, with overall retail sales falling \$432,771 from 2009/10 levels.
- ≈ Overall expenditure increased by \$898,522 during the year.
- ≈ The Statement of Financial Position (formerly referred to as the Balance Sheet) was referred to via the overhead slides, with notation being made to redevelopments, plant, property and equipment, and investments.

### Closing remarks

The CEO highlighted that the RSPCA (Victoria) remained in a sound financial position, but that challenges, inevitably, will arise over the coming years, as funds are invested in facilities and programs. [Report received with acclamation.]

### Question and Answer Session

- Ms Childs asked what technologies the Society was embracing to assist with adoption and training of people, and if they were being used, did they include Facebook and Twitter. The CEO responded as far as she was aware, Facebook for online training for adoption was not being used. However, Facebook and Twitter are used to promote adoptions generally, she elaborated. In addition, she said the use of internal systems to monitor the success of programs had been utilised.
- Ms Joanna Wriedt asked about statistics on animals that are rehoused or reclaimed and whether, when the figures are broken down, if it was found certain areas of Melbourne were more resistant to change and education. The CEO responded that statistics for various areas of Victoria could be looked at, rather than various areas of Melbourne, as it is well serviced by Burwood East. Certain regional areas, she said, do better than others in the state and others do more poorly. As to whether these differences related to lack of education or different demographics, she said it was a complex area, and that it was easier to look at success or failure in a regional sense rather than in a suburban sense in terms of metropolitan Melbourne.
- Ms G Don stressed the need to ensure council dog tags are placed on collars, including a phone number for contact purposes.

#### MOTION #2

That the 140th Directors' Annual Report of RSPCA Victoria be accepted.

Moved: Ms Cynthia Neubecker

Seconded: Dr Bronwyn Neubecker

CARRIED

#### MOTION #3

That the 2010/2011 Annual Financial Report and Auditor's Report be received and adopted.

Moved: Ms Betty Amsden

Seconded: Mr Peter Barber

CARRIED

#### **4. DECLARATION OF ELECTION OF DIRECTORS**

The CEO took the Chair and noted that nominations were called to fill vacancies arising from the three retirements of directors under Clause 3 of the Board policy No. 1. She added, the retiring directors this year standing for election were: Dr Hugh Wirth, Dr Onn Ben-David, and Dr Carole Webb. There were no other nominations received. She duly declared:

Dr Hugh Wirth  
Dr Onn Ben-David  
Dr Carole Webb

Re-elected to the RSPCA Board and Dr Wirth resumed the Chair.

#### **5. PRESENTATION OF THE 'RSPCA AMSDEN LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT SCHOLARSHIP' 2011**

The President provided a short outline to the history of the scholarship, and he invited Ms Betty Amsden to explain the different focus applied to the scholarship this year.

Ms Amsden explained her involvement with the future of the Society, and her eagerness that younger people are afforded opportunities to become the next leaders in the organisation. She spoke to the pleasing results that had already been achieved from the scholarship since its inception. Ms Amsden also spoke about the development of a course by the Australian Institute of Management, which was specifically targeted at the RSPCA, entitled "Leading the RSPCA Way." She duly quoted from two previous recipients of the award as to how beneficial they found it to their career and assisting the RSPCA.

Ms Amsden said it was her great pleasure to award the scholarship this year to all the shelter supervisors across Victoria. [Received with acclamation.]

#### **6. PRESENTATION OF THE 'WOTHERSPOON SCHOLARSHIP 2010'**

The Chairman explained the purpose of the scholarship, and announced the successful candidate for the year as Dr Michael Voyce. [Received with acclamation.]

#### **7. HONORARY LIFE MEMBERSHIP AWARDS 2011**

The Chairman announced the winners of the award of Life Membership of the RSPCA Victoria as:

Mrs Cynthia and Dr Bronwyn Neubecker  
Mrs Marie Gardner  
Mrs Margaret Matthews (who sadly passed away recently)

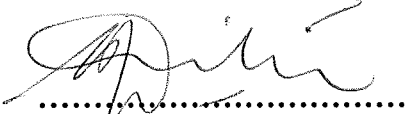
#### **8. GENERAL BUSINESS**

- Upon Ms Childs speaking to her concern at reading an article in The Age recently, related to what appeared to be a pound in Geelong where animals were put down without any thought, the President responded that he was aware of the article, stressing that the Minister's department had been asked to investigate all allegations made. He added, that the President of the organisation had resigned and probably some other members of the Board. He believed the issue was being dealt with in a rapid fashion.
- Ms Don asked how many puppy farms had been permanently closed down. The CEO responded that none had been. The President added, that he believed an announcement in relation to puppy farming was about to be made with respect to amendments to the law in this area.

**9. CLOSURE**

The Chairman thanked attendees for their input into the Annual General Meeting, and declared the Business part of the meeting concluded at 12:20 pm.

**Minutes approved:**

  
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Signature of Chair

9 NOVEMBER 2011  
.....  
Date

