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Address provided privately

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Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
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To Whom It May Concern:

Thank you for providing members of the public with the opportunity to contribute to the Senate Committee inquiry into the National Animal Welfare Bill 2005. In this submission I would like to draw attention to some areas of concern in the proposed legislation, with regards to sporting and recreational activities involving animals.

Allow me to begin by drawing a distinction between *animal welfare* and *animal rights* or *animal liberation*. *Animal welfare* in common usage means the prevention of cruelty to animals, where cruelty refers to the unnecessary infliction of pain, overly restrictive restraint, and other types of suffering. *Animal rights* refers to the contention that animals possess a set of moral rights including the right to self-determination, and *animal liberation* is the process of gaining legal and practical support for the exercise of those purported rights. In modern-day western society, the concept of *animal welfare* is almost universally supported, and the parts of the present Bill that seek to improve the quality of animal welfare in Australia are to be commended. On the other hand, the concepts of *animal rights* and *animal liberation* are relatively new and contentious. The fact that the vast majority of Australians eat meat and have engaged at some point in recreational fishing is testament to this fact. The agenda of the animal rights lobby includes the abolition of all forms of animal “exploitation”, including farming, hunting, fishing, the eating of meat, eggs, milk and honey, the use of leather, fur and wool and the keeping of pets. Most Australians would strongly oppose such a development. Parts of the proposed Bill stray from the accepted tenets of animal welfare into the territory of animal rights, and it is my contention that owing to the lack of public or scientific support for this concept, it would be grossly negligent of the Australian Senate to pass the Bill in its present form.

Of my two main areas of concern, the first pertains to the proposal to “prohibit the capture and killing of wild animals for entertainment or sport” (Section 3(b)(ii)). Neither the capture nor the killing of an animal necessarily inflicts pain or suffering. Moreover,

the motive for the act – entertainment or sport – is irrelevant, for surely from an animal welfare standpoint it is only the outcome for the animal that matters. While I understand that some people may consider these motives to be invalid or even morally repugnant, from a civil libertarian viewpoint this is irrelevant. As it presently stands, this section is a piece of animal liberation doctrine, and would ban numerous popular and socially acceptable activities, including recreational hunting and angling, the most popular participation sport in Australia.

My second area of concern is the list of specifically prohibited events (Section 82). Most of the prohibited events do not necessarily inflict pain or suffering, and once again the Bill strays away from animal welfare into animal rights, by banning these events outright rather than stipulating that they must not involve undue suffering. Section 82(a) borders on the ridiculous – if it is a crime to tease a bull, it should also be a crime to play with a kitten using a ball of wool! Section 82(c) seeks to prohibit “canned hunts”, where free-ranging animals are instantly killed without the need for mustering or transport prior to slaughter. These animals are subject to considerably less stress than meat livestock, and when done correctly, experience a death that is equally swift and painless. There can be no self-consistent argument for a ban on the basis of animal welfare concerns, unless all forms of animal farming and slaughter, and hence eating meat itself, are to be banned. I also note that this section would effectively ban fishing at a trout farm or even at one of the many publicly accessible impoundments artificially stocked for recreational anglers. Section 82(e) is invalid for similar reasons, unless keeping an animal in captivity, releasing it or killing it are all to be subject individually to blanket bans, thereby banning all animal farming, commercial fishing and the keeping of pets.

I urge the Senate Committee to consider the fact that the majority of Australians feel that it is acceptable in general to kill animals for our own purposes in a sustainable manner, as long as reasonable steps are taken to ensure that the suffering of the animal is minimised. This is reflected in the popularity of eating meat and engaging in recreational angling and hunting. It appears that parts of the Bill represent the “thin end of the wedge” from the animal rights movement in Australia. These sections of the Bill aim at the soft targets of sporting and recreational activities, while working towards the presently hidden radical agenda of the complete abolition of all uses of animals by humans.

As it stands, the proposed Bill is in direct opposition to strongly and widely held public opinion, and forces the relinquishment of precious civil liberties to make way for fictitious “animal rights”. I sincerely hope the Senate sees fit to suitably amend the Bill, or reject it.

Yours faithfully,

Russell Edwards