

National Animal Welfare Bill, 2005

Response

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The National Animal Welfare Bill covers a range of issues relating to the treatment of animals.

Parts 1-7 cover many aspects including animals kept by individuals as pets or for other reasons and protects animals from cruelty, pain and distress inflicted on them by their owners or otherwise either inadvertently (for example being left in a car) or deliberately (for example : debarking, removing claws, dog fighting etc).

Part 8 covers “Animals used for Experimental purposes” and rightly covers a range of issues relating to the Institutions that undertake animal experimentation, the individual researchers who do so and the Animal Units that supply and look after the animals.

Many important aspects are covered to ensure that the numbers and types of animals used, the procedures and so on are thoroughly documented. Despite the extremely onerous and arduous degree of reporting over and above that already undertaken by the researchers, research units, Institutions and the Authority, these are important steps in ensuring continued adherence to laws that protect animals from pain or stress. Development of an online reporting system by the Authority may help to streamline both the reporting and the assessment of the reporting.

However, I am deeply concerned, regarding the following sections in the Bill relating to Animals used for experimental purposes.

99 Matters of responsibility

(1) “ensuring that the public is aware that proposals for cruel experiments will be scrutinized”

It is worth quoting here the definition of cruel: “Disposed to inflict suffering; having or showing indifference to or pleasure in another’s pain; merciless; pitiless; hard-hearted.” (Oxford English Dictionary).

My deep concern relates not to public scrutiny but to the very suggestion by implication that cruel experiments are a) proposed and b) may even be approved within our Research Institutes and Universities. Institutional Animal Welfare and Experimentation Committees currently undertake massive and onerous screening of all research proposals which by law cover all experimentation undertaken in this country. Researchers are constantly under scrutiny at each stage of developing and

submitting a proposal, a process which can take several to many months, precisely to ensure that experiments are not “cruel”.

I am extremely alarmed and deeply affronted by the Bill that, by the use of the word cruel in the above section, implies that we undertake first, to inflict pain and second, that we derive pleasure from doing so.

Public scrutiny should be available, but should not be set in the context of researchers aiming to be cruel. I doubt that today any researchers are cruel, and if they were, their proposals would not pass the intense scrutiny of the Institutional Animal Welfare and Experimentation Committees. In addition, experiments undertaken that are cruel would be flawed and uninterpretable due to the animal’s stress responses.

My suggestion is to replace

(1) “ensuring that the public is aware that proposals for **cruel** experiments will be scrutinized”

With

(1) “ensuring that the public is aware that proposals for **all** experiments will be scrutinized”

102 Public notice of licenses

- (1) “The Authority must ensure that notices of an application for a license are published in a newspaper circulating in the locality of a research unit and in a different paper circulating nationally”
- (2) “The notices must state the time and place at which the Authority will meet to consider whether to grant a license”

This was the most alarming section of the Bill which has the very real and grave potential to halt all research using animals in this country, an intended aim of animal rights groups.

First, such a Bill, should it become law, would be a gross violation of privacy and an individual’s right to freedom from acts of terror and would constitute an extremely serious security threat for all researchers.

The majority of the members of the General Public to whom I, and many other researchers, speak about their research, understand the necessity for research, are thrilled, proud, relieved and given real hope that their fellow citizens are researching difficult issues for the benefit of mankind and other species on our planet. However, there are some animal right activists and extremist who are seeking to stop all animal experimentation as well as other uses of animals. Extremists in other countries have rigorously targeted researchers and with devastating effects. For example,

http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk_news/story/0,3604,431812,00.html

A parcel bomb packed with nails which exploded yesterday morning in a charity shop is believed to be the latest in a series of attacks by animal rights activists.

The device went off as a volunteer at the British Heart Foundation shop in Penrith, Cumbria, opened the morning post. The woman was shocked but uninjured, police said.

It is the tenth device sent to premises in northern England and Wales and comes amid warnings from the home secretary, **Jack Straw, that the government intends to crack down on intimidation from animal rights protesters.**

(current author's bold emphasis)

http://www.adl.org/learn/extremism_in_america_updates/movements/ecoterrorism/vlasak_congress_110705.htm

A militant animal rights activist referred to the notion of **murdering medical researchers in order to save laboratory animals as a "morally justifiable solution."**

Jerry Vlasak, co-founder and spokesman for the [North American Animal Liberation Press Office](#), which provides information about the [Animal Liberation Front \(ALF\)](#), [Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty \(SHAC\)](#) and other militant animal rights movements, made the remark during his testimony before the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee on October 26, 2005.

Vlasak made similar comments in 2003, when he told an audience at an animal rights conference in Los Angeles that the assassination of scientists working in biomedical research would save millions of animals' lives. "I think violence is part of the struggle against oppression. If something bad happens to these people [animal researchers], it will discourage others. **It is inevitable that violence will be used in the struggle and that it will be effective,**" Vlasak Said.

(current author's bold emphasis)

<http://www.abc.net.au/correspondents/content/2005/s1447421.htm>

HAMISH ROBERTSON: Finally to Britain, where violent action by Islamic radicals is not the only form of terrorism that's causing concern.

Animal rights activists were also being described as terrorists last week, after extremists claimed one of their most important victories yet – the closure of a family-run guinea pig farm.

As Kirsten Aiken now reports, that might be considered good news for guinea pigs, but it's creating consternation within the medical research establishment.

KIRSTEN AIKEN: It's a battle which has been waged in the quiet English countryside for six years, and revolves around an animal which I'd only ever thought was a child's pet.

But while the guinea pig has been farmed in some countries for thousands of years, usually for food, during the past 30 years the Hall family has been farming guinea pigs in the British Midlands for medical research.

PROTESTER: These people are sick, evil, perverted monsters.

KIRSTEN AIKEN: Last week animal rights activists won their war against the Hall family, when it announced it was giving in to a long campaign of terror and intimidation, which saw hate mail, bomb hoaxes, and arson attacks.

Despite vowing never to give in to terrorism, the breaking point for the Halls came when a group calling itself the Animal Rights Militia dug up and stole the remains of a family relative from a church graveyard.

Activists are claiming a victory for animals, but the medical establishment has labelled the decision to close a victory for mob rule.

(current author's bold emphasis)

What isn't in doubt, according to Professor Nick Wright, a senior cancer doctor at Barts London School of Medicine, is that the result is bad for science.

<http://www.drugresearcher.com/news/ng.asp?id=10799-animal-groups-bomb>

US company Chiron has been hit by two explosions at its headquarters in Emeryville, California. An animal rights extremist group has claimed responsibility for the attacks, which caused some minor damage to property but did not cause any casualties. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has started a domestic terrorism probe into the case.

[Chiron](#)'s employees have suffered a campaign of nuisance attacks in recent months from activists who are angry that the company has been doing business with UK-based clinical research organisation Huntingdon Life Sciences, under fire for alleged cruelty to animals at its research facilities. However, the bombings mark an alarming escalation in hostilities.

HLS continues to operate, despite years of disruption by animal rights organisations, but has struggled to survive as animal protesters have targeted the companies with which it does business. Earlier this year, Deloitte & Touche stepped down as HLS' auditors after a campaign of harassment by Stop Huntingdon Animal Cruelty (SHAC), a UK-based group.

http://www.animalliberationpressoffice.org/media_coverage/2005-09-28_gskbombed_ft.html

Animal rights extremists have claimed responsibility for attacking the home of a senior employee of GlaxoSmithKline, the pharmaceutical company.

The Animal Liberation Front said it had placed a device outside the home of GSK's corporate controller, Paul Blackburn, on September 7.

"We can confirm that an attack on a GSK employee took place at his home in Beaconsfield late in the evening on 7 September 2005," GSK said in a statement. "Any attacks on GSK employees are unacceptable. We have referred the matter to the police and urge anyone who thinks they might have information on this attack to contact the Thames Valley Police."

The claim of responsibility was made on Bite Back, a website with an address in Florida that has carried similar postings in the past, including one ALF posting earlier this year claiming responsibility for an arson attack that gutted an Oxford University college boathouse.

The most recent posting on the website claimed that a bomb containing "two litres of fuel and four pounds of explosives" had been detonated on the doorstep of the GSK director's home in Beaconsfield.

It said this had been done because GSK was a customer of Huntingdon Life Sciences, the animal testing company, and threatened further attacks on both senior executives and junior staff.

Pharmaceutical industry data released last month indicated that overall, the number of attacks by animal rights activists fell in the first half of the year, before the introduction of new legislation giving the police greater powers to crack down on extremists. However, there were still a number of high profile incidents during the period.

GSK said that it recognised **"the commitment made by the UK government to bring animal rights terrorism under control and is looking forward to seeing this happen"**.

(current author's bold emphasis)

The above few examples are reasons enough that every researcher in Australia is rightly fearful at the potential threat to themselves and their families should Public notices of licenses be published in newspapers. The bold emphasis above highlights the real danger of the situation and the fact that, for example, the Government in the UK has stated its commitment to bringing animal rights terrorism under control. The wording in the current Australian Bill will do the exact opposite to the stated aims of the UK Government and expose researchers as clear targets to acts of terror.

To reiterate, we are not afraid of scrutiny. But we are rightly and seriously concerned at the perceived and very real threats from animal rights activists and extremists to ourselves and our families. It is this threat that could lead many researchers to say, undertaking research on animals is not worth the risk to my life or that of my family and outweighs the benefits to mankind and our fellow species that stem from research.

Second, the Bill is extremely biased in whom it is targeting with respect to animal use and raises major equity issues. It does not include many other members of the community, in sum practically all of us, who are directly or indirectly responsible for inflicting cruelty on animals that simply does not compare in any way with animal experimentation. If researchers are to be listed in newspapers for public scrutiny of their actions relating to animals, then the following groups should also be listed:

1. Fisherman, (the most popular sport in Australia) who hook, gaff and suffocate fish to death so that we can eat fish
2. Those of us who inadvertently or otherwise consume shark fins, which are lopped off prior to throwing the animals back into the ocean to drown
3. Federal and State Governments and Local Councils who collectively oversee the destruction of vast tracts of native vegetation and land to develop housing and other community resources. Habitat fragmentation and destruction account for massive death tolls on countless species of animals and is continuing at an ever increasing pace despite dire warnings as to its destabilising effects
4. Farmers who also clear land so that they can produce crops and animal stock for human and animal consumption
5. Drivers who inadvertently, and sometime deliberately, run over animals and either kill them instantly or leave them to die by the side of the road to add to the Nation's road-kill toll
6. etc, etc including all of us who stand by as whales have bombs harpooned into them etc etc.

The list can go on and should also include invertebrates. They also have nervous systems. For example, crayfish "scream" in processing plants when their heads are ripped off to harvest the meat in their tails.

If transparency is the intention of the Bill, I suggest replacing

- (1) “The Authority must ensure that notices of an application for a license are published in a newspaper circulating in the locality of a research unit and in a different paper circulating nationally”

With

- (1) “The Authority must ensure that notices of an application for a license are published on the Research Institutions webpage”

In this way, the process will be transparent while lessening the risk of threats to our researchers.

If the Bill is passed in its current form, research will be seriously curtailed, if not completely halted because researchers are either directly threatened or perceive that they are being threatened. Who then will undertake the research necessary to reduce the burden of disease in children with for example, cancer, diabetes, eye disease etc and their parents and grandparents with heart disease, Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, multiple sclerosis etc to touch on only a few devastating conditions? And this is just for the biomedical research area, yet alone the many others relating to animal and environmental science.