

The Self Help Group for Farmers, Pet Owners and Others experiencing difficulties with the RSPCA (The SHG)

Press Release

For Immediate Release

3rd April 2008

Another day, another massive RSPCA media operation RSPCA's 5 day raid seizes and "euthanizes" cattle at East Farm, Thetford

The SHG is very concerned to note that the RSPCA has found yet another target for its extreme activities. It has recently focussed its operations on yet another hard-working farmer and his wife. The RSPCA's media teams, journalists and photographers (including a photo journalist) have been at East Farm in Barnham for the last five days.

East Farm, the new point of focus for the RSPCA's media-based operation, is farmed by Edward Heading. Mr Heading, and his wife Margaret, are tenants of the Duke of Grafton, who himself lives nearby at Euston Hall. The Headings are typical RSPCA suspects - they are hard-working farmers of good character. They also run a highly-rated bed and breakfast from their farmhouse.

The RSPCA's operation against the Headings is commanded by Mark Thompson, whose job-title at the RSPCA is "Chief Inspector". Mr Thompson is a veteran of many RSPCA raids, and he has been regularly critical of magistrates' "leniency" in the past. An example was the infamous "fat dog" case (RSPCA v David and Derek Benton), for which Mark Thompson was personally responsible. Thompson was also concerned in another disastrous prosecution, when the RSPCA wrongly accused Martin and Gina Griffin of cruelty to one of their horses.

Mark Thompson is supervised by Timothy Wass, the RSPCA's Regional Superintendent for East Anglia and the Midlands. Mr Wass will shortly assume command of the RSPCA's entire Inspectorate and has been repeatedly called upon to resign. He is another controversial figure in the animal rights movement. He was personally responsible for the RSPCA's bizarre operations in December 2007 against the Hindu temple at Bhaktivedanta Manor, and involved in the infamous "Spindles Farm raids", in which over 100 horses were seized. These both attracted unprecedented and wide ranging criticism of the RSPCA's aggressive handling of the cases.

The media have, as is usual for an RSPCA investigation, been afforded access to the Headings' farm and its animals during the investigation. This is important to put pressure on the farmers and to generate the headlines that the RSPCA needs for its fundraising. According to news reports, the RSPCA have seized and photographed over 100 cattle and taken them to a "place of safety" to a farm which has a good relationship with the RSPCA. They will apparently be cared for there at the expense of the RSPCA's charitable funds - although it seems many of the animals have already been "euthanized".

The RSPCA was accused by the Hindu Council of trespass to both land and goods, when it killed the sacred cow in the middle of the Temple in December last year. The RSPCA's John Rolls, responding to the media circus which Tim Wass has unwittingly created for his employers, said (on Friday March 28):

"We have received a letter today, asking us to admit liability for trespass to land and trespass to goods. However, we entered the property accompanied by the police who were holding a valid warrant. We acted properly, within the law, but clearly they are of a different opinion. I am sorry it has got to this point. We had hoped that the issue could be addressed through dialogue rather than the courts."

Only one cow was killed during the raid on the Hindu Temple - the East Farm raids show that the Hindu is experience is far from unique.

Concern about the RSPCA in a number of different forums has recently reached new heights. For example, The Horse Trust ("THT") and The British Horse Society ("BHS") are now leading a group of 16 animal welfare charities demanding a major review of animal welfare procedures in England and Wales. The SHG supports their demands - the fairness and integrity of the RSPCA's welfare procedures and prosecutions is regularly, and rightly, being called into question. This is because the RSPCA is completely out of control. It has no checks and balances and its activities against farmers and others unlucky enough to come into contact with the RSPCA's enforcers are hitting the national papers on an almost daily basis. The RSPCA still brings over a thousand prosecutions a year, but its number of convictions has regularly fallen.

These demands for review were followed by the intervention of Shadow Environment Secretary, Rt Hon Peter Ainsworth MP, who joined a host of high-profile politicians worldwide who support the campaign against the RSPCA's killing of Gangotri. THT and BHS, by contrast with the RSPCA, are universally respected - they have asked Princess Anne, to convene their review into how welfare investigations are conducted.

The remarks of Peter Aisworth, THT and BHS follow further revelations about the RSPCA and their "independent expert" vet Nic de Brauwere, which emerged from the ill-fated prosecution of Martin and Gina Griffin, supervised by Mark Thompson. That case, like so many of the RSPCA's private prosecutions, ended in more highly-embarrassing disaster when the RSPCA and Nic de Brauwere were severely criticised by Judge Philip Browning. The conduct of the RSPCA's Spindles Farm raids, again using "independent expert" Nic de Brauwere, has also contributed to the calls for urgent review.

The SHG, and its many supporters, are calling for a full investigation into the killing of Gangotri, and a change in the RSPCA's stance on trespassing on farms, and unlawfully killing animals without the owners' consent. Mr Ainsworth has given his support to this campaign, saying that "at Bhaktivedanta Manor, something happened which should not have done". The SHG welcomes this, and notes the recent, but not unprecedented, spate of high profile criticisms of the RSPCA, and its procedures, by judges and magistrates in the courts - of which the RSPCA v Griffin case was just one.

The RSPCA, after all, has a long-standing conviction for perverting the course of justice - and that is itself another reason why the SHG, more than 30 Hindu organisations and many others, including farmers, and pet owners who are genuinely concerned about the standards and fairness of investigations, are calling for a review, and also for the resignation, or immediate dismissal, of Tim Wass.

Speaking in relation to one of at least half a dozen recent cases in which the RSPCA has been criticised, the RSPCA's Head of Press, Henry Macaulay, said on the subject of the RSPCA's use of a proforma document which was considered to have influenced the evidence provided by expert witnesses in a case which the RSPCA wrongly brought against an innocent primary school teacher:

"The two cats were found dead, and were examined post mortem by a veterinary surgeon assisted and observed by a colleague. The former provided evidence ... but before the case came to trial, she emigrated. Her colleague became the principal veterinary witness for the prosecution, therefore it was necessary to establish her in opinion (sic). She was not experienced in giving evidence in court, and ultimately the District Judge felt that he was unable to attach any weight to her evidence.

"The RSPCA takes the view that the principle issue here was one of the lack of credibility of the veterinary surgeon rather than the issue of 'coaching and rehearsal'. Crucially, this vet did not make it clear to the Court that it was her opinion that the animals had been caused to suffer and that her opinion had not been influenced by the 'proforma' which had only been referred to as an aide in the production of expert witness statements. The RSPCA routinely provides guidance for vets about how to write a complete report for use as evidence in court. In this case the first report provided by the vet didn't give all the information needed, and so a second one was written in accordance with the guidance. This is not out of the ordinary - the evidence did not change, just the details that were included.

"Following this case, the RSPCA has welcomed a debate on the role of veterinary surgeons in animal cruelty cases and agrees that veterinary surgeons receive little guidance about giving evidence in cruelty cases. This is why the RSPCA has [arranged] a conference, hosted by the Royal Veterinary College, aimed at providing some information to veterinary surgeons. At the request of many veterinary surgeons, and with the approval of the British Veterinary Association, the Society has also produced a guidance leaflet in this respect. It is this latter document which the defence in this case claimed to be a witness-coaching document, which clearly it is not."

Anne Kasica of the SHG said:

"I am very concerned to hear about the East Farm raids. I agree with the Horse Trust's Chief Paul Jepson when he says 'the welfare system is not working'.

"The RSPCA, and its sinister anti-farming agenda, are the main reason for this. It seems that the Headings were not members of the RSPCA's Freedom

Food assurance scheme. People, and farmers who are not members of this scheme in particular, are living in daily fear about what might happen when the RSPCA illegally enters their farm. The Headings were a very hard-working couple - tenant farmers who run a successful bed and breakfast from their farmhouse, which offers an authentic farming experience.

"The RSPCA views its private prosecutions primarily as a means of generating headlines and donations. Recent figures show that the RSPCA spends 44% of its £100 million income on cruelty investigations and prosecutions. This is a disgraceful position - no prosecution ever directly benefits an animal. The RSPCA's leviathan legal department should be shut down and welfare prosecutions left to professional and independent CPS personnel."

Ernest Vine, also of the SHG, said:

"I agree with Mr Macaulay, the RSPCA's Head of Media, that it is necessary for well-respected welfare charities to meet and discuss the problems with 'independent experts'. They should do so very urgently - otherwise this will happen to a lot more farms. The RSPCA is completely out of control and is engaging in raids on people's properties and farms which are reminiscent of Nazi Germany. The need for review arises, as the recent front-page article in the Veterinary Times points out, from the RSPCA's 'independent experts' thinking they should act primarily as advocates for their paymaster, and not as court-appointed independent experts.

"I do not know what Mr Macaulay, RSPCA's Head of Media, meant when he said of a recent case 'the evidence did not change, just the details that were included' when the RSPCA successfully invited their 'independent expert' to alter her written opinion - this is also something which Mr Macaulay says is done 'routinely'. Strong anecdotal evidence suggests that Mr Macaulay is right - RSPCA experts often produce a draft report, which is not disclosed but is edited by the prosecutor to produce a second report which is both disclosed and relied upon at trial. Perhaps the best recent example of that was the case of RSPCA v Burden, where the prosecutor accepted that he had written the final report for the expert which was disclosed. The Burdens, who were hard-working sheep farmers, were wrongly accused by the RSPCA, and they were also rightly acquitted.

"I would be amazed if the BVA has approved this course of action, as Mr Macaulay appears to be claiming. What on earth can he mean when he says that it was 'necessary to establish her in opinion'? It was this 'proforma' document, and the RSPCA's 'routine' which worries many people - not only District Judge Gray in Harwich and all the Magistrates in the litigation against Malcolm Ellrich, Janet Walker and Maxine Proudler, not to mention people involved in the prosecutions of Annette Nally in Leamington Spa, Martin and Gina Griffin in Norwich, and the cases in Maidstone."

"These are just the prosecutions that we know about in the last two or three months - defendants in RSPCA prosecutions are frequently unrepresented and don't realise how 'serious the case was' until they find themselves vilified on the front page of the paper. Only then do they do a

bit of research and call us -sometimes it really is too late to do anything."

ENDS

Word Count: 2016

Notes to Editors: -

References

[Cattle owner faces prosecution](#)

The Thetford and Brandon Times, UK - 3 hours ago

... including 20 calves, were loaded on to a **trailer this afternoon** and were transported to an **unnamed private farm** in East Anglia while the owner of the ...

[Cattle rescue enters fifth day](#) Norfolk Eastern Daily Press

[Leading charities unite to review welfare issues](#)

Horse & Hound Online, UK - 10 Mar 2008

The RSPCA ... have been invited to plan how cases should be managed in future ... Horse Trust chief executive Paul Jepson said: "It appears the welfare system is not working ... The BHS and the Horse Trust asked the Princess Royal to convene the review

<http://www.horseandhound.co.uk/news/397/195314.html>

[Shadow Environment Secretary joins Gangotri debate](#)

Borehamwood Times, UK - 12 Mar 2008

Gangotri was put down at the temple last December after receiving a lethal injection from RSPCA officers. The cow had been suffering from injuries suffered ...

http://www.borehamwoodtimes.co.uk/news/localnews/display.var.2114290.0.shadow_environment_secretary_joins_gangotri_debate.php

[RSPCA sued over sacred cow 'mercy killing'](#)

Farmers Guardian, UK - 31 Mar 2008

Last week, **Peter Ainsworth**, Shadow Secretary for the Environment visited the temple and issued a statement saying that the **RSPCA** acted wrongly and the ...

[Hindus to sue RSPCA over sacred cow death](#)

This is Local London, UK - 29 Mar 2008

A recent statement of support has been received from the shadow environment secretary **Peter Ainsworth** MP, who visited the Manor in March to discuss the ...

[Victims of RSPCA bite back - Telegraph](#)

... finally exposed how RSPCA witnesses had concerted their evidence in advance, using a proforma document to "coach" witnesses in what to say - about which ...

www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/main.jhtml?xml=/opinion/2008/03/02/do0202.xml

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The SHG was officially formed in June 1990 and has been helping people to
defend themselves and their animals from the RSPCA ever since.

The national help line number is **08700 72 66 89**

A copy of this and previous press releases from The SHG are online at
<http://www.the-shg.org/SHGPressReleases.htm>

Background information on the Self Help Group for Farmers Pet Owners and
Other Experiencing Difficulties with the RSPCA can be found at
<http://www.the-shg.org>

Details of further criticisms of the RSPCA can be found at the RSPCA-
Animadversion website: <http://cheetah.webtribe.net/~animadversion>