

Scott Saunders

First and foremost, I wish to applaud the government on the proposed amendments to the Animal Protection Act – it is a starting point. However, I have concerns surrounding how such amendments will be enforced. The NS SPCA currently has 2.5 investigation officers to manage enforcement; and that is from the most northern tip of Cape Breton to the most southern tip of Cape Sable Island – this is neither acceptable nor realistic. I often wonder if maybe its time for a joint effort of investigations and enforcement involving the Department of Justice; after all animal cruelty is criminal.

It certainly isn't a secret that Nova Scotia's current Animal Protection Act and lack of regulations allow people who abuse animals to simply walk away without any consequences. A Nova Scotian woman received a \$5.00 fine after drowning 2 kittens in a bucket of water. Notorious puppy broker and convicted animal abuser Gail Benoit sold close to 2 dozens puppies that were sick and died over a period of just a couple weeks, but was never held accountable or prosecuted. In fact, she continued to sell even more dogs that either required expensive vet care, died, or had to be euthanized. It is perfectly legal in Nova Scotia for convicted animal abusers to be in the business of selling animals, even if on a large scale. Benoit herself testified under oath that she had sold over 30,000 dogs in just 13 years. I can only assume that this generated tax free revenue, at the expense of unsuspecting buyers. It is time that this government stops allowing convicted animal abusers from buying and selling animal's altogether. I believe this province requires mandatory sentencing, mandatory prohibitions from owning animals and a mandatory fine schedule.

It is also perfectly legal for someone to permanently chain their dog outside 24/7/365 days of the year, as long as it has food, water, and shelter. This is neither acceptable nor humane; yet it continues right across this province. Dogs are living in isolation day in and day out; eating, sleeping, and defecating all within a very small space. A dog kept chained alone in one spot for days, months, or even years suffers immense psychological damage. An otherwise friendly and docile dog, when kept continuously chained, becomes neurotic, unhappy, anxious, and often aggressive. In many cases, the necks of chained dogs become raw and covered with sores due to the dogs constant yanking and straining to escape confinement. Some chained dogs have collars embedded in their necks, the result of years of neglect at the end of a chain. Chained dogs frequently become entangled in their chains and unable to access food, water, and shelter. This government has the

ability to end this archaic and cruel practice and stop the ongoing misery for permanently chained dogs in the province.

Many neglected and abused animals find themselves in the care of rescue organizations right across the province. These organizations are made up of volunteers who dedicate their lives to helping animals in need. Some of the situations these organizations are faced with are horrific, yet rarely is anybody held accountable for the abuse and torture they have caused the animal. The NS SPCA says they have a 100% animal cruelty conviction rate; at first glance that sound good – but, what cases are not being tried due to lacking legislation? We all know that not every criminal case in this province results in a conviction, even if it is evident that the accused is obviously guilty. Animal Cruelty investigations and charges should not be based on achieving a 100% conviction rate; yet accountability for the suffering caused to an animal.

Serious violent crimes often begin with animal abuse. Research in psychology and criminology shows that people who commit acts of cruelty to animals don't stop there; many of them move onto abusing humans. Animal abusers target the powerless, and their crimes against animals often develop into the abuse of their spouses, children, and the elderly. It is important that this government realizes that they have the ability to curb domestic violence by adequately punishing animal abusers before they move onto people. Our animal cruelty laws need to be changed to protect both animals and people. I suggest that this government make mental health consultations a mandatory requirement for anybody convicted of animal cruelty.

It has taken a long time for government to respond to the concerns of animal advocates, tax payers and voters in this province. Advocates across this province today are still calling on our Minister of Agriculture to end the permanent tethering of dogs, prohibit convicted animal abusers from selling animals, and adequately prosecute animal abusers. How many more emails, letters, phone calls, petitions and years will it take, before this government commits to ending the 24/7/365 suffering and abuse of mans best friend on the end of chains across this province? Animals are not able to speak up, speak out or vote; but at the end of every leash in this province is a voter – and we will be heard.