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Title:

Opening Federal Conference, Royal Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

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OPENING FEDERAL CONFERENCE, ROYAL SOCIETTES FOR THE PREVENTION
OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS - 11/3/75

Mrs. Symes, Mr. Harries, ladies and gentlemen:
Thank you very much for asking me to open your Federal Conference. May I first of all extend a special welcome to your interstate delegates and say how pleased we are that the Adelaide conference should co-incide with the South Australian Society's centenary. It's been a hundred years of remarkable accomplishment but, as a glance at the agenda will show, there's still a long way to go. Much has been done to eradicate the grosser, more public cruelties to animals, but there is still, depressingly enough, need for the Society not only to continue but to expand its operations. This applies to cruelties to domestic, farm animals and to livestock and also, increasingly, to wild, native animals. It's about this that I would especially like to speak today. In doing so, of course, I don't underestimate the Societies' work in the more traditional sense. It's just that here the law is more closely defined and understood and that its administration has gained the efficiency of experience - with the proviso that it may from time to time need tightening. It is, however, the cruelties to - and the threat to - our indigenous wildlife that is still insufficiently appreciated by the general public. In South Australia, since 1964 there have been legislative controls on the keeping and sale of native animals. They provided an original framework for action but they were found to be inadequate. This lack of control led to two evils - to cruelties inflicted on native creatures which were rarely detected and then generally unpunished and to the emergence of a conservation problem - in some cases a threat to the very existence of a particular species. This concern for both the cruelty factor (the one which most directly concerns your Societies) and to the conservation ethic led my Government to take determined action to preserve and to care for Australian animals. Our new National Parks and Wildlife Act of 1972 and its subsequent amendments has very greatly strengthened the law. It now provides a remarkable - and for a while it was a unique - system for the keeping, sale and protection of native fauna. I say for a while because, happily, it seems that other States will follow us in introducing similarly stringent controls.

But as you will readily appreciate, no network of legislation and regulation, however complete and legally foolproof, has any impact without effective means for it to be policed. This we have provided through an expansion of the staff of the National Parks and Wildlife Service and by the provision within the service of a special unit to detect and deter offenders. I acknowledge that we need more inspectors; I acknowledge, too, that the inspectors must often combine this work with other equally important duties and, most importantly, I acknowledge that we could not have done as much as we have without the ready co-operation of the R.S.P.C.A. -- both its fulltime and its volunteer workers.

We shall be trying within the confines of a severely straitened budget to increase our services. We shall also be calling on the R.S.P.C.A. for its support to stamp out a very real evil.

I hope that other States will make similar calls on their Societies. I am sure the response will be as generous.

I am referring especially to the need to wipe out that organised, profitable and nasty racket, animal smuggling.

Disclosures about the existence of organised bird smuggling will have shocked many people -- it's a most unpleasant traffic. But it's not confined to birds. Mammals have been illegally exported and so have reptiles. Snakes have been sent through the post to collectors or to unscrupulous middlemen overseas.

Now I appreciate that many people feel revulsion towards snakes and other reptiles. But their uncontrolled exploitation can have very damaging effect on the ecological balance and can do irreparable damage.

In recent years a combined effort by the R.S.P.C.A., the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Customs Department has been successful in detecting and preventing a number of these cases.

But we must remain vigilant, especially against organised, professional smugglers who know all the tricks and all the loopholes in the law.

We have the legislation to control them. We have an inspectorate and an enforcement squad with a proven record of success. We can rely on public sympathy -- no-one surely should have scruples about dobbing in someone guilty of cruelty.

But to stay on top of the problem we shall require interstate co-operation and we shall certainly need the continued support of the R.S.P.C.A. I know we can assume it.

The work of the Societies in this and in their other areas of concern for animal welfare is, indeed, one of the constant bright spots in Australian society.

I have very much pleasure in declaring your conference open.

Thank you.

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