BC Premier announces Canada's toughest animal cruelty laws

May 10, 2011

VANCOUVER (RPRN) 05/10/11 — British Columbia is acting on all of the recommendations of the Sled Dog Task Force, including providing new funding for animal cruelty investigations and introducing the toughest animal cruelty laws anywhere in Canada, Premier Christy Clark announced today.

"British Columbians have said clearly that cruel or inhumane treatment of sled dogs or any other animal is simply not acceptable," said Premier Clark. "That's why we are acting on all of the recommendations of the Sled Dog Task Force and sending a strong message that those who engage in that type of behaviour will be punished under tough new laws."

The Province will immediately begin the process to make changes to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, including increasing penalties to up to $75,000 and 24 months imprisonment for the most serious offences, extending the current six-month limitation period for prosecuting offences, and requiring mandatory reporting of animal abuse by veterinarians. The BC SPCA has also received a $100,000 grant to enhance their capacity for animal cruelty investigations.

The task force, led by Kamloops-North Thompson MLA and Environment Minister Dr. Terry Lake, submitted its report to Agriculture Minister Don McRae after meeting with key industry stakeholders and listening to public feedback. The review included a thorough assessment of the sled dog industry; associated legislative regulatory and enforcement concerns; and standards of care and general welfare requirements of sled dogs.

"I would like to thank the task force members for their dedication to animal welfare in British Columbia," said McRae. "We are acting on the report's recommendations because we take animal protection very seriously in this province.

The report recommended 10 changes to enhance the health, welfare and protection of sled dogs in British Columbia, and strengthen animal protection legislation, including development of a mandatory code of practice for sled dog operators, and improve communication and awareness of animal abuse.

"I can confidently say the recommendations include what I believe, as a veterinarian and animal lover, will help animals be well cared for," said Lake. "Through our work the task force identified the need for the development of best practice guidelines for sled dog operations, and improved animal cruelty laws overall."

“The BC SPCA is grateful to the provincial government for taking such prompt action on this issue,” said BC SPCA chief executive officer and task force member Craig Daniell. “We look forward to the swift implementation of recommendations set out by the task force, particularly the development of a mandatory code of practice for the sled dog industry and increased capacity for the BC SPCA to undertake cruelty investigations.”

“I want to thank Minister Lake and Minister McRae for the process that has led to this report,” said UBCM president Barbara Steele. “The task force findings will enhance animal protection in B.C., and I support the report’s recommendations.”

A backgrounder is attached listing the recommendations.

The full Sled Dog Task Force report is available at: http://www.gov.bc.ca/agri/taskforce.html

BACKGROUNDER

Sled Dog Task Force recommendations

The Sled Dog Task Force has submitted the following 10 recommendations to enhance the health, welfare and protection of sled dogs in British Columbia, strengthen animal protection practices, and improve communication and awareness of animal abuse.

Strengthen enforcement of animal protection legislation (PCAA):

- Increase penalties for offences committed under the PCAA.

o The Province will begin the process to increase penalties for offences to up to $75,000 and 24 months imprisonment, extend the current six month limitation period for prosecuting offences, and require mandatory reporting of abuse by veterinarians.

- Amend the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (PCAA) to create a regulatory authority to define Standards of Care for animals and extend the current six-month limitation for bringing forward proceedings related to contraventions of the PCAA.

o The Province will immediately begin the process to make changes to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.

- Consult with the College of Veterinarians of B.C. to create a mandatory reporting requirement under the PCAA for veterinarians to report suspected cases of animal abuse to

the BCSPCA with statutory immunity for veterinarians making such reports.

o The Province will immediately begin the process to make changes to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act.

- Recommend to the Government of Canada that consideration be given to strengthening the Criminal Code provisions related to animal cruelty.

o The Province will work with federal officials responsible for animal cruelty laws.

- Enhance the capacity of the BC SPCA to undertake animal cruelty investigations.

o Effective today, the BC SPCA will receive a grant of $100,000 to enhance their capacity for animal cruelty investigations.

- Build upon the existing prosecutorial expertise in the Ministry of Attorney General to successfully pursue cases of animal abuse through ongoing training.

o A Crown counsel has been appointed with an expertise in the area of animal cruelty to increase awareness among prosecutors.

Standards of care for sled dogs in B.C.:

- Establish a working group to develop a sled dog 'Standard of Care'.

o Within the next 14 days, a working group will be appointed.

- Require that all sled dog companies operating on Crown land include in their management plans annual inspections by either the BC SPCA or a licensed veterinarian.

o The Province will immediately begin the process to make changes to the Land Act.

- Encourage the development of a self-sustaining sled dog industry association which establishes a certification and auditing program for the industry and related events.

o The Province will direct stakeholders in establishing an industry association.

Communication and awareness of animal abuse:

- Enhance the provincial public sector's ability to recognize and report instances of animal abuse.

o The Province will:

o Develop information awareness materials regarding animal abuse for front-line staff.

o Develop policies to ensure the mechanisms to report animal abuse are in place.

o Establish information sharing agreements between the BCSPCA and the provincial ministries, Crown corporations and non-government agencies with statutory obligations.

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About the author:

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