

RSPCA should implement my report now

Tuesday 4 March 2014 21.00 GMT

Following his resignation as chief executive of the RSPCA through ill health (Report, 25 February), I pay respect to Gavin Grant and I wish the RSPCA success in meeting its challenges. In a relentlessly driven commercial arena, one can feel for the leader of an organisation committed by its constitutional objectives to animal welfare in all forms. Buffeting of the Grant-led RSPCA has been unsparing and frequently contradictory: for having or spending too much money, or too little; for vigorously pursuing prosecution of those violating animals, or for soft-peddalling the issue; for over-asserting animal rights, or for neglecting them.

Too often indeed those traducing the society during Grant's tenure pursue interests inimical to animal welfare, informed by the commercial imperative alone. In 2013 I was commissioned by Gavin Grant's RSPCA to chair what became the McNair inquiry and report into Freedom Food, the leading animal welfare assurance scheme. This followed criticisms I had made of the scheme. I was permitted to act wholly independently of the RSPCA, to build my panel as I wished (former Defra secretary Caroline Spelman and veterinary academic Professor David Main) and to take evidence and deploy our findings. The report and its recommendations are no devotional exercise yet have been endorsed unanimously by the governance of the RSPCA.

The RSPCA has a long and distinguished record in alleviating wanton animal suffering. While continuing its work for domestic pets and wildlife, in an age of industrial and sometimes brutal factory farming, and where austerity has depleted regulatory disciplines, the RSPCA must also exert its influence for the wellbeing of those 95% of the nation's animals in food production. Flaws acknowledged, the RSPCA deserves our support in setting its hand to issues which research shows will affect our own health and that of our planet increasingly over time. As a start it should implement the McNair recommendations without delay. And it should not be chastened by assaults from those far outside the tent of animal welfare.

Duncan McNair

Chairman, McNair inquiry and report

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