



CANADIAN VETERINARY  
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Speaking notes submitted by Dr. Alice Crook  
on behalf of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA)  
to House of Commons' Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights  
with respect to its hearing on  
Bill C-84, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (bestiality and animal fighting)  
February 5, 2019

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Speaking Notes: Dr. Alice Crook

*Representing the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (CVMA)*

Mr. Chairman and Committee members, thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee.

I am a member of the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association (“CVMA”, as I will refer to it) and am currently Adjunct Professor, Department of Health Management, and Coordinator of the Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre, at the Atlantic Veterinary College, University of Prince Edward Island, in Charlottetown, PEI. I am past Chair of the CVMA Animal Welfare Committee and was honored to receive an international Animal Welfare Award in 2018 from the World Veterinary Association that recognized my work towards humane treatment of animals. My particular areas of interest are animal abuse and effective veterinary response, pain management, welfare-friendly veterinary practice (large and small animals), and enactment of effective animal welfare legislation. I have given numerous presentations and written articles on these topics and was one of two lead authors during the creation of the CVMA website on addressing animal abuse.<sup>1</sup>

The CVMA provides a national and international forum for over 7,200 veterinarians working in all of Canada’s provinces and territories as private general and specialist practitioners, researchers, educators and public servants. In addition, the association counts 7,300 veterinary technicians and technologists as affiliate members. Veterinary practitioners provide services to owners of pets, livestock and other animals. A top priority for the CVMA and its members is animal welfare.

Veterinarians provide unique expertise on the health and welfare of all types of animals. In addition to specific expertise in animal health and disease, and knowledge and understanding of the biology of domesticated and wild animals, veterinarians have practical experience and understanding of the care and management of animals, and practical experience in the recognition of the signs of suffering in animals.

With respect to animal cruelty and neglect, veterinary practitioners are commonly the first professionals to examine a vulnerable and abused animal, including in cases of sexual abuse and animal fighting. An affected animal may be brought into the veterinary practice by the owner or a family member, or a veterinarian may be asked to assist animal protection officers in an investigation, or a veterinarian may work directly with an animal welfare organization to provide medical care and secure evidence pertaining to an animal seizure. The CVMA, as a participant in the Violence-Link Coalition referred to by the Minister in the committee hearing last week, is keenly aware of the very well-documented link between abuse of animals and

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<sup>1</sup> CVMA-ACMV Animal Abuse/Cruauté envers les animaux <https://www.canadianveterinarians.net/policy-advocacy/animal-abuse>

other family violence, including child, spousal, and elder abuse. To protect the animal victim, and because the abuse may be a sentinel for other violence that is occurring within or outside the family, it is crucial that veterinarians deal effectively with instances of suspected animal maltreatment. The CVMA provides numerous resources through its website, social media, meetings and conferences aimed at educating its members and the public on the matter of animal abuse, including sexual abuse and animal fighting, extending to recognizing the signs of abuse, and emphasizing the importance of reporting suspected cases of abuse to authorities.

The CVMA has actively lobbied for a number of years for amendments to the Criminal Code aimed at strengthening the law with respect to animal cruelty. In this regard, the CVMA is very pleased to support Bill C-84. The Bill proposes an unambiguous definition for bestiality, and a much more comprehensive treatment of animal fighting.

The CVMA, along with other interested stakeholders from the agricultural and animal welfare organizations, noted in a letter to the Minister of Justice in late 2017 that gaps currently exist in the law with respect to bestiality and animal fighting. With respect to bestiality, the CVMA believes that Bill C-84 will close a gap that currently exists that effectively legalizes sexual abuse of animals that falls short of penetration. As proposed in C-84, bestiality means any contact for a sexual purpose with an animal. Bestiality (also called animal sexual abuse) can involve a distressingly wide range of animals and result in a wide spectrum of suffering and injury, including death. It may or may not include other physical violence, and may or may not result in visible physical injury to the animal. Signs that may be seen in animals that have been sexually assaulted include traumatic injury to the anus, rectum, or vulvar/vaginal area, recurring vaginal or urinary tract infections, foreign objects within the genitourinary tract, and internal injuries.

Bill C-84 recognizes that harmful sexual behavior is an affront to animal welfare in Canada. In CVMA's view, the Bill will help support what is referred to as One Welfare—that is benefitting animals as well as addressing the sexual exploitation of other vulnerable members of society, including children.

With regard to animal fighting, the CVMA recognizes that the current legislation does not include as an offence, maintaining a facility for animals other than cocks, nor does it recognize as an offence the training of animals to fight. The CVMA is pleased that Bill C-84 updates the *Criminal Code* provisions to deal with these gaps so as to include all species of animals, and to add the offences of training animals for fighting and profiting from such activities. The CVMA is pleased that the scope of the Bill covers all species of animals rather than the current situation which outlaws some animal fighting activities only for cocks. For the purpose of this presentation, I will focus on the realities of cock and dog fighting, as these are the species most commonly affected in Canada.

Animal welfare science has contributed greatly to our understanding of the pain and suffering, both emotional and physical, that animals experience during acts of cruelty. There is abundant scientific support for the existence of emotions in animals (also called sentience), accompanied by the identification and understanding of the brain processes that underlie such emotional

experiences. This evidence-based understanding is now being applied in cases of animal cruelty. I would be more than happy to provide the committee with recent scientific publications in this regard.

I will focus now on the suffering involved in dog and cock fighting, where aggressive animals are pitted against each other, or against bait animals in a confined space. The fight ends when one animal dies, or is cowed or is seriously injured. In dogs, the behaviour of the aggressor includes chasing, biting, wrestling, and lunging, until one dog is incapable of continuing, or is withdrawn. Behaviours of the animal victim, such as the losing dog or a bait dog, include distress calls, attempts to retreat or escape, defensive behaviour, appeasement gestures, cowering, or trembling. Typical injuries include multiple bites on the face and legs, bite injuries to the belly and groin of a dog who is showing submission, “ringing” or degloving injuries on the legs when a dog firmly seizes the lower leg of its opponent who is trying to pull away. Also typical in fighting dogs are multiple injuries in various stages of healing. (These types of injuries are not typical of fighting that may occur between normal dogs. I can provide more information on this subject to the committee, if it so desires.)

Now, I will speak about the emotional experience of the animals involved, both aggressor and victim. They will likely experience anger, fear, panic, helplessness; extreme pain from serious bite and ripping injuries; and lasting pain and discomfort from disabilities such as nerve, muscle, tendon and/or bone damage. You may wonder—what is a “bait dog?” These are smaller dogs that are used in training dogs for fighting; cats and rabbits are also used as bait animals. Clearly such bait animals suffer extreme injury, fear, and panic from which they cannot escape. Survivors may experience anxiety and fear in circumstances similar to those in which the cruel act took place, e.g., the presence of other dogs.

In conclusion, the Canadian Veterinary Medical Association is pleased to see notable progress in improving the welfare of animals in Canada in the form of amendments to the Criminal Code through Bill C-84. The CVMA is actively involved in organizations such as the National Farmed Animal Care Council and the National Companion Animal Coalition, as well as with partners such as Humane Canada, allowing us to collaborate with other stakeholders, including industry, to work to ensure that Canada has high standards with respect to the humane treatment of animals. We remain ready to assist the government of Canada in any way to further enhance legislation to protect animals from cruelty and abuse and in this way help build a more humane and compassionate Canada.

**Additional references:**

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