

NEWS RELEASE
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Ministry of Agriculture and Lands

TOUGHER PROTECTION FOR ANIMALS NOW OFFICIAL

VICTORIA - Amendments to strengthen the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act have now been passed into law after receiving Royal Assent by Lieutenant-Governor Stephen Point in the legislature on Monday, Agriculture and Lands Minister Pat Bell announced today.

"We've now got a good body of legislation that will give the SPCA the tools that they need to protect animals," said Bell. "We've put some real teeth behind these amendments and I think people are going to think twice before they start behaving inappropriately towards animals."

The amendments will improve the BCSPCA's power to help animals that are in distress or abandoned and will increase penalties for offences. Previously, upon conviction for the offence of causing distress to an animal, there was a penalty of up to \$2,000 or a six-month jail sentence or both. That has now increased to \$5,000 or a six-month jail sentence or both for a first offence and \$10,000 or a six-month jail sentence or both for a second offence. The amendments address operational issues identified by the BCSPCA and will:

- * Refine the definition of "distress" to include situations where an animal's health or well-being is affected by inadequate ventilation, space, care or veterinary treatment.
- * Authorize agents operating in remote areas to obtain warrants by telephone.
- * Clarify the authority of agents to seize evidence of an offence.
- * Clarify the authority of agents to take abandoned animals into custody.
- * Clarify the BCSPCA's authority to hold and dispose of animals, and the obligation of animal owners to reimburse the Society for its care-related costs.
- * Increase the fines for offences.
- * Provide immunity from legal proceedings for damages to persons performing duties or exercising powers under the act.
- * Update provisions relating to corporate structure and obligations.

"We are absolutely thrilled with the amendments to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, which will lead to stronger cases against animal abusers" said Craig Daniell, chief executive officer of the BCSPCA. "These changes significantly raise the bar on animal welfare in B.C. and send a strong message to those who abuse animals that this kind of cruelty will not be tolerated."

The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act was enacted in 1895 to establish the BCSPCA and authorizes the Society to take action to assist all captive animals, including farm animals, that are in distress and to investigate offences involving animals.