



# **Northwest Territories Legislative Assembly**

## **Standing Committee on and Economic Development and Infrastructure**

Public Meeting on  
*Bill 16: An Act to Amend the Dog Act*

January 17, 2011  
Yellowknife, Northwest Territories

Chair: Mr. David Ramsay, MLA Kam Lake

# **STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE**

## **Chair**

Mr. David Ramsay, MLA Kam Lake

## **Members**

Mr. Bob Bromley, MLA Weledeh  
Mr. David Krutko, MLA Mackenzie Delta  
Mr. Yakeleya, MLA Sahtu

## **Regular Members**

Ms. Wendy Bisaro, MLA Frame Lake

## **Witnesses**

Ms. Jan Vallillee, Citizen  
Ms. Nicole Spencer, President, NWT SPCA  
Dr. Tom Pisz, Great Slave Animal Hospital  
Ms. Robin Weber, Citizen  
Mr. Georges Erasmus, Citizen  
Mr. Grant Beck, Dog Musers Club and Beck's Kennels  
Ms. Barb Needham, Catholic Women's League

## **Committee Staff**

Ms. Jennifer Knowlan, Committee Clerk  
Mr. Colette Langlois, Director of Research  
Ms. Alicia Tumchewics, Committee Researcher  
Ms. Sheila MacPherson, Law Clerk  
Ms. Malinda Kellett, Deputy Law Clerk

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT  
AND INFRASTRUCTURE**  
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**January 17, 2011**  
**Yellowknife, Northwest Territories**  
**12:00 p.m.**

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. David Ramsay):** Thanks, everybody. Sorry for the slight delay in getting more chairs. I would like to call the Standing Committee on Economic Development and Infrastructure to order. First off, I'd like to welcome everybody to our proceedings this afternoon. Before we get started, maybe we'll have Members introduce themselves for the record, starting with Mr. Krutko.

**MR. KRUTKO:** David Krutko, MLA Mackenzie Delta.

**MR. BROMLEY:** Bob Bromley, MLA Weledeh.

**MR. YAKELEYA:** Norman Yakeleya, MLA Sahtu.

**MS. BISARO:** Wendy Bisaro, MLA Frame Lake.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** David Ramsay, MLA Kam Lake, and chair of the committee. I'd like to introduce the staff we have with us today as well. To my immediate right we have Jennifer Knowlan, committee clerk; to my far left, Malinda Kellett, deputy law clerk; Sheila MacPherson, law clerk; to my immediate left, Alicia Tumchewics, our committee researcher; and in the back is Colette Langlois, director of research.

Today the Standing Committee on Economic Development and Infrastructure is holding its second hearing on Bill 16: *An Act to Amend the Dog Act*. There should be copies of the bill on the back table as well as copies of a plain language summary of the bill. I'd encourage everybody to help themselves to those.

Last week, on January 13<sup>th</sup>, the committee held its first public hearing on the bill. We heard the Minister's opening comments as well as Members' comments. Today is our second public hearing on this bill and today we'll hear from members of the public on what you think about these proposed amendments.

So far we have the following witnesses scheduled to speak today: Jan Vallillee, Nicole Spencer of the NWT SPCA, Dr. Tom Pisz of the Great Slave Animal Hospital, Laureen Schlidowky of the Great Slave Animal Hospital, Robin Weber and Georges Erasmus and I'm sure there are others that have signed up. If there is anybody else here who wants to be added to the list if you haven't been added already, please just advise our committee clerk, Ms. Knowlan, that you'd like to speak.

Before we start with the witnesses, I'd like to ask the Members if they have any comments. Before we do that, I forgot one important thing, we should have a prayer before we hear from the public, so I'll ask Mr. Yakeleya, perhaps, to lead us in a prayer.

**MR. YAKELEYA:** Thank you, David, and Members of the Legislative Assembly, plus the Members who came to listen and speak about this important issue. It's very important for us. I remember growing up, part of our survival, part of our life was dogs. I was raised with dogs, driven dogs, and dogs helped us survive when we were young with our families. As we got older, the skidoo became part of our lives, so the dogs were more of a pet or they took the place of our hunting companions. We need dogs in the bush to hunt moose and keep us alive. If we knew the ice wasn't safe to go on, the dogs would be there for us as companions also. So they were close to us and over time we've become less dependent on dogs and that style of life and that way of life. They became pets to us where to now we give them names and dress them up and we say different things to our dogs, not like the old days where they used to teach us how to be like a dog. Dogs are very important. When I was raised, they were part of our family, they were like our family and we treated them like a family. Today it's different.

We have different meanings for this very special animal to us, so we ask that you share that with us in this forum here and whatever you share, we'll take into consideration and think about that because it's very important what we will be talking about today. I wanted to say that in my opening comments about what I know about the dog here.

---Prayer

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Mahsi, Norman. Thanks, committee. We'll now move onto our first witness and that's Jan Vallillee.

Oh yes, did any Members have any comments before we get started? Ms. Vallillee, you can come up right up to the table, Jan, if you could. We are recording the proceedings this afternoon, so Trevor will look after turning your mike on. If you'd like to have a seat there, that would be great. Thanks, Jan.

#### **Presentation by Ms. Jan Vallillee**

**MS. VALLILLEE:** Good afternoon everybody. Thank you for the opportunity to stand before or sit before this committee and speak to the proposed *Dog Act*. I was fortunate enough to attend Thursday's meeting and I actually had some concerns with some of the statements that were made, and I was also very impressed with some of the statements that were made regarding this *Dog Act*.

First and foremost, I think this act falls very short. This act should actually be an animal act or a domestic animal act. To suggest that just dogs should be on the agenda is short-sightedness on the part of this government. I'd also like to see that infamous clause about traditional practices removed. It's essentially a "get out of jail free card," because the interpretation is just wide open. All one has to do is when speaking about the working dog in the North, all one has to do is look at the fine example of the kennels that are out at Kam Lake. Working dogs can be treated quite humanely, with all due

respect. With the introduction of sleds, ATVs, automatic rifles, life in the North has changed, and for those who don't know me, I'm a long-time Yellowknifer. I've been here since 1969. So I've had the privilege and the honour of living in this great Territory of ours for a very long period of time and I've seen significant changes.

Back to the *Dog Act*. Mr. Krutko, I was a little bit disappointed in one of your comments during the first meeting about how it's really nobody's business when it comes to national and international animal welfare. Well, Mr. Krutko, let me remind you of the sealing industry. These groups have immense power and for us to ignore them is extraordinarily short-sighted on the part of this government. In fact, I think if this *Dog Act* is tightened up, there are so many potential opportunities for ecotourism. If people see that our people, if they are brought out on our land and they see how well our animals are treated and respected in comparison to how some of them are now, I think it would only speak volumes to our tourism industry. If you think these groups do not have power, you are selling yourself short and you're going to be in for a battle that's going to smear a Territory for which I'm so proud to live in and be part of.

I really hope that this committee will take a look at this act more closely, also perhaps extend on the definition of terminating a dog's existence, if you will. It's very imperative that it's done so in a humane way, as humanely as possible. So I really hope this committee will take all the concerns of the committee members that spoke on Thursday. Thank you to all for those very positive comments, and to all the people who are going to speak today, make the changes that are needed and do it so quick so this doesn't get lost in the shuffle and get pushed onto the next government, who may or may not find it or seem it important enough. I think the people who are sitting behind me and the volume of people who are here today shows the passion that we all have for animals in our Territory. So I really, you know, I press upon you to do what's in your heart and do what's best for all of the people and for all of the animals that can't speak for themselves. Thank you.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you very much, Ms. Vallillee. Committee have any comments? Mr. Bromley.

**MR. BROMLEY:** Yes, I wonder when we have witnesses up, if that would be an opportunity to ask questions to the witness at this time rather than later might be logistically...

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Sure.

**MR. BROMLEY:** I do not have a question, but in terms of process...

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Yes, that's good. We should clarify that. The committee is here today to hear from the public, but there might be some questions that some committee members may have on your presentation, or just a point of clarification on what you said or something. Before the presenters go back to their seat, I will just ask committee members if they have points of clarification or questions of the presenters.

So as we move on, that will be how we work things. With that, thanks again, Mr. Bromley.

We'll go next to Ms. Nicole Spencer with the NWT SPCA. I invite you to the table, Ms. Spender.

### **Presentation by NWT SPCA**

**MS. SPENCER:** Thank you very much. Thank you very much everybody. I wasn't here at the hearing on Thursday as I was home with the stomach flu. I apologize; I should have been here. However, today I have something prepared.

My name is Nicole Spencer and I am the president of the NWT SPCA. I would like to take a few minutes to speak on the amended *Dog Act* and some views of our organization that I think need to be recognized.

The SPCA, as well as many other residents of the NWT, wish to have in place a comprehensive animal protection law which would include all animals. Currently the business at hand is the amendment of the outdated *Dog Act*. The overall goal is to protect dogs, both working and otherwise, from neglect, abuse and torture, and to charge and convict those who choose to take part in such disgraceful acts. All you have to do is Google animal abuse in the NWT and you will find far too many stories of horrible cruelty and neglect, with very few, if no, convictions. Even in the most horrendous cases, there was no charge or conviction against the person responsible for the crime. Obviously, the *Dog Act* or federal legislation is not working to protect dogs here in this part of Canada.

In the SPCA's opinion, and that of many likeminded individuals and organizations, the NWT is in desperate need of the following:

1. More veterinary care facilities or access to veterinary care throughout the region;
2. Much better enforcement and more manpower;
3. For the NWT SPCA to have some kind of training and/or authority to help in situations alongside other enforcement officers;
4. Stricter penalties for dog abuse, neglect and torture;
5. Much more education in all communities on responsible pet or dog ownership and animal respect;
6. More temporary shelters or pounds for dogs collected in the communities;
7. A spay and neuter program throughout the entire Territory.

This last one -- a spay and neuter program -- would drastically reduce the number of dogs roaming free, dogs being shot, dogs being abused and dogs suffering. It needs to

be a necessary program for the communities, just as medical clinics are. The spinoffs from dogs being unable to reproduce freely are so significant. The safety aspects of roaming dogs potentially forming a pack and causing an incredible danger to the residents of that community will be diminished, as will be the danger of shootings within town limits. And, of course, the fact that neglect and mistreatment would likely decline as a result of fewer unwanted dogs in the communities. The SPCA is working to achieve resources for a spay/neuter program in the future but it needs help from government to do so. I think it is the GNWT's responsibility to help us out with that.

Living in "the best place to be an animal abuser" is not something I am proud of and, to be honest, it makes me sick to my stomach. Canada is actually so far behind in its animal rights compared to other progressive countries in the world, so for the NWT to be the worst in Canada is something not so flattering about us as people on this planet.

Even countries like China have animal rights in place. As an international representative for the SPCA states, "When it is passed, it will be the first time in China's history that the state is sending a clear message to every citizen: the way we treat animals, matters."

This is where the NWT needs to be. We need to show that we, as people, care about the welfare about our animals. The big question is: why don't we?

Basic care of a dog, both working and as a pet, needs to be law. The new amended *Dog Act* is a good start. Adequate food, water, shelter as well as medical care is a must. All animals feel pain, all animals can suffer as we do, all animals can be afraid. Those of you who actually have a dog for a pet know they are the most loyal animals alive. Treat a dog well and he will be a lifelong companion, a friend, a therapy dog, as my dog is, they can help the blind function better in a seeing world, detect drugs, mould and even explosives for authorities, keeping us safe. Dogs are amazing creatures and they need to be treated as such. It is our responsibility to protect.

### **The Link between Violence and Animal Cruelty**

There is a proven relationship between those who use violence towards animals or treat them in a humane way and violence against family, spouses and children. This is the behaviour of people who do not empathize with pain and suffering of others. Domestic violence is a problem in the North. It goes without saying that being stricter with animal cruelty cases can lead to a decline and violence overall and, therefore, in domestic violence. Violence in the home is not okay.

Another way to help is nationwide education of this problem. A territory-wide education program understanding this link is very important for this region. This has been acknowledged by Members of the federal government, including Jack Layton, NDP leader, and other national and local members. We need to educate our children in school and in the home about the responsibility of having a dog and respecting all animals and teach them it is wrong to abuse and neglect living things. This can go a long way in changing violent behaviour in people and decrease the cases of violence within the family unit in future.

## **Some Point on the Clauses in the Act**

I wish to speak to the loophole that so many people, including myself, have a problem with: exemptions for locally accepted practices and tradition. In no other legislation in the country is there a clause of this type. Why should there be one here? The problem is most of the abuse against dogs in the North stems from locally accepted practices. This is wrong. Abuse is abuse, neglect is neglect. It does not matter where you live or what your background. If it was acceptable to beat your spouse in a particular town and it was accepted, would that be okay? Of course it wouldn't. Inflicting or prolonging pain, doing nothing about a suffering animal is wrong. Keeping food, water and shelter from dogs is unethical and should be punishable by law. The Northwest Territories is in Canada and we must abide by the same rules and laws no matter if you live in Yellowknife, Inuvik or Whati.

## **Traditional Practices**

With respect to traditional practices of the North, the SPCA would like to state that it understands and respects what traditional knowledge and tradition is and means. I have read and have been told that for centuries the wellbeing of a community and family depends on the wellbeing of its dogs. People using dogs for their livelihood, whether for survival or tourism, as in today, should be giving these animals proper care. In other words, they should be healthy. What is the point of having dogs if you cannot provide the basic necessities of life?

In the past, dogs were very important to the survival of the family and, therefore, were taken care of. That was tradition. Please tell me where the tradition is having a dog tied up outside your house on a two-foot chain, not cared for, not fed adequately and not exercised at all. This is not tradition. Where is the tradition in starving a dog to death or abandoning a dog team tied on with no care, no means to fend for themselves? This was the case in Kakisa last winter. Three dogs were found dead in their houses. The remaining 10 were taken by us, the SPCA, with a lot of help from people in Hay River. Five eventually went to B.C. and the other five are now in the care of Grant Beck. They are fabulous dogs and lucky to have an owner like Mr. Beck. He understands what tradition is, and I respect him for what he does.

I also feel the word "tradition" with respect to dogs has been a cover for many people not willing to take care of their animals properly, for whatever reason. We cannot be afraid to step on toes or be politically incorrect. This is not tradition and it must stop.

The point about dogs at large, this needs to be defined, in my opinion, as dogs running free without an owner or guardian present. This way no one can call the authorities on a person running with their dogs, as many people do in these parts as recreation. No one can take a dog or dogs from their owners while they are out skijoring or hiking with their animals. These animals are not at large.

The popular shooting of dogs, often called Dog Day in various communities of the North, has to end as a means of controlling the dog population. Shooting can be quick

and humane; however, it is not always the case. I was speaking with an RCMP officer last spring. He was very upset that in that particular community, all the roaming dogs were slated to be shot on that particular day. Unfortunately, some of these dogs had owners and they just happened to be off leash that day. Unfortunately, this is common. Also unfortunately, one of the men shooting the dogs shot one from afar and didn't kill it. The RCMP officer was called in to finish the job. The poor dog was hiding, seriously wounded, under a house, suffering immensely. This kind of activity has to stop. It is barbaric and cruel and there are alternatives. We just need to want to make the change and embrace the benefits of such change. We need to remember that dogs aren't disposable pieces of garbage.

The SPCA works with several organizations down south by transferring dogs and pups from the communities, when it can, to southern shelters and foster homes. These dogs are more able to be adopted in places with larger populations of people. "Northern specials," as I call the dogs, are adopted fairly easily down south. If there were temporary shelters put in place in the communities, we could work with these communities and the airlines, and regularly organize transfers of these dogs. This would help with the population problem in a very humane way and give way to fewer shootings in the communities. Of course, if a spay and neuter program was created, then there would be far fewer dogs to have to transfer or shoot. This is an alternative and progressive way to make much needed changes to the overpopulation of dogs in all the communities of the NWT. It is humane, it may create jobs, it will make the community safer. This, however, cannot happen unless there is a sufficient SPCA facility here in Yellowknife, but we are working on that one.

There is a limited supply of veterinary care in the North. Regular travelling vet clinics should be considered as essential services in the communities of the North. There is a yearly program like this going on in the Sahtu with the Calgary Veterinary College, but is not frequent enough nor is in near enough communities. The SPCA proposes helping government form a program linking veterinary colleges with the Northwest Territories communities. This may be a mutually beneficial way for both parties to get what they need: experience for vet training for the vet students, and for dog owners, a way to get proper care to their dogs as the *Dog Act* will demand.

### **Time for Change**

It is also the view of the SPCA that there is a time of transition needed and that communities need education, direction and support with this transition. First Nations need to take on the responsibility, however, in enforcing this in the communities. These are laws of the Northwest Territories.

As well, this *Dog Act* should not interfere with hunting and trapping. There are already regulations in place for this. The act has to do with appropriate care of dogs and not an impact on aboriginal rights to hunt and trap. This needs to be made clear to the local people in all the communities. This transition will take a little bit of time, but it can be accomplished.

Finally, as Ghandi said, "You can judge a society by the way it treats its animals." The Northwest Territories is being judged very harshly, and rightly so. We need to change the horrible fact that we, as a Territory of Canada, choose not to take proper care of our animals, and dogs in particular.

We need to be the "worst place to be an animal abuser" and not the best, as currently is the case, and I believe we can all work together to make this a reality in the near future.

Instead of seeing this act as a negative change, as Northerners we can choose to see this act as the beginning of a new era where Northerners are seen as leaders. Thank you.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you very much, Ms. Spencer. Any questions from committee? Mr. Yakeleya.

**MR. YAKELEYA:** Thank you. Mr. Chair, in bringing up the issue of veterinary services in our smaller communities, certainly I have had the privilege of taking the opportunity to take advantage of it last year with the University of Calgary. They are doing that on a non-supportive, because we had to give whatever donation. They were quite busy in Tulita with the dogs and that. I was very surprised after they talked and looked at my little dog, they asked for a donation. We fed them too. We fed the veterinarians because we wanted to know more about the program and also because of the hospitality by us in the Sahtu. I was surprised. We gave them some donations and they were saying hopefully they would come back up and our government doesn't have this program.

With all these things you want us to do in the small communities, but we don't have the resources. We don't have actually anything to do these things here. I'm very happy to hear about an education program. If we are to do some of the things they want in this act here, we need to get backed up. We can have the best laws, but if we aren't allowed to enforce them or can't enforce them, they are no good to us. There are some laws like that in the Northwest Territories. We need to back up what we're going to say, otherwise it's meaningless to us in our small communities. So I'm very happy to hear what you said about veterinary services which play a very important role in our communities. I guess that's something I wanted to ask the lady here in terms of the services that you have to offer in the North and making yourself available to the smaller communities.

One of the things that this agency did was there were some young people in my community that want to become veterinarians and look after animals. It's a shame that they have to ask for donations. We don't have a program like that.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Mr. Yakeleya. Ms. Spender.

**MS. SPENCER:** Yes, actually, last year I met with Susan Kutz (sic) and she was very excited. I think that was her third year and this is their fourth, I believe, and she actually e-mailed me the other day and I think they're bringing up, I think it's two or three additional vets. So hopefully they will stay a little bit longer and they will be able to see more people, but she did say that last year was outstanding. I think they saw over 100 dogs from surrounding communities. Last year her concern was that they wanted to

keep coming up, but the department in the university where she works and does her research, they were giving her a hard time because it was kind of sucking money out of their department, so they were looking to see if they could get money on this end to help them, and hospitality was a huge help because I think they had to pay before that. So that was a huge help to them, just having a free place to stay and be fed.

But as I said in my presentation, this needs to be broader. We need help with it and I think if the government got onside and actually worked with vet colleges and say fourth-year students as part of their curriculum, if they could come up as part of their curriculum, come up, have a northern experience and see this beautiful land that we live in, get experience with spay, neuters, vaccinations, surgeries and things like that, they both can benefit.

As the SPCA, we are just, we are a non-profit organization. We do our best with people's donations. We all have full-time jobs, as you know, so it's hard to actually do what we need to do. I think honestly getting vet services a few times a year in the communities would help so much to get dogs spayed and neutered so that you don't have this free-running puppies everywhere freezing to death. Then our dog transfer wouldn't be so... I am getting calls every single day: I found this puppy; I found this litter; they are only probably three weeks old; they are ten weeks old; two weeks old; they are just born, what do I do; they are going to freeze to death; we don't have room for them. So we do our best. We've got two coming tomorrow from Inuvik. We had three last week. Always, there's always people calling us and that wouldn't be the case if we could have vets go up there and do the spay/neuter and vaccinate, but we need help with it. If the communities could help just by providing hospitality, according to Susan, that's a huge help. So even that in itself would bring more people up. It's a big organizational thing, but we could do it.

There are so many communities that need our help. That's something the SPCA is going to move forward with, but we need help, like I said. Hopefully government can help us, or the City, maybe even... We don't have affiliation with the national SPCA. We are on our own, so that ties our hands a little bit. Anyway, we'll do the best we can.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Ms. Spencer. Mr. Krutko.

**MR. KRUTKO:** Again, it seems like I'm the bad apple in this bunch. I come from a riding which represents Inuvialuit and Gwich'in people and traditional activities still exist. People still run dog teams. I know there are a few people out there saying there are no dog teams. They've got dog teams running between Old Crow and Fort McPherson. They got dog mushers in Aklavik, Fort McPherson, Tsiigehtchic. You've got trappers who still depend on dogs, and people fish and trap for a living. For them, that's their lifestyle. For some reason, it seems like that's wrong. I don't believe it's wrong. I grew up in that community all my life. I basically see how people treat their dogs. They treat their dogs before they even take care of themselves. They make sure their dogs are fed, taken care of. They go to their net, they feed their dogs, they water their dogs before they even go home to eat. That still exists in our communities but for some reason, it seems the whole concept of traditional way of lifestyles, from the groups I

represent, we are trying to get our culture back. We're trying to get our languages back. One of them is the whole idea about the relationship between man and dog. To me, it seems like the way you guys are interpreting the word "traditional" or interpreting communities and how they treat their dogs. That little situation that happened in wherever, it seems like it's the mosaic of the day. It's what people are catching on to. It's what they are hearing from the media and that's what people are reacting to. People in our communities, they don't like what they are hearing on the radio. You know, people back in the day, we had our own dog control. Sure, shooting a dog might be cruel to some people, but for most people, that's the way you put a dog away. The same thing with puppies. If a dog had something wrong with her little and you too many dogs, there was dog control. You usually put them in a bag, put a rock in it and dropped it in the water and that's how you basically took care of the problem.

That's the problem we have in our communities: there are too many dogs. Because there are so many problems in our communities, they are trying to cope with what we have. We don't have shelters. We don't have the infrastructure and capacity to deal with what the municipalities are dealing with. They don't automatically go out there and shoot a dog. They'll catch the dog and put it in a cage and notify the person that you've got so many days to take care of this animal. For me, I think it's the way that this thing is being played out. The local governments have bylaws in place that they try to follow. I know for a fact that in most cases, it's the other way around, where the RCMP are the ones that destroyed a dog and that's not what they do. They're not used to doing that. So it works both ways. For myself, there has to be an understanding, because you made reference to Dog Days in our communities. We don't have Dog Days in our communities. We basically try to hold off with that decision, because that's the last decision to make, is to destroy the dog.

Again, I think you have to be cognizant of the whole idea that First Nations people, people in our communities, their relationship with their dogs is just as important today as it was, say, 100 years ago. We survive in our communities with those dogs. We depend on them to go hunting, when people go to their bush camps. People are going back to using dogs traditionally for trapping because the cost of trapping by snowmobile, it's still cheaper to go with a dog team.

Again, it's that understanding. Just following up on Mr. Yakeleya's point, I think you have to be... I know people don't like the words "local" and "traditional" practices, but the way that the hamlet and communities have functioned since we were settlement councils and then moving up to hamlet councils to chartered communities, there is a system in place that they use for dog control. That's not the perfect way. Sure, it's great to bring a veterinarian in to give them a needle to put them to sleep, but there's a cost associated with that. That's the problem we are going to run into in communities. There's a cost associated with infrastructure. You talk about a dog shelter; you talk about having the capacity to deliver. That's the issue I have with this legislation. It's not only the individual that's going to have to take this on, it's the municipal governments and the community governments that are going to have to. They are responsible. Once you take ownership of a loose dog, you are obligated under this legislation to ensure that all those items are applied.

I know that you guys mean well, but again there's a cost associated. So I would just like to know what is your cost with regard for veterinary services for communities and how is that being billed every time you have to go into a community. Do you charge the individual? Do you charge the local government? The way this thing reads, I think that's what's going to happen. Thank you.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Mr. Krutko. Ms. Spencer.

**MS. SPENCER:** First of all, I'll speak to veterinary care. These vets, like in the Sahtu, that are coming up next week or a couple of weeks, when they come in they don't charge. If you have a donation, great. But they come for that service. If you have a dog that needs to be vaccinated or spayed or neutered or if it has a broken leg or if it's ill in any way, they say to bring it to them and they will treat it. They will do whatever they have to, for no charge. That's why I was saying if we could come up with, if we could get more organizations like that to come up and you could just provide hospitality and food, that seems to be enough. So if we could get fourth-year vet students, work with the universities, if we could use that, then the communities wouldn't have to pay.

To spay and neuter a dog would take care of so many problems. I mean, you wouldn't have puppies running free and you shouldn't have so many dogs starving and freezing.

And as you mentioned, the mushing. I think it's great. I appreciate what you said that you feed your dog before yourselves and that's the way it had to be and that's the way it has to be, right? This has nothing to do with people who have working dogs and treat them well; not at all. That's excellent. But it has to do with people who have a dog or dogs and they aren't working them and they aren't treating them well. That's what we're talking about. Something has to be done to control that neglect and that abuse. It's not specifying mushers or people who use the dogs for their survival. If you are treating your dogs well, then you won't have a problem. It has nothing to do with whether it's tradition or not. If you are treating your dogs well, you won't get fined and you won't get in trouble. If you're not treating your dogs well, if you're starving them, if you don't have an insulated dog house if it needs one, you'll get in trouble. So the quick answer to that, I know that last week one of my colleagues said how are communities supposed to afford the fines, the simple answer is treat your dogs well, feed them and you won't be fined. So that's that.

With regard to the veterinary services, hopefully it won't cost the communities anything and their services... People in the communities can take advantage of that. It won't cost them anything, cost them minimal, but we need it more widespread. Like, once a year in the Sahtu, I know they do tremendous work and it helps everybody out, but it's not enough. I think I answered your questions.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Ms. Spencer. Mr. Krutko.

**MR. KRUTKO:** Just one more point I picked up on. I have to say I agree with you on something.

---Laughter

It's in the area that you talked about the dogs running at large. I mean, dogs are dogs, they need their exercise, they need to run. You can't always have them on a leash. The way this legislation reads, it says even areas outside of the municipal boundaries. So not only in a municipal boundary do you have to have it on a leash, even when it's running anywhere in the Northwest Territories, it has to be on a leash. I would just like to ask what you suggest, either removing it or...

The other area you touched on is the whole area of when a dog is running loose and somebody grabs it. You could be 10 feet behind it and the bylaw officer picks it up, automatically takes it away and then he has to go through the whole process. I walk the dog along the trail every once in awhile and I see people running their dogs and walking their dogs. The same thing in our communities. For me, that's important that you talk about the idea of giving them the space that they need and the ability to run. I would just like to know if you would maybe consider amending that and allowing for different wording and what type of wording you would suggest.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Mr. Krutko. Ms. Spencer.

**MS. SPENCER:** I mentioned I run my dogs and sometimes they don't come back and sometimes they do...

---Laughter

...and sometimes they do on Tin Can Hill. One of them specifically. But there are lots of people on Kam Lake, all the lakes, in the woods, people run their dogs, they skijor. That, to me, is not dogs at large. Dogs at large are ones where the owner is nowhere to be found. They're not out exercising. They're not out with their owners. So wording definitely needs to be more carefully stated with that. I think it's simple. If a dog is not near with a guardian or an owner, then it's considered at large. I think it can be very simple; but you're right, a lot of people run their dogs and I don't think I'd be too happy if a bylaw officer grabbed my dog and took it and said it was at large when it wasn't.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Ms. Spencer. Mr. Bromley.

**MR. BROMLEY:** Just follow-up, Mr. Chair. In my mind, the bad connotations of the word "traditional" have derived from cases of abuse of animals and justification being that it was traditional. Clearly, that is not what is meant in the act with the use of the word "traditional." I wonder if simply putting a definition in of traditional would alleviate Ms. Spencer's concern. It's difficult to define traditional, but just listening to you, respectful treatment which includes adequate food, water and shelter given the climactic conditions and the ability of the dog to thrive under those conditions, something like that. Presumably the experts could come up with some of kind of definition. Would that be acceptable? I assume that definitions could also take care of the "be at large" term that's used in the act.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Mr. Bromley. Ms. Spencer.

**MS. SPENCER:** Like I said, I wasn't here on Thursday, but did somebody say that they weren't going to define what traditional was or was I told that wrongly? No? I don't know.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Ms. Spencer. I don't believe so, no.

**MS. SPENCER:** No?

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** We talked about it but there was no clear direction given at that time.

**MS. SPENCER:** Okay.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Ms. Spencer.

**MS. SPENCER:** Thank you. I was talking about this with my co-worker, actually, and he recommended perhaps you could get community elders to come up with something for a definition to say what tradition means to them regarding dogs and that would appease everybody, I think. It would probably be very accurate. So I think a good, solid definition that community elders would agree with, and other people, would suffice for sure.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Ms. Spencer. Ms. Bisaro.

**MS. BISARO:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thanks, Nicole, and thanks, Jan, for your presentations so far.

There was a concern from both sides at the public hearing last week and kind of went to following up on the definition of tradition and traditional. I guess I should ask, has the SPCA given any consideration as to how adequate care of dogs will be defined? Because what it's going to come down to is regulations and interpretation of a person in looking at a dog or dogs and determining that they are being mistreated or not. Mr. Krutko certainly talked about dogs that are outside dogs who stay outside, are outside all the time, are not necessarily fed daily but certainly they have access to water and they're not being starved. Have you given any thought to the act allows different interpretations to be made without sort of getting accusations on a frivolous basis? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Ms. Bisaro. Ms. Spencer.

**MS. SPENCER:** Thank you. That's a tough one. I know that last Thursday, I apologized for to being here so perhaps it's second hand and may not be accurate, but the word "common sense" was used and common sense is not the same for every person, so that's not a great word. I understand there are outside dogs. One of my dogs loves to be outside all the time and I don't know how he stands it and he's not northern, really. He's a northern Saskatchewan dog, but he's not a northern dog. You know, dogs are dogs. With feeding, I mean this is slightly different, but I was in Romania and worked with wolves. We had two wolves in an enclosure and twice a week part of a horse

carcass was put in with them and that's what they would have over several days. They ate what they could and it was pure meat. So I understand that. Speaking with Mr. Beck last week about the five dogs that he took from us last year, he said he went up North and had an education about the dogs, the Eskimo dogs up there and they don't like to be inside and people look at that and see them on the ice and think that's cruel. He had said to me there's education on both sides that is needed about what tradition is. I mean tradition about the dogs and what they're used to and what they're bred for. I think that if you provide your dog with a good house, if it's not starving... I mean, everybody sees a dog that's starving and you know when a dog is starving. I know with some of the sled dogs, people look and they're so skinny, but they're supposed to be like that and I know that. There's a big difference between a thin sled dog and what they're supposed to be and a starving dog. To answer your question, I don't know how you can put that in the act, but it has to be explained somehow.

I think there's a part also in the communities that community leaders need to educate their local people on what is acceptable if this act comes in. What's acceptable, what isn't acceptable and you do have to take care of your dogs and you do have to make sure that they're fed, watered and run sometimes. What we're looking at is dogs that are tied on. The dogs in Whati that we brought in -- the Great Slave Animal Hospital has two and we have two -- one of them had a chain around its neck that took forever to get cut off and the other one had a seatbelt wrapped around its neck and it didn't even have room enough to lie down. So that's abuse. That's not right. At the same time, the female dog is put outside to give birth to her puppies. She died; she perished as did all the puppies, except one. That is clearly abuse and neglect. This is what we see and this is what we have to deal with and this is what we have to stop and we have to let people know in the communities that this is wrong and it's not going to be tolerated. Hopefully this act can be worded as such and people in the communities can be educated and the leaders actually take part in educating the people of the communities.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thanks, Ms. Spencer. Ms. Bisaro.

**MS. BISARO:** Thanks, Mr. Chair, and thanks for your comments. I just wanted to make a quick comment. I'm really pleased to hear you see the big picture. You know, the comment that we need education on both sides I think is really valid. I'm a little concerned that this act may lead to people, as you say, freaking out, because they see a dog who's outside all the time but that's fine for that dog because that's where they are supposed to be. I think in your remarks you talked about a transition period and I think that's a really valid point. It will probably go more towards regulations. I don't think we'll put it into the act, but it's a really good point, that it will take some time for people on both sides. We need to teach each other. In my case, this is okay and in your case, that is okay and they are both acceptable treatment of dogs and these dogs aren't in distress. Thanks very much.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Ms. Bisaro. I'd like to thank you, Ms. Spencer, for your presentation and staying with us to answer some questions. Thank you. Next on the list I have Dr. Tom Pisz from the Great Slave Animal Hospital. Mr. Pisz. Welcome, Dr. Pisz.

## Presentation by Great Slave Animal Hospital

**DR. TOM PISZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My name is Tom Pisz and I have worked as a veterinarian in Yellowknife for over 25 years. Believe me, I've seen it all. I've seen dogs in communities coming with already castrated and nobody neutered that dog. The dog had frozen testicals and they fell off. I've seen the puppies with the chain grown in the necks because when it was chained up, he was small and he increased, his size tripled but nobody cared. The collar has to be bigger. So this puppy had... Not one, there was many of them. I've seen little puppies frozen to the ground with bloody diarrhea because they suffered with parvo virus infection, which is very infectious disease on your dogs and they are dying of dehydration, vomiting and diarrhea, but before they die, they froze to death.

In the beginning when I came to Yellowknife, I did a lot of travelling around as a vet, as a travelling vet to do the spaying and neutering clinic. We went to Coppermine, Norman Wells, Cambridge Bay. I've been everywhere. The type of dogs we've seen there, they got nothing to do with traditional type of dogs. We learn from...(inaudible)...books, et cetera. These dogs were larger dogs, 80 pounds, the closest type to the Canadian Inuit dog, if you guys know what kind of breed it is. It's a very rugged, strong animal which doesn't run very fast, but he could eat very little and survive in very cold weather. That dog doesn't need a shelter. He's got a coat like a bison. I don't see any of these dogs anymore up north. We've seen hundreds of dogs. They're small, skinny and they look exactly the same like dogs in Florida, dogs in Ontario, dogs in Europe. They're just little mutts with short hair and no fat. These little dogs are tied up in the same manner as the dogs years ago.

Tradition, we are talking about tradition. What kind of tradition? Tradition is when they hunt, when they use the dogs for transportation, for hunting and for protection. I don't see any of this still happening up north. The only thing that's left is the dog has a poorly defined landscape of the past. Everybody uses skidoos, cars, automatic rifles. Everybody uses quads to do their hunting and trapping.

So there is no difference between dogs from down south and dogs in the Northwest Territories. They suffer the same. I think this act, the *Dog Act*, instead of being some umbrella for defining some traditional practices, you should actually target those practices. These practices are not acceptable. We have to define what is acceptable and what is not acceptable. This is not about dividing our community between different groups, aboriginal groups, white groups, Polish groups, Polish veterinarians or whatever. We should work on that together. That should be one target we have. It's not about fining people \$5,000 because they left their dogs outside. We should tell them how to do it and if they don't need that dog, they shouldn't have it. One dog in the family, that's good enough; not 15 dogs.

Last year I'd been called to Behchoko. There were several investigations before I went there. Probably most people knew about it. One of the citizens there, he's got a compound of dogs, which were supposed to be used as sled dogs. There were 46 dogs of different ages, older puppies, newborn puppies, no food and water. It was terrible;

terrible. The dogs were wild, you couldn't catch them. I put down 46 dogs that day, humanely destroyed. We shouldn't have that.

There are other things about this act about euthanasia. Euthanasia doesn't need to be performed by a vet. Euthanasia with guns shot can be as humane as chemical euthanasia, it just has to be done properly. You don't need a vet to do that. But you need some skilled person who knows how to shoot the dog. They might not be looking good there, pleasant, but it's instant. It's as instant as my needle. So we should emphasize this as a big thing. How are the people up north going to euthanize those dogs? If you have a dog control officer or somebody who is trained or has the basic knowledge, you can do it. That's one thing.

Another is there is still lots to do with basic education before we start implementing this. We should educate the people about vaccinations, basic vet care, and for previous meetings we were talking about the aboriginal groups not having resources for veterinary treatment. For example, your dog has...(inaudible)...at the last meeting and the surgery will be \$3,000 and the person cannot afford that is he going to be charged for neglect? Of course not. There are lots of different options. We have these calls all the time. We have calls with broken pelvis and orthopaedic surgery which will cost \$3,000. There are several options. You can do a lesser surgery, amputation, medical treatment for hip dysplasia with anti-inflammatory or whatever. It could be put the dog for adoption and that's really strong here in Yellowknife between animal lovers and the SPCA and ourselves, the Great Slave Animal Hospital. We always give an option. We take those dogs and we treat them as much as we can. There's not a dead end if you have a dog and you can't afford treatment. They can ask about options and it's going to be...and they are going to receive those options. Again, back to education, the people should be informed.

The veterinary services up north, it's difficult because unfortunately no matter who's doing it, a private practice or university, it still has to be paid. Someone has to pay for drugs, someone has to pay for transportation and the time of these people. If there are no resources, it's not going to happen. We have to ask government for help. They sponsor us for travelling, et cetera. Giving them food and shelter, it's not enough. Three vets working there, they should be paid by the hour and someone is paying, and it's a bunch of students, it's beneficial for them to learn how to spay and neuter stray dogs, but it's not enough. I'm telling you, I used to do this travelling and in the beginning we had some sponsors. We had airlines sponsoring because I was travelling with a bunch of equipment and a technician. I was losing about \$3,000 a day just doing that. So, unfortunately, no one can afford it. It could be the most difficult part of it because the Northwest Territories is so spread around that this is a problem. Here in the closer communities to Yellowknife and closer to south it could be done easier.

Again, the *Dog Act* is a step in a good direction, proper direction, and I'm really glad and thankful to all the people that work on it. It has to be still improved in many ways, like the fact is the *Dog Act* is very short-thinking, because there are other animals besides dogs. We've got cats, we've got horses, we talk about exotic pets. There's abuse of those animals too, so it should be brought up to the animal act.

But, hey, it's good. Thank you. That's what I want to say. If you have any questions, I'll try to answer. Thank you.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Dr. Pisz. Mr. Yakeleya.

**MR. YAKELEYA:** Thank you. I know the doctor provides a valuable service to our people that don't have this type of service. Like you say, it costs money. Hopefully this government or the next government will look at how we can help people if we put this legislation and act into effect and really help the people.

I'd like to just talk to you about the traditional practice. I think the lady before said it very well; we need to educate ourselves very well both as well as to traditional practices with the dogs in our communities. You made a comment that you don't see any traditional practices. That's quite accurate. There are some places where we still use our dogs when we put them on an island to hunt moose. You never went hunting with us. I don't know. Maybe one day I'll take you hunting to show how our dogs work in the bush, the doctor. The dogs, just because they sit outside our house, they are our protection. They are there for us. If you listen to the elders and the traditional knowledge, you sit down and ask why the dogs are there. If you ever hear dogs howl at night, the elders will tell you the reason why. That's our belief and our culture. If you're not familiar with it, then it doesn't make any sense why the dogs are howling at night. I listen to my grandmother and my mom and they say it's good to have dogs outside your house. They are there for protection. For other people, that may not sound logical or rational, but that's ours in our region, in our community.

It is true what you're saying, but there are parts that we have really lacked the responsibility of taking care of our dogs. Other people have said it. I think we need to be very careful when we start to talk about my people and culture. They are our protection, those animals. Dog sleds, they are racing dog sleds. They wonder why they're so skinny. We have dogs that are really big, working dogs. It's a different way of life. So there are different views that we have to wrestle with views around small communities when you have dogs there. So we've got to understand each other, because we don't understand why dogs... Sometimes people tell me why do dogs come into people's houses and sleep on couches and beds and that? That's not right. But how can you have a dog sleeping with you? That's what one woman did. One woman had a dog sleeping on the bed with her. I was kind of scratching my head. A dog is not supposed to be sleeping on a bed with a person. They are supposed to be outside. We don't understand. That doesn't make it wrong; it's just that we don't understand. What we were told is a dog is supposed to be outside. If you put food there, dogs will eat it. That's a dog. He doesn't push his plate away and say I want something else. A dog will eat it. That's how we grew up. Yeah, I think you're right, I think you're right. It's not hearing about our communities that we have lacked our responsibility for dogs. But you are saying educate us to put the right place for dogs to be again. We certainly have fallen off that...(inaudible)...and you have told me -- I don't like to hear it but I need to hear it -- we need something to change. Not everything I am going to take as truth, because I have been told about protection for animals in my country, in my land. We have dogs to protect us, protect my family.

So I need you to support us more in educating each other. I know you do a valuable service for the people of the Northwest Territories, but also some of those traditional practices are very close to my heart and the reason why on that part. That's why I wanted to see how we could again use this opportunity to help each other with this *Dog Act*. Animals, we can go to another meeting on that one, but we are here just for the *Dog Act*.

I wanted to thank you again for moving in that area to promote dog sledding, dog teams and dog racing. That would be good. I think the lady said before, if we work with the elders on tradition, then we've got a place where we can work together. I think that's a good thing. It's true, we need to come back and talk to people. These animals are important.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Mr. Yakeleya. Before I go to Dr. Pisz, we are at 1:15. We've got 45 minutes left. We've got a number of people left on the list to speak today. So I could just ask Members, if you have a question, try to get to the question for the presenter as soon as you can so we can get to everyone and listen to everyone today that we have with us. Dr. Pisz.

**DR. PISZ:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Yakeleya, I appreciate your comments and they are absolutely right. I don't think the *Dog Act* should be opposed to traditional ways of treating a dog. But the interpretation is wrong. We were on the wrong page. You said having a dog in front of the house, sure enough, you could have a howling dog outside of the dog if it's a Canadian Inuit dog. Like I said, 80 pounds with a thick coat. If you have a howling little dachshund, chihuahua/husky cross, this is pretty cruel because that dog is howling because it's freezing. I don't see those types of dogs anymore. I wish I could see them back, but I don't. What happened with this traditional type of dog was they moved to the next stage to mushing dogs as a sport because those races are short enough and a large dog like that cannot keep up, so they used to breed them with greyhounds and right now to short-haired pointers, German short-haired pointers. But the dog is from Europe. The traditional type of dog is disappearing, it's gone. You don't see it. These people don't have those dogs anymore. They have whatever they have, they have reject mushers dogs. Sure, they howl, but they are not supposed to be there.

I think they should be consulting with some knowledgeable dog people, what is acceptable, what is not. I am not saying it's not acceptable to keep this dog outside, a Canadian Inuit dog. They don't need shelter, but they need food. So that's all you have to do, give them food and their coat is thick and shiny and they've got enough fat, they're happy. They dig a hole in the snow and they sleep there and keep themselves warm. But that's not the point. Those dogs are gone. The Inuit dog is almost extinct. There are a couple of breeders having them.

I might have said I have never see dogs used for hunting anymore. They did use those large types of dogs for hunting polar bears up north, but that's kind of disappeared too. It's gone because there's no more polar bear hunting. Distemper wiped them mostly off there. They were never vaccinated, so they didn't have an immune system strong enough to fight distemper. Years ago -- I don't know how this happened because the

community was completely isolated -- but I think distemper was brought by seals, because seals have distemper and the dogs were eating seals. There were hundreds of them gone. We can bring them back, but education again, I guess. Education and talking to each other, not blaming each other but talking. We'll help each other.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Dr. Pisz. Mr. Krutko.

**MR. KRUTKO:** Yes, I just want to note, you touched on distemper and that's where I was going with my question. I think I have to agree with Mr. Yakeleya; right now we have wolves all over the place and in the summer months we get grizzly bears and other animals coming into the communities. We do see dogs being taken by wolves, but again that's one of the reasons we do have dogs located where they are in our communities. They are usually down by the riverbank or at the back of the community, so that you can get a head's up.

You mentioned distemper and rabies and things you get because of foxes and other animals where you live. So what is the common ailment that dogs usually get in the Northwest Territories besides distemper? I'd just like to know what affects dogs and immobilizes them because of disease.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Mr. Krutko. Dr. Pisz.

**DR. PISZ:** Mr. Chairman, the most common disease right now is the parvo virus. It's a gastrointestinal virus, very, very, spreads very quickly. It can survive in the cold weather, in the snow for a long time. Actually, the cold weather preserves it. So it's always there. The only way to immobilize or eradicate that is a vaccination, mothers giving immunity to the puppies right away and if they are vaccinated properly, they won't get it. Unfortunately, that's another program. The government was actually doing it, a lot of vaccinations for distemper and parvo in the past and now they've given it up. They still do the rabies vaccination, which is another very, very important disease. ...(inaudible)... Because of human risk, that is why the government still carries on this program, especially up north. We don't have as big a problem in this area, but the white foxes transmit distemper, rabies. We didn't have very many cases, but there is always a possibility. Wolves, coyotes and foxes, they...(inaudible)...so rabies vaccination is not only for dog protection but humans, basically. You should vaccinate dogs for rabies, for sure.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Dr. Pisz. Mr. Krutko.

**MR. KRUTKO:** Just one more question. I know the big issue in this one is trying to look at distress of a dog, but I know the age and lifetime of a dog... We had a dog that was 16 years old and at the end of it, it was pretty distressed because of its ailments, age and everything else. You know, dogs fall off vehicles or break a hip and in our case, we had to get our dog from McPherson to Whitehorse to see a veterinarian and it lost its hind leg because of that. It was in distress because of a certain condition. In your professional opinion, with regard to stress, is aging also a factor in distress where a dog, as it ages, if it has different diseases... In most cases, you notice it in his

hindquarters or his walk. I know that that's an area that whoever is going to interpret it, an RCMP officer flying into a community who has never been there before is going to see a dog that looks like it's distressed, but the dog, like I say, is 15 years old, it will be distressed when it gets to that age in his lifetime. So I would just like to ask to elaborate on that.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Mr. Krutko. Dr. Pisz.

**DR. PISZ:** Mr. Chairman, of course age is a factor. The dog in old age cannot handle the same lifestyle as it could at a younger age. They usually suffer degenerate joint disease. They suffer digestive problems, they lose weight. All kinds of problems. I guess it's better to euthanize them than let them suffer for a long time. That should be, again, decided by, well, partially by the owner. The owner knows the best. If a dog cannot eat for some reason or eats and losing weight and it's shivering and his coat is very poor and he's hardly moving or has a stiff gait, maybe it's time to let him go. That's normal.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Dr. Pisz. Alright, thank you very much for your presentation, Dr. Pisz, much appreciated. Next on the list we have Robin Weber. Robin. Welcome, Robin.

#### **Presentation by Ms. Robin Weber**

**MS. WEBER:** Thank you for allowing input on the proposed change to this very important issue, the outdated NWT *Dog Act*.

A better, more thorough and encompassing animal protection act is needed, and since most other jurisdictions already have them, it wouldn't be too difficult to implement one. For now, the NWT *Dog Act* can be updated as a band-aid solution, but I can't support some of the currently proposed changes.

It has been 11 years since I first became involved in discussions with the NWT about updating the *Dog Act*. The proposed changes may be better than the ineffective legislation that we've had for the last 50 years, but there are glaring deficiencies. Specifically, Section 4.(3), adding a loophole to allow locally accepted or traditional abuse is unconscionable. Just because something has been allowed to happen for years doesn't mean it's right or that the rest of the civilized world won't condemn you for allowing it to continue. For example, smoking in the car with a child in your lap and no seatbelt used to be common place, but you wouldn't do it now.

There is no excuse, traditional or otherwise, for abusing an animal. We also know that many studies show it's a small step from abusing animals to abusing people. Strong laws make people think twice before committing a crime.

A jump from a \$25 to a \$5,000 fine would still put the NWT at the bottom of provincial and NWT comparisons in terms of penalties imposed. So it may seem like a lot of money, but as the saying goes, "if you can't do the time, don't do the crime."

I have pets and I believe that being a caretaker of an animal is a responsibility and not a right and should not be taken lightly. If you can't afford basic care for an animal, you shouldn't have one. I hate to do it, but I want to remind you of all the dogs that have died slow, painful, unnecessary deaths. Every dog that was tied to a tree and shot in the face, every puppy smothered in a plastic grocery bag, every cat left behind like garbage in an apartment or out on a winter ice road, these animals deserved better. They died because the people who were supposed to look after them didn't, and no one was held accountable because the penalties were so low that it wasn't worth the court's cost to press charges.

They deserve justice and no more animals should suffer the way that they did. Please keep them in mind when you reconsider the NWT *Dog Act*. Thank you.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you very much, Robin. Does committee have any questions? If not, I'd like to say thank you very much. Next on the list of presenters is Mr. Georges Erasmus. Welcome, Mr. Erasmus.

### **Presentation by Mr. Georges Erasmus**

**MR. ERASMUS:** Thank you very much. I want to start by letting you know I'm speaking for myself. I know I'm associated with different organizations, but today I'm speaking for myself.

I want to start by saying I am really pleased you're doing this, because it's pretty badly needed. It's a long time coming. I agree with those people that said it should have been done a long time ago. I also want to say that I support just about everything I heard this morning, particularly what the SPCA stated. I thought I couldn't have done better myself.

As opposed to whether there should be a *Dog Act* or animal act, because of the special relationship that people in the North have had with dogs, I think it's absolutely appropriate you start with dogs and deal with that separately by itself so that it doesn't get confused with anything else. That doesn't mean we don't need an animal act. We badly need an animal act. But just so it doesn't get all distorted and confused in relation to particularly because aboriginal and others in the North have used dogs in traditional ways, in working ways, I think it's smart that we deal with this first. So don't use that as an excuse to take another 10 years to do an animal act, but please proceed.

Like many Northerners, I was able to live in the North when dogs were extremely important to our lifestyle, and listening to Mr. Yakeleya's opening comments during his prayer, I absolutely agree with everything that Norman said. Those are, in fact, some of the common things I wanted to bring up at the beginning, was the importance of the dog in particular to aboriginal people. I don't know if we would have been able to exist without them up here. I just don't know how we would have been able to do it, because they enhanced our life, they allowed us to hunt, to carry the food home, to go get wood in the wintertime, everything. They were absolutely totally vital to the lifestyle. I don't need to list out all the things they did for us.

The other thing I thought was important, when Raymond started speaking about it, was we were brought up that we should respect all life. In some of the roles I've played in my life, for instance as national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, I discovered that the things I was taught in the North were actually being taught all across North America and amazingly when I went to World Council indigenous meetings, it was taught all around the world. Indigenous people were taught to respect all life, to treat life with dignity. Up here and many other places, when people went hunting we were taught that no matter how good a hunter we were, the animal was actually giving themselves to us. And we were taught we should take total dignity and respect in how we treated the animal, how we butchered the animal, what we did with the bones later, everything.

So to then have a law that says we have a tradition, what is it? A shield that allows us to do something that other people don't do? What is it necessary for? I've been involved in developing lots of shields. You know, I was in the First Ministers' meetings when we were dealing with Section 35 and put some clauses in there to protect treaty rights. I know all about shields. What is this shield for?

When I grew up, many people had dogs and we had whips. It was only certain people that only used the whips on the dogs and there were certain people that were cruel to their animals. No one in the community respected the people for what they were doing. On the other hand, we were taught to be respectful, so we couldn't go up to the person and say, you know, I don't like what you did with your dog. We were taught to be respectful of each other. So how did we talk to each other? Our families had the responsibility to talk to us in private. In public when we were in ceremony and feasting or other situations, elders would come up and speak and would talk in generalities and give us moral stories and values and things which we should live by, but we had problems going face to face with each other saying I really don't like what you just did with your dog. I really don't like what you did. And you know, it's not beating your wife. I mean, so the problem is if we're living in a society where even just a few percent are being disrespectful, we need a law that covers everyone. So the reality is we have to build into your legislation the ability to deal with those few people that are going to use, whether it's tradition or whatever, to hide behind.

So be careful going down that road of tradition. One of the things I do, when I do things for pay, is I'm chief negotiator for the Dehcho and I'm trying to define "tradition." Good luck. It's like trying to define "elder" or many other things. It is not an easy job at all.

So whatever you do, the bottom line has to be that there has to be respect and dignity and there can't be cruelty and abuse. It's just not only if you're using aboriginal traditions.

I thought there was a lot of commonsense spoken today. You know, some people had dog houses; many didn't when I was growing up. Why? The dogs were different. When you drive around Kam Lake and other places in town, you see the mushers with their dog houses. Why? If you just went and compared the pictures of the dogs that were racing in the dog derbies that started here some 50 years ago, and you compared them and took snapshots every five years, there is absolutely... Like Dr. Pisz says, there's no

comparison. Why? Well, obviously we're breeding them for speed. What did we use them for before? We needed strong, hardy, big dogs.

When I was a child, I was able to ride on the back of my father's lead dog. The dog was big enough. You could take two, two and a half dogs now that were racing, the size of some of the big dogs we had in the past and their fur, it was really thick. So, yeah, of course they could sleep outside in the snow and it made no sense... But nowadays, you take a dog outside in 20 below and if the dog is just standing there for four or five minutes, that dog is shivering. You know that dog can't live outside without a house. It gets 30 and 40 and 50 below. There are pictures of dogs in the Arctic in the past where they are completely covered in snow, they will lift their head up and it's no problem. So, yes, it's true there are dogs that can do that, but they are fewer and fewer. Wasn't it in the early '70s that Bill Carpenter had a program in Kam Lake to rescue the Inuit dog?

So, yes, we are going to have to treat people differently in relation to how they treat their dogs, but there should be absolutely no room for the kind of abandonment that we've heard described today, small chains... Unfortunately, even in Yellowknife we've had the excuse of shooting dogs. One of my sisters let her dog out to have a run in the morning before she went to work, never came back. Couldn't find the dog, how many times they went to look for it. At that time, there was a local person hired by the band to clean up the dogs. What excuse is that here in Yellowknife? All they had to do was grab the dog if it was necessary. To me it describes a situation of somebody walking their dog like in Fred Henne. Every day if you go to Fred Henne if you want to, at some point you could catch two, three four, 10 dogs and say they're not on a leash because they're being run, but they absolutely need to be run. So there are lots of practices that we do and may have been done in the past that don't need to be done anymore.

One of the things that is happening in the North, and has been happening for quite some time obviously, is the aboriginal people are still in transition. At one time we lived very much on the land, migratory. We really didn't have permanent settlements. Settlements built up over time. Even as the settlements were there, people would go out on the land, come back and all the rest of it and our dogs were always being exercised, whether it was to get food or wood or whatever. But the reality now is if we have a dog, most of us at least -- and I'll let Krutko here -- will absolutely, will acknowledge that people are still using dogs traditionally and certainly the mushers are exercising their dogs all the time. Otherwise, these athletes that they're using for racing wouldn't be very good to them. Those of us who have pets, we actually have to exercise them. I remember after we didn't have dogs anymore and we started having pets, I was an adult before I realized just leaving a dog tied beside your house doesn't make a hell of a lot of sense. They really need exercise. They love exercise and so forth.

I'm not asking you to put that in this legislation, because I think that may be there for another day. I'm not going to shoot that high right now, but absolutely we have to remove the kind of neglect and abuse that we've unfortunately seen too many examples of. So whatever you do, don't allow that to be a shield in our traditions. To me, that's an absolute sacrilege and that's the underlying theme.

I wanted to speak here because I expected that there weren't going to be very many aboriginal people speak to this and what you were going to field were only well-wishing, non-aboriginal, non-understanding of the veil of traditions. I wanted to pull the curtain aside because there's no room to hide behind our traditions to be cruel and neglectful and abusive to our people or to animals, but they always were there. So to say that because it was done in the past by some people that it should continue to be done in the future, is absolutely dead wrong. Thank you very much. I'll answer any questions you want.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you very much, Mr. Erasmus. Well said. Mr. Yakeleya.

**MR. YAKELEYA:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Erasmus stated that one of your roles is negotiating. Have you noticed or have you see in the past or even today in your role as negotiator for the Dehcho or any other role that you had with regard to negotiating aboriginal rights, have you noticed any places where the federal government has defined the word "traditional"? Because when we were negotiating the Sahtu Land Claim, we wanted to add traditional into our land claim and there was no definition offered by the federal government. Like you said, it's a pretty big word and they didn't really want to tackle it, so they made other means to capture what you want to say. It's like trying to capture air. How do you capture air?

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Mr. Yakeleya. Mr. Erasmus.

**MR. ERASMUS:** Well, off the top, I can't think of a definition that is simply for tradition, but we have defined trends like traditional activity which will be the long list of things that people will normally do, hunting, fishing, trapping being the most common and gathering of berries onwards. We have a long list of stuff like that, but in this situation if I was negotiating this, I would suggest you would have to have a term called "traditional dog management" or whatever, some terminology where you would have to start defining what you were talking about in a more specific way, because whatever your title was, you'd have to spend some times in the contents.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Mr. Erasmus. Anything further, Mr. Yakeleya?

**MR. YAKELEYA:** Thank you. I think that's something worthwhile, Mr. Chair, to look at, this word here, because it has sparked some passion from people. Certainly you've made it very clear that this word here doesn't mean that we have to hide behind our neglectful responsibility, but there's also this word that people use to the heart and they use it to the best of their heart. I know there are different times. Today is a different time in the small communities. There are some in our communities that still hold our traditions in terms of animals. Like you were saying, they are really important to us. The dog, as one, that is really important to us. I say that to our friend, the doctor, for the dog howling in the evenings, there's a meaning to that. It's a good one. It makes you listen to what the elders have said. Without the elders, that's what kept us going and can keep us going. So we have to pay very close attention to that.

I think there is no room for neglect and abuse of animals or dogs. That's not our way. That is not our way and I don't know what happened that we've done like that, but that's not our way. If you really follow what the elders said, we wouldn't be sitting here. We'd be practicing our own laws, but somewhere we decided not to practice them and go somewhere else. In the prophecies the animals will bring us back together to remind us of who we are. The dog is one of them. We have to think about those things. Thank you for your words.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Mr. Yakeleya. We don't have any other Members who want to say anything, but thank you very much, Mr. Erasmus, much appreciated. Thank you. Next on our list we have Mr. Grant Beck. Welcome, Mr. Beck.

### **Presentation by Dog Musher's Club and Beck's Kennels**

**MR. BECK:** Thank you. I'd just like to touch on a key word and that key word is "education." When I started running dogs, I ran dogs traditionally. That meant they ate fish, frozen meat, they got their water, they were the type of dog that you could run in all temperatures. They had good coats. There have been a lot of changes since then, all part of education, I think. Dog racing has brought that education forward. Dog racing today is we don't like to call them dogs, we call them athletes. The food now is measured in calories and they did it traditionally also. When I was a young boy and running dogs for my dad, my dad was a barren-land trapper and we had five generations of running dogs, so we have a lot of history in mushing dogs. They passed on that knowledge to us and the Beck family has gone to Europe. We've been world champions twice, we've gone to Europe 11 times, Canadian champions five times. That whole success is part of education from the old traditional way of running dogs. We learned how to care for our dogs, what is needed to keep them warm and, most of all, what is needed to keep them healthy, healthy and happy. A healthy dog and happy dog obviously will do the best for you, and it was a long process for us. That education came back from when I was seven, eight, nine years old. Today, yes, I hear people say we have a different dog. Yeah, we do. They're faster, they're stronger, they've got more endurance, all because of racing that kept that tradition alive. We have the Iditarod racing that runs 1,000 miles now. That is all traditional dogs today. There are no dogs that cannot withstand the cold. There are 120 teams starting March 1<sup>st</sup> from Anchorage to Nome. So that tradition continues there and it can here too, and it does to a certain part, and some communities still have that tradition, but this all stems from education.

Going back to when I started dogs and when I run dogs today, you know, our dogs are healthier than we are. They eat the right food, they get the right conditioning, they get the right exercise, the right hydration. I'll give you an example. In 1973 when Iditarod started, the snowmobiles came in. People were giving up their dogs because they felt they didn't need them anymore. But the Iditarod race started in '73. It took them 27 days to do a 1,000 mile race. They are doing it now in eight days. You know, when you look at it, that's a lot of miles on the dog, but if you see the dogs finish happy and they finish in better condition than they did when they started, that's all a learning process. And they are a different type of dog. They are bred for that. They can do that with ease. They can do that happily. They get to the finish line and they're happy dogs. There is no

doubt in my mind that they're happy. They are doing what they like to do, but that whole process, again, is education from '73 to now. If you asked us back then in those traditional days if we could do that, our elders would have said that's impossible. But with education and care in what we can do, it just made a whole lot of difference.

Again, we see around the North education in the same way our dog care, dog racing, our Yellowknife Dog Trotters Club looks after itself. If there is something going wrong, somebody will call the president or call somebody. That's an organization that looks after itself. We need something like that. There is no place for cruelty and we need legislation for cruelty. I agree with that. I talked to our SPCA president at length. I think education is the key here. To see this happening and what you hear today is just sad, but education is the key word here.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you, Mr. Beck. Anything from committee? If not, once again thank you, Mr. Beck. Much appreciated.

Next we're going to go to Ms. Barb Needham. Welcome, Ms. Needham. Ms. Needham is the last on the list, so if anybody else at the back wants to present, they will be after Ms. Needham, and just let Ms. Knowlan know. Ms. Needham.

### **Presentation by Catholic Women's League**

**MS. NEEDHAM:** I'm here on behalf of the Catholic Women's League. Our dog, Scarlet, she's a Talton bear dog. My gosh, the love she's brought is enough to bring me tears. But before we were blessed with Ms. Scarlet, we had to really think and ponder if we could be good enough parents to Scarlet. Would we be able to look after her? Would she have enough time with us that we wouldn't be away too often? That she would be fed at the right times, that she would have water, that she would be cared for and that she could run free with me when I did my rush. Guess what? ...(inaudible)... I pray the bylaw doesn't get me for that. That's become another problem, because I sometimes attend places and I'm gone but an hour or maybe 20 minutes and if I tie her up, she's taken by bylaw. I've become a friend of SPCA and am so grateful for them. I don't know what we would do without SPCA and the animal hospital. We need a larger animal hospital. We need the SPCA and I thank you very much for the vote there.

We need our dogs in the North. They are a tremendous tourism draw and I think we are losing the whole point here when we don't recognize the values of the huskies and the value of our dogs. We talk about sled dogs and mushing. I didn't live in the days of the past, but I do know that the fur traders valued their dogs so much that they were vital to life. They slept with their dogs sometimes when they couldn't get to a cabin. That kept them warm. Those dogs did save their lives.

The dogs of the past were abused occasionally and if those ones were abused, the dogs ran away. If they were not abused, the fur trader died. That's how it was. It was a harsh life. Reality is temperatures have warmed up a bit, but we have vehicles. We are no longer dependent on a dog and because we are no longer dependent on a dog, what are we going to do? Just let the dog sit there? Or more than that, the dog isn't as

important anymore. It's not as valued. To me, as you can hear my love for Scarlet, a dog needs to be valued. We need to be responsible. If we are going to purchase or own a dog, we are blessed to receive it.

For tourism, the value of our sled dogging is incredible. Mushing is great. Again, there's a difference in the type of dog. There are outdoor and there are indoor dogs. If you take an indoor dog that's been in Great Slave Animal Hospital with the SPCA and put it out on the land to be a mush dog, he's going to freeze up pretty fast if he's been housebound. Those that are abandoned wandering the streets do freeze up and die. There are brutal things we've heard about neglected dogs. It's not just a little bit here in Yellowknife. It's in communities, but it's big here. It's embarrassing. We're from Yellowknife. We should be the leaders of how to look after and support our animals. My heaven's sakes, we could be the Territory's greatest in tourism for dogs, but more than that, leaders of how to care for, look after and possess dogs.

Again, to do that, that requires education; education on how to be responsible about how to care for a dog; education on the reality that, yes, we need vets up here. They need to be trained up here. Why not a veterinarian college up here to draw work, and better than that, we need dogs to be spayed so those little puppies don't die. These are critical and essential things that we need up here and it would be a blessing if we could work towards it and I thank you for your time.

**CHAIRMAN (Mr. Ramsay):** Thank you very much, Ms. Needham. Does committee have anything for Ms. Needham? If not, I'd like to say thank you once again, Ms. Needham, for your words.

Are there any other members of the public that wanted to make a brief presentation to the committee today? If not, I'd just like to once again say thank you very much to all the presenters. Very well spoken. It's never easy to come before a committee. We public speak for a living, so it's easy for us, but it's nice to see folks come to the table and share their concerns with us. As I said last Thursday, it's fortunate for us that we live in a jurisdiction that when laws are made and legislation gets passed, we have the opportunity to ask the public for their input and we get to debate that amongst ourselves before the legislation is passed.

So with these amendments to the *Dog Act*, it's very important that we hear from as many folks as we can. Today is the second of our public hearings. We're on the road tomorrow night in Hay River, and then on Thursday we're in Inuvik. Or Wednesday night in Inuvik, sorry. We are going to try to make some time to get to Fort Smith as well before we present our findings in the House sometime in February.

So, again, this is a step, as many presenters have said, a step in the right direction. It's obvious that we need to do something about protecting animals from abuse and cruelty in the Northwest Territories. The *Dog Act* is a start. My belief, and I share the concern with many presenters, is that the Northwest Territories needs comprehensive animal rights legislation much like other jurisdictions in the country and that's certainly

something I hope this government can continue to pursue and the next government can pick up on it as well.

So once again I wanted to thank everybody for being here and for sharing yourselves with us this afternoon. Thank you very much, and to the committee, thank you, committee. We're on the road tomorrow. To our staff, thank you very much. Much appreciated. Thank you.

---ADJOURNMENT