



Presentation

Welcome speech

By Elizabeth Usher

Good morning everyone and, on behalf of Voiceless, the fund for animals, welcome to this Humane Education Symposium.

Voiceless was founded in 2004 by Brian Sherman and his daughter Ondine, as the culmination of a life-long feeling of empathy and kinship with animals. They wanted to do what they could to actively improve the lives of animals in Australia and to promote a world in which animals are treated with respect and compassion.

The reason Brian and Ondine felt compelled to do this is because millions, or more realistically, billions of animals are today suffering in ways that many of us find too horrible to imagine or confront. While we often hear about the cruel ways in which animals are treated overseas, for example the terrible slaughter of harp and hooded seals in Canada¹ or the incredibly inhumane bear farming industry in Asia², the fact is that Australia can in no way be exonerated from responsibility for its own forms of cruelty against animals.

Voiceless believes that nowhere is this more apparent than in intensive farming systems, used throughout the country. Hence one of our organisation's primary aims is to 'lift the veil of secrecy' about what goes on in Australia's factory farms. The reason for this is the considerable extent of the suffering inflicted as a result of factory farming, and the sheer number of animals it affects.

While it is hard not to despair at the stark reality for so many animals in Australia, Voiceless is totally committed to raising awareness about their plight and paving the way for change. We try to do this in a variety of ways.

Voiceless has three main arms – a legal arm, an education arm, and our Grants Program. Excitingly, this Humane Education Symposium ties in strongly to both the Grants Program and our education arm.

The Voiceless Grants Program is totally unique in Australia. Over the last few years we have awarded around \$560,000 to fund projects aimed at improving the lives of animals. The ultimate goal of our grants is to provide the funding and consequently the momentum to build the animal protection movement in Australia.

We are absolutely delighted that, as part of the 2006 Voiceless Grants Program, Griffith University, working in conjunction with Compassion in World Farming, was awarded a grant of \$20,000 to hold this Humane Education Symposium. We have no doubt that this weekend will be remembered as a landmark event in the development of humane education in Australia.

¹ International Fund for Animal Welfare, 'Fighting the World's Largest Hunt for Marine Mammals' 2003

² World Society for the Protection of Animals, 'Bear Farming', 2007

As I mentioned, Voiceless is also active in the field of education, and runs two educational initiatives to harness the compassion and empathy of young people.

In May last year we launched Animal Club, a national network of clubs that operate in schools around Australia. We currently have a large number of schools throughout Australia involved in Animal Club, with more joining up all the time. Children have a natural empathy for animals and the purpose of Animal Club is to foster this feeling of empathy and kinship to create a better awareness about the needs of animals. Katy Wood will be sharing more about the Animal Club program tomorrow afternoon.

This year, Voiceless also launched a new initiative on university campuses across the country, called Voiceless Animal Advocates, or 'VAA'. VAA will garner the energy and intellect of Australian university students to advocate for animal protection. Currently, VAA is focusing on law students and Animal Law reform, however we intend to expand VAA to encompass other university disciplines including veterinary science, politics and economics.

At Voiceless, we firmly believe that all people have compassion for animals in their hearts. By promoting awareness about how animals are mistreated in Australia it is our hope that Voiceless will play a significant role in bringing about change. Humane education is a vital aspect of this, and I hope that you are all as excited as I am to be involved in this weekend that may well turn out to be a watershed for the nascent Australian humane education movement.