

4 July 2017

Hon Nikki Kaye  
Minister of Education  
Freepost Parliament  
Private Bag 18 888  
Parliament Buildings  
Wellington 6160



Dear Hon Nikki Kaye,

RE: School events involving the killing of animals.

Once again, a primary school fundraiser involving the killing of possums has hit the national headlines:

Horror at children drowning baby possums at Drury school event  
[http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c\\_id=1&objectid=11883083](http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11883083)  
*New Zealand Herald* 2 July 2017

The story was covered by Newshub, Radio New Zealand. Newstalk ZB and appeared on Stuff. It also made international headlines.

Dr Marc Bekoff, one of the leading animal ethologists in the world, picked up on the story and blogged about it in *Psychology Today*.

Youngsters encouraged to kill possum joeys in New Zealand  
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/animal-emotions/201707/youngsters-encouraged-kill-possum-joeys-in-new-zealand>

Dr Bekoff **describes these events as “horrific and unconscionable killing contests”**. He goes on to say, **“It simply is not okay to train youngsters to kill other animals for fun and for money. It's unnerving to imagine how this early training might continue to be displayed when these youngsters become adults, and how killing other animals, sanctioned by educators and school systems, will play out and be transmitted to future generations who might adopt these perverse values”**.

Dr Jane Goodall, who has been visiting New Zealand in the last week to launch a branch of the Jane Goodall Institute in New Zealand along with her world-famous Roots & Shoots youth programme, was horrified by this event. When we met last week, we spent considerable time discussing the appalling treatment of possums in New Zealand. This was not the kind of impression we hoped to make on her.

New Zealand frequently claims that we have some of the highest animal welfare standards **in the world, and recently included and recognised ‘animal sentience’ in our *Animal Welfare Act***.

If we truly are world leaders in animal welfare we are doing a poor job of relaying this to our children, future citizens and our most precious and impressionable charges.

Possums are sentient beings and a protected and beloved animal by our closest neighbour, Australia. Visitors to New Zealand are regularly horrified at our scant disregard and indeed perceived hatred of possums.

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Most countries have problems with introduced species and take measures to manage them, but I am not aware of any other country that demonises these animals to the extent we do with possums.

The *New Zealand Curriculum* encourages and promotes the development of positive values such as respect, empathy and care for the environment. Surely, we want our young people to grow into compassionate members of society who recognise that when we face difficulties we do so with integrity and decency. Not by instilling fear and resorting to brute force and violence as the only solution.

Violent acts have no place in our primary schools. Children should not have to witness the dead and bloodied bodies of animals being thrown around like worthless objects. These events may lead to desensitisation towards violence.

It concerns me that the educators and parents at Drury school (and other schools who use this type of event as a fundraiser) see no harm in exposing young impressionable minds to this type of behaviour. It is particularly alarming that at this event, a teenager drowned joeys in a bucket of water. **The organisers did not only lack in concern for the animals' or even the teens' well-being**, but were also unaware that drowning animals is an illegal act, and causes a painful and prolonged death.

I call on you as Minister of Education to put a stop to these types of violent and cruel school events on the basis that they not only contravene the spirit of the *New Zealand School Curriculum*, but also have the potential to undermine and damage the moral and ethical development of our young people.

I know that your vision for New Zealand education is progressive and innovative. These types of school fundraisers are dragging us back into the dark ages and causing irreparable harm to animals, our children and our nation. For the past 10 years, SAFE For Animals' **education programme has** successfully engaged hundreds of teachers and thousands of secondary school students in learning about animal suffering and taking compassionate action to improve non-human animal and human well-being. We would like to discuss our programme with you further, with a view to incorporating these values and embedding animal protection as a core competency into the national curriculum.

Yours truly,

Jasmijn de Boo, MSc, DipEd, MRSB, MloD  
CEO, SAFE For Animals

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