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Animal Rights Legislation in the NWT

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to speak today to the issue of animal neglect, cruelty and abuse. Along with many Northerners, I was shocked and in disbelief yesterday when I heard that charges were stayed against a Behchoko man who was charged last September after the local government in Behchoko called in a veterinarian to examine his sled dogs because of concerns about their health and living conditions.

The veterinarian determined that 34 of the sled dogs were so malnourished they had to be euthanized. Mr. Speaker, the Crown stayed the charges of animal neglect in this case because they felt it was unlikely of getting a conviction. To me this is a very, very sad commentary on our current animal protection laws here in the Northwest Territories and an indication that we must take action. The current Dog Act is woefully insufficient, ineffective and, as the name clearly states, does not even begin to address any other pets or animals.

Mr. Speaker, the Northwest Territories desperately needs an animal rights act. We have seen and heard far too many stories of animal neglect and abuse, and are getting a bad name both nationally and internationally for not protecting animals. I believe we can come up with a piece of legislation that will protect animals here in the Northwest Territories. We need to look at much tougher fines, incarceration for more serious offences and, at the same time, this new legislation should respect lawful and traditional pursuits such as hunting, fishing and livestock.

Mr. Speaker, without adequate and proper legislation in place it makes it almost impossible to get a conviction in the Northwest Territories. Our neighbours to the west in the Yukon have come up with an action plan to address the animal rights issue. They were prompted to act when a man shot 56 dogs on his property in Dawson City and there was nothing the authorities could do about it.

Mr. Speaker, we have had this latest incident in Behchoko coupled with the freezing death of many more sled dogs in Tuktoyaktuk recently and the picture begins to get much clearer. We need to move to protect animals from abuse and neglect and we must be able to pursue those who commit these heinous acts so that they face real consequences like time behind bars. Mr. Speaker, as a legislator I would support this government taking some clear and urgent action to address our archaic animal rights legislation here in the Northwest Territories. Thank you.