

Up to scratch and above

Agency says N.S. has some of best animal anti-cruelty laws in Canada

By BEVERLEY WARE South Shore Bureau

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BRIDGEWATER — An American agency that works for the legal protection of animals says Nova Scotia has one of the best systems in Canada when it comes to anti-cruelty laws.

"I was kind of surprised Nova Scotia was ranked in the top tier," said Mary Hill, secretary of Nova Scotia Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, said Thursday.

"Upon closer reflection you have to bear in mind this is comparative and it says a lot more about the ranking of the other provinces that are lower on the list than it does about our legislation. It just means the other provinces have worse legislation."

The California-based Animal Legal Defense Fund released a report this week that said Nova Scotia is "one of the worst places to be an animal abuser."

For the second year in a row, it ranked this province in the top tier, along with British Columbia, Manitoba and Ontario, for its animal protection laws.

New Brunswick, Northwest Territories, Nunavut and Quebec were rated on the bottom tier while Alberta, Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, Yukon and Saskatchewan were placed in the middle tier.

Ontario was judged best while the Northwest Territories and Nunavut tied for worst.

The report said Nova Scotia ranked high because its laws allow judges to order abusers to reimburse the costs of care for an impounded animal, place restrictions on the abuser's ability to own animals in the future and imposes increasing fines on repeat offenders.

But Ms. Hill said even though the province requires the society to enforce the Animal Cruelty Prevention Act and the new Animal Protection Act, it only gives the society \$3,000 a year to do that.

Despite that, the society secured three animal cruelty convictions. They include Digby-area puppy brokers Gail Benoit and Dana Bailey; Alan Elliott,

who had 130 cows seized from his farm in Spa Springs, Annapolis County, and Alice MacIsaac and her mother Zonda MacIsaac of Celtic Pets Rescue in West Bay Road, Cape Breton. The latter case alone cost the society more than \$110,000.

The Agriculture Department gave the society a one-time lump sum of \$100,000 last month "but it's a drop in the bucket," Ms. Hill said. "We welcome it, but it's not enough and it's not ongoing."

That money covers the salary and expenses of 1.5 cruelty investigators. The society has 2.5 and Ms. Hill said it needs at least six to fulfil its obligations.

The society investigated 1,264 cruelty complaints in 2008 and 496 this year. Thirteen charges have been laid as of May 21. Other than the money from the Agriculture Department, the society's only other sources of money are donations, bequests and fundraisers. Last year, with the help of 78 fundraisers across the province, the society raised just over \$425,000, which left it with a \$35,000 shortfall.

The province has passed new legislation called the Animal Protection Act, which requires veterinarians to report suspected abuse and to define acceptable standards of care for animals. But Ms. Hill said the legislation doesn't go far enough.

However, since the regulations haven't been written yet, Ms. Hill hopes the society will have a role in developing them so that they include specific wording that deals with animal fighting and puppy mills.

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