

## NSW Parliament Hansard 13 May 2004

Subjects	Veterinarians; Animals: Dogs; Animals: Cats; Food
Speakers	<a href="#">Lynch Mr Paul</a>
Business	Adjournment

### MR TOM LONSDALE AND THE AUSTRALIAN VETERINARY ASSOCIATION

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Mr LYNCH (Liverpool) [5.39 p.m.]: Tonight I inform the House of the plight of veterinarian Tom Lonsdale. Several of my constituents are interested in the case of Tom Lonsdale, which raises issues of relevance to my electorate, as it does for the electorates of all honourable members. Simply put, Tom Lonsdale complained to the Board of Veterinary Surgeons [BVS]—a State body. Somehow that complaint was made known to the Australian Veterinary Association [AVA]. As a result, after some inadequate processes, he was expelled from the AVA. This is relevant to the House in two broad ways. The first is the behaviour of the BVS, a State body, and the second is the behaviour of the AVA which, while technically being a non-government body, is treated by the Government in a particular way—that is, it is regarded by the Government as representative of veterinarians generally—and representatives of the AVA are placed on various boards by the Government.

It is fair to say that Tom Lonsdale is a controversial figure within veterinarian circles. He has regularly run in elections for the AVA, getting about 10 per cent of the vote fairly consistently. No-one can argue that he has majority support among veterinarians but a consistent vote of 10 per cent suggests significant minority support. His most controversial position stems from asserting the need for dogs and cats to be fed more than canned and dry pet foods: they need to be fed bones. The lengthiest exposition of his argument is in his book, published in 2001 and appropriately entitled *Raw Meaty Bones*. The preface to the book contains the following comments:

**If you own a dog or a cat which you feed with processed food from the supermarket or corner store, you will probably find this book deeply disturbing ...**

**The book is about what happens to dogs and cats if their diet is inadequate. These days most pet owners give their animals processed pet food. It may seem a convenient way of feeding but such a diet on its own is likely over time to cause the pets considerable ill health and suffering. And the signs of the ill health may not be obvious to many owners.**

**But ask yourself the question: Is it likely that a carnivore—a meat eater—whose species evolved on a diet of the whole carcasses of other animals, will benefit from bland processed food with never a bone in sight?**

Needless to say, such views have done little to endear him to the very large, seemingly multinational, companies that mass produce pet food. He has also done himself no favours with veterinarians who do not share his views. Vets and any of their associates who are funded by pet food companies would be likely to be pretty hostile towards him. When his book was published in 2001, Tom Lonsdale sought to have it reviewed in a journal called *The Veterinarian*. I have seen the email correspondence this generated. Despite promises or suggestions that the book would be reviewed, an interview with Tom Lonsdale published or a feature article printed, nothing eventuated. After two years of this frustration, Tom Lonsdale sent copies of what he regarded as

this highly unsatisfactory email correspondence to a number of bodies, including the Board of Veterinary Surgeons of New South Wales. He received an email from Maria Linkenbagh, registrar of the board, asking why he had sent it to her. He replied in an email dated 18 July 2003, which he also sent to almost all members of both Houses of the New South Wales Parliament, part of which stated:

Members of the NSW Board of Veterinary Surgeons are likely aware of the allegations of scientific and consumer fraud perpetrated upon an unsuspecting Australian public by an alliance of pet food companies and veterinarians ...

Any right-thinking person knows that the slow poisoning of the nation's pets by junk food manufacturers, aided by veterinarians, is against the interests of pets, pet owners and the wider community ...

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) has financial ties to pet food companies. For ten years the AVA has sought to stifle news of the scandal.

There appears to have been no real substantive response from the BVS. In Tom Lonsdale's view there are many connections between the BVS and the AVA. Thus he was not surprised when the AVA took it upon itself to respond to his communication with the BVS. He was, however, somewhat perturbed by the substance of the reply. He received a letter dated 8 January 2004 from Dr Bruce Cartmill, President of the New South Wales division of the AVA. He advised that the AVA had received a complaint that Tom Lonsdale had breached the AVA code of conduct and was bringing the association into disrepute. No complainant was identified so the complaint, from Tom Lonsdale's point of view, was anonymous. The letter from Cartmill made it clear that Lonsdale's email had generated the complaint. The New South Wales division recommended that Tom Lonsdale's membership of the AVA be cancelled—that is, that he be expelled. This recommendation was referred to the AVA board.

Tom Lonsdale requested full particulars of the allegations against him but no further information was provided. He was told that he was not allowed legal representation at the AVA board meeting that would consider his expulsion. He then received a letter saying that his membership had been cancelled as of 2 March. Tom Lonsdale was expelled from the AVA on the basis of an anonymous complaint in relation to which further particulars were not provided at a hearing at which he could not have legal representation. The whistleblower was punished. This is the action of a kangaroo court. It is a disgrace. There are two levels of serious public policy concern: Did the BVS refer the matter, either formally or informally, to the AVA? How can the Minister for Primary Industries continue to place reliance upon a group such as the AVA? The practical implication of Tom Lonsdale's expulsion is to silence dissenting voices. He cannot run in elections and he is prevented from participating in the AVA group discussions. The AVA has decided who can run against it and who cannot.

<http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/Prod/Parlment/HansArt.nsf/6c0d5d791841aef8ca256d1000816e0b/6f81f344826042c8ca256e9d003f8b3b?OpenDocument>