

Whistleblowers Australia, 2008 National Conference and AGM
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Blowing the whistle on the pet-food industry/veterinary/fake animal welfare racket

Summary

Modern pets suffer a litany of modern diseases as a result of their modern diet. It's a rather simple but shocking realisation. After all you wouldn't put adulterated fuel in your car, not even once a week, and expect it to run smoothly. So why should pets forced to consume a daily diet of junk food be any different? In 1991 [Dr Breck Muir](#) and I blew the whistle on the pet-food industry/veterinary/fake animal welfare racket. But the players, the referees and onlookers pretended not to notice. In the ensuing years a small band of enthusiasts has tried to get the issue onto the national and international agenda.

Starting from the realisation that junk food is responsible for the majority of pet diseases there are both upstream and downstream implications worth \$billions. Upstream those that run the systems – pet-food makers, veterinary profession, veterinary schools, animal welfare bodies, governments, retailers, and consumers — conspire to maintain the racket. This must stop. Downstream there's an opportunity to develop new scientific paradigms and new human and animal health care initiatives worth \$billions as a direct result of the lessons arising from the junk pet-food debacle. The wider economic, administrative and environmental benefits will likely be colossal following a paradigm shift.

The full extent of the junk pet-food fraud may never be fully known. When a \$30 billion industry goes unquestioned for generations it blends into the fabric of society to the point it's unrecognised and unremarkable. Western culture, manipulated by pet-food companies, encourages ownership of a pet dog or cat (preferably several) to be fed out of the can or packet. Vets are the authority figures at the forefront promoting and sustaining the junk pet-food culture, assisted by (fake) animal welfare bodies, electronic and print media, governments, oppositions and the pet-owners themselves. Of course the junk pet-food companies, dominated by Mars, Nestle, Colgate-Palmolive and Procter and Gamble, have the major stake in the ongoing fraud. But we should not forget the supermarkets and small retailers and the millions of shelf stackers, truck drivers, abattoir workers, farmers and ad men who depend to varying degrees on the \$multi-billion industry.

How could something so commonplace and widespread be cruel and corrupting? Discussions with veterinary colleagues and re-evaluating the case evidence of the animals under my care revealed the elements of a massive scientific con. Despite swearing the veterinary equivalent of the Hippocratic Oath, I had been actively promoting the ill-health and early death of my animal patients. The full implications of endemic malpractice, economic and environmental costs were enormous.

Matters of human nutrition revolve around dietary ingredients and food pyramids. For pets, the carnivore tooth became the crucial pivot for the new thinking about pet diets. Confronted with an epidemic of pet dental disease it became clear that the animals were not cleaning their teeth; that junk food lacks the essential tough chewy texture of a whole raw deer, rabbit, fish or fowl. And the resulting mouth rot, whilst symbolised by the ubiquitous 'dog breath', was just the beginning of lifelong disease affecting all internal organs and body systems. Add in the devastation of inappropriate cooked, pulverised ingredients and factory made additives and it's small wonder a majority of western pets are in poor health — although the pet-food propaganda mill proclaims the opposite.

When in 1991, a touring party of Mars Corporation vets and a professor from the University of London Veterinary School (my old alma mater) visited Sydney to promote Mars pet food

(Pedigree, Whiskas, Uncle Bens, Royal Canin) and the elaborate vet treatments made necessary I was incensed. I wrote a [paper](#):

Oral Disease in Cats and Dogs

The stench of stale blood, dung and pus emanating from the mouths of so many of my patients has finally provoked this eruption of dissent.

The sheer numbers passing through the practice, when extrapolated to the world situation, tells me that oral disease is the source of the greatest intractable pain and discomfort experienced by our companion animals.

This is a great and mindless cruelty we visit upon our animals from the whelping box to the grave. Just imagine having a mouth ulcer or toothache for a lifetime. . .

By tackling the first lie I hoped that open debate within the veterinary profession would begin and that the fuller implications would be revealed and in due course resolved. I expected some resistance, but thought that fair play and common sense would prevail. I was wrong. Conventional science proceeds by small increments (often utilising massive research funds) within an existing paradigm. The establishment is affirmed and supported. When a small cheap-to-implement concept brings about disproportionately large scientific gains, it reveals the establishment in a poor light.

In Australia some limited debate was permitted in the letters pages of the veterinary press. The veterinary authorities kept a low profile hoping the controversy would burn itself out. In August 1992 I addressed the local branch of the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) on the [Pandemic of Periodontal Disease a Malodorous Condition](#). As a precaution I arranged for the event to be filmed. The Mars representative publicly congratulated me on my 'bravery' but otherwise the assembled vets scoffed and laughed off the threat.

If the veterinarians refused to do their job and research and disseminate the information about the devastating effects of a constant junk food diet, then the obligation fell to me. From that moment I became a full-time activist/researcher with my professional practice being relegated to a part time effort.

Lacking access to the channels of communication, getting the word out was damnably difficult. Increasingly I was subjected to character assassination and became concerned lest an 'accident' might befall me. In a combined offensive/defensive strategy I circulated the Pandemic monograph to all Deans of English speaking veterinary schools. With the genie out of the bottle I felt somewhat safer and in the next couple of years sent two more lecture monographs ([a](#), [b](#)) to the world's veterinary school deans.

Simultaneously a loose coalition of Australian vets, dismissively referred to as the Raw Meaty Bones Lobby, wrote letters to the veterinary press. Sometimes the letters were published, often not. As a way around this I [stood for President of the AVA](#) on this sole, but multipart, issue. Together with Drs Breck Muir and Alan Bennet we tabled motions for debate at AVA Annual General Meetings. As hostilities increased and progress slowed or went into reverse I started to pen [media releases](#).

Occasionally the media would pick up on aspects pertaining to 'dog breath' and the dog's bowl. But getting anyone to investigate and report on the \$multi-billion fraud was virtually impossible. Meanwhile the pet-food companies poured more and more money into the veterinary school teaching and 'research' (public relations and marketing propaganda for the companies). Veterinary dentists, instead of joining in the whistleblowing effort, performed six-monthly dental treatments under general anaesthesia and promoted bogus dental diets.

Legal position

Numerous existing statutes can be invoked — providing the regulators are awake, competent and honest. There's the Animal Welfare Act, the Veterinary Surgeons Act, Trade Practices Act and regulations governing advertising standards. A lawyer in the US recommended bringing action under the [Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act \(RICO\)](#). But try as I might in letters to Ministers, RSPCA, Veterinary Boards, Trade Practices Commission, US Federal Drug Administration and numerous politicians I was fobbed off or dismissed as a bothersome crank. The chief vet at the Western Plains Zoo threatened me with legal action. Pet food companies working with the Australian Veterinary Association brought five separate disciplinary actions before the NSW State Veterinary Board (stacked with AVA representatives who zealously prosecuted the actions behind closed doors). At one point I was threatened with a year in jail and \$2000 fine.

Consequences for the whistleblower

Financial pressures mounted and with the ever present risk of being 'struck off' I could not afford even the smallest misstep or misdiagnosis. Staff became hard to find and harder to keep. Word went out that young vets would be tainted if they worked for me. Given the new discovery of boundless health available to pets fed as nature intended, it became incumbent to extend each consultation to provide clients with vital new information. But since clients did not ask for the extra time they could not be charged for it. Financially, though, it was much worse than that. Clients who listened and absorbed the information seldom had much further need for our veterinary services. Plus they often passed on the health saving and money saving tips to their relations, friends and neighbours who in turn had diminished need for our services. Those clients who preferred the convenience of the can over the health and welfare of their pets ceased using our services. Local vets chortled and heaped derision as they welcomed our ex-clients.

For sanity's sake, the sake of my health and finances I had to get out while I could still control my affairs. It was 1997, six years after blowing the whistle, that I took steps to sell the veterinary practice and practice premises and cease being a practising vet. Fate smiled and a buyer was soon found and, although careworn and stressed, I slipped away for a prolonged rest.

The next few years provided an opportunity to further research and write about the science, politics and economics of a mighty fraud. With the aid of seven lawyers, two editors, two indexers and two printers (one printer tore up the contract days before the scheduled print run due to fear of legal reprisals) [Raw Meaty Bones](#) was self-published in August 2001. [Hailed as the Silent Spring](#) (the [Rachel Carson classic](#) that kick-started the environmental revolution) of pet health the book was virtually stillborn. The *Australian* newspaper and the *Sun Herald* both prepared lengthy pieces to coincide with the book's publication. But both newspapers [pulled the articles](#). The *Sun Herald* published a (false) advertorial for Mars junk pet food instead.

Slowly word spread around the internet. Some TV stations provided minor coverage and there was a one page article in [Time magazine](#). Unfortunately momentum was slow and a critical mass never eventuated.

Lessons learnt

OK, we need to evaluate some of the lessons to be learnt from a system out of control and without redeeming features. Unfortunately there's a generalised conception that keeping pets is a luxury and if the pets suffer from diet then that's a small consequence by comparison with people in the third world who suffer from insufficient food and those in the west who suffer from too much food.

Actually, we can use the information gleaned from the pet-food debacle as a wonderful living (and failed) experiment from which we can derive important information to resurrect biological

science, medical science and regulatory systems; improve the global economy and help repair the natural environment. At a fundamental level the pet-food debacle helps us to [postulate a system of regulation](#) of Planet Earth throughout the Age of Mammals this past 65 million years. By observing the interplay of carnivores, herbivores and plants and by learning from the mistakes with captive pet carnivores, we can create a new paradigm of health and disease with implications for our global ecosystems too.

Public interest

The public interest is denied and abused by those entrusted with its care and protection. The veterinary authorities are ruthless, arrogant and lacking a scientific or moral compass. At the highest level the RSPCA do deals with junk pet-food companies in the full knowledge that junk food is the single biggest source of suffering and ill-health in pets. High Court Judge, Justice Michael Kirby, patron of the RSPCA justified the cross-promotion with Hill's Pet Foods on the basis that the RSPCA needs the money. Science journalist Robyn Williams and his pet-food company vet girlfriend Jonica Newby commandeered the ABC airwaves, (radio and TV) to air pet-food promotions. [ABC Media Watch](#) condemned the duo on three separate occasions but the ABC management refused to act. Robyn Williams still broadcasts his Science Show, Jonica Newby is comfortably ensconced at taxpayers' expense at ABC Catalyst and the biggest issue to confront pets, pet owners and veterinary science never gets an airing on the public broadcaster.

Rank and file vets sometimes suffer from ignorance, but mostly they keep a low profile in the hope that their leaders will fend off the truth before it affects their bottom line. A majority of vets promote and sell the junk food and make the dollar whilst the going is good. It's the human gene that permits vets to live a lie. Young vets who worked for me and saw, felt, understood and promoted the good health message eventually left to start their own practices — whereupon they reverted to tricking their clients and promoting and selling junk food. [One vet](#) who used to add his signature to Raw Meaty Bones media releases subsequently resigned from the Raw Meaty Bones Lobby and commenced manufacture and promotion of his own line in junk, albeit raw, food.

Some pet owners have discovered the benefits of a natural diet and help spread the word. Others adopt the 'I'm alright Jack' attitude. Some pet-owners set up as self-styled gurus. They recommend different concoctions and formulas that may be better than the commercial offerings but nonetheless fail the complete and natural test. These (inferior) band-aid solutions do nothing to counteract the corrupt systems underpinning the widespread fraud nor do they assist in ushering in new paradigms of health and disease.

Babies lie in their cradles comforted by the sounds of the advertisements on the TV. As toddlers they accompany mother to the supermarket and help her to load the junk pet food into the trolley. As adults acquiring their first pet it's hard for them to overturn the habits of a lifetime. And even when people are aware of the issues, something akin to the [Stockholm syndrome](#) takes over, permitting the exploiting companies, vets and animal welfare societies to be seen as figures of admiration and respect.

The public interest is betrayed in many ways. Only when the existing junk food system is rejected and new paradigms adopted will we begin to appreciate the full costs born by a vulnerable and dependent public.

Would Whistleblower Laws assist?

Yes, but indirectly. The mere existence of public sector Whistleblower Laws would further legitimise whistleblowing and in turn the laws could be invoked as a standard applicable in instances of industry-wide or cultural corruption in the private sector.

Whistleblower support

I've been especially lucky to have supportive friends and associates. My wife and family are prepared for some sacrifices. They recognise the immense personal, professional and financial

costs. But on the other side they are greatly uplifted by the unique opportunities we have as a family to explore new territory and serve the community.

WhistleBlowers Australia (WBA) has provided much needed factual material that helped make sense of an otherwise nonsensical situation. Brian Martin and Cynthia Kardell have helped with editorial and legal advice. Being part of the WBA community of like minded people provides a sense of belonging and fellowship that's hard to obtain in the wider community.

Paul Lynch MP, Member of the NSW State Parliament has provided support and [Parliamentary representation](#). [David Taylor MP](#) and [David Lepper MP](#) both tabled Early Day Motions in the UK Parliament.

Cost to whistleblower

Although there have been some mighty financial costs relating to legal and other expenses and foregone income since 1992 and some health and relationship issues; there have nevertheless been some telling benefits. It's every scientist's dream to discover answers to the big questions. It's even more enthralling to first discover the question. Every day I feel privileged and uplifted that I can do a little more to right a set of wrongs.

If I feel a sense of loss, it centres on the fact that after 17 years I'm still labouring to get the subject heard and debated — when in fact my energies could be better used in the introduction and implementation of new strategies for the betterment of pets, people and the planet.

How to proceed?

I do not know of a better way to proceed. Working with consumers at the base of the pyramid makes for overemphasis on the band-aid approach. People at the apex in science, politics and the law tend to be busy with their own concerns and have no time or interest in radical new systems of thought. Raw meaty bones information tends to be viewed as a threat.

An unfortunate aspect of any representation to Government Ministers or Government Departments is that the gate keepers tend to be members of the veterinary establishment. Departmental officers filter complaints and write ministerial responses as if they were straight from the desk of a pet-food company executive. Self-styled radical politicians and environmentalists are generally no better. They dismiss the issues and fob me off with inane excuses.

On the current evidence, this battle will need to be financed, fought and won by a handful of dedicated individuals who understand the magnitude of the issues and without the support of those best placed to provide help. To that extent I'm trying to raise funds for a [documentary film](#) inspired by the success of An Inconvenient Truth, Super Size Me, Sicko and The Corporation. If you have any ideas for funding or know of well placed persons willing to help, then please let me know.

Thank you.

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