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DISTURBING SPATE OF ANIMAL CRUELTY CASES ROCKS TASMANIANS – BUT NOT THE ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITIES

A spate of animal cruelty cases is currently shocking Tasmanians who believe that the punishment should fit the crime when gross animal abuse is brought before the courts.

James George Turner, of Garden Island Creek in the south of the State has been before the courts repeatedly for cruelty and aggravated cruelty. He also has a history of violence, with people having taken out a restraining order against him in recent years. He has escaped any significant punishment to date, but is banned from having any more than 20 horses in his “czre” until 2010. It is widely known that there are starving horses on his property today, and that there are more than 20 horses there.

Animal activists quite rightly want to know why no appropriate action has been taken by the authorities. Turner is to appear on more separate complaints of cruelty and aggravated cruelty charges in November and December, but that may not save the animals currently on his property in the south of the state.

On October 18, Robert Charles Gregg, a sheep farmer from Oatlands in the Midlands in Tasmania appeared before magistrate Helen Wood in the Hobart Magistrates’ Court charged with “using an unsatisfactory method of management on an animal”, cruelty and aggravated cruelty. The mismanagement and aggravated cruelty charges were dismissed by the Magistrate, despite the fact that **150 sheep died of starvation and 1,000 more were scored at 2 (emaciated, near death) by a government veterinarian. Four sheep were “cast” (too weak to stand), and their eyes had been pecked out by crows.** Ms Wood took the view that Gregg had “made a mistake” and did not “intentionally” starve the animals. Gregg has been a sheep farmer for 20 years.

Animal activists outside the court reacted angrily to the one month, wholly suspended sentence imposed by Magistrate Wood, describing it as a “farce”. Live Export Shame’s Tasmanian spokesperson, Suzanne Cass, was outraged, demanded an appeal, and is encouraging the public to make representations to the Director of Public Prosecutions over this, and other cruelty cases dealt with so carelessly.

On Monday (October 23) another farmer, this time from the New Norfolk district in the south of the state faced the court over the starvation deaths of more animals. **75 year old Richard Rainbird**, of Lawitta, is to reappear in December on charges of cruelty and aggravated cruelty, but animal activists despair of a fitting sentence. Suzanne Cass, from Live Export Shame, commented:

“So far, we have seen a case against live export agents and saleyard operators Roberts Limited thrown out by Magistrate Michael Hill because the case was poorly researched, poorly prepared and poorly presented. The four people charged over the agonizing death of the bull After Dark at the Carrick Bull Ride, have not even been charged with cruelty, only with “mismanagement”.

Tasmania is the only state in Australia whose Animal Welfare Act contains the “mismanagement” provisions; in any other state the incident would have attracted cruelty, or aggravated cruelty charges.

After Dark broke his back exiting the chute, and was made to drag his paralyzed body to a truck as people kicked him in the face. He remained on the truck for over an hour before veterinary assistance arrived, and he was taken away and destroyed. The emphasis was on not “spoiling the entertainment” of the day.

In June, **livestock transporter Robert Ervine was convicted of animal cruelty** in the Hobart Magistrates’ Court after leaving about 30 lambs in concrete sale pens at the Roberts Saleyard at Bridgewater (the same incident for which Roberts was charged). He told the magistrate, Chris Webster, that he had “sore eyes” and could not drive back to collect the lambs, who were delivered to slaughter the next day. Ervine told the magistrate that he was a “pensioner”, although he acknowledged that he has a farm and a livestock transporting business. He was fined a paltry \$500.

“James Turner, Robert Ervine, Roberts Limited and Robert Gregg have all, to date, escaped any punishment of any meaning”, continued Ms Cass. “Rainbird will probably get a slap on the wrist, as Gregg did. How bad does it have to get before the authorities will treat this gross animal cruelty with the seriousness it deserves? What sort of message does the judiciary want to send? That this abuse is acceptable? These people just go right out there and do it all again”, she concluded.

For other information, please contact Suzanne Cass, Live Export Shame Tasmania, 0414 726935 or Against Animal Cruelty Tasmania on 0408 970 359.