



Gisborne men used dogs to torment and kill goats

Two Gisborne men who encouraged their dogs to viciously and repeatedly attack live goats, one of which had a broken leg, were sentenced today in the Gisborne District Court.

Richard McKee, 34, and James Manukau, 27, were convicted on charges of wilful ill-treatment of an animal resulting in the death of the animal.

McKee was sentenced to 100 hours community work, three months community detention, and ordered to pay reparations of \$1000. Manukau was sentenced to 100 hours community work and ordered to pay reparations of \$500.

Gisborne SPCA began investigating McKee in August 2013 when McKee posted videos on his Facebook page showing him restraining an adult male goat while encouraging two pit bull type dogs to attack the goat. In the video, the dogs bite the goat's face, lips, nose, and neck for several minutes while McKee laughs and shouts encouragement to the dogs. The goat eventually dies after McKee cuts its throat.

A Veterinarian concluded from watching the footage that the dogs inflicted significant violence on the goat, the Defendant encouraged this, and the prolonged suffering and slow death of the goat was unacceptable.

The following month, Gisborne SPCA was made aware of three videos posted on Manukau's Facebook showing McKee baiting a second goat while Manukau filmed him. Search warrants executed simultaneously at both of the Defendants' properties revealed a total of four videos showing the incident.

In the videos, McKee drags a goat by its right hind leg, which appears to have an open fracture in the femur, while pit bull type dogs attack the goat. The goat's screams can be clearly heard throughout. Three dogs repeatedly bite the goat on the neck and face. The goat tries to flee but collapses on its fractured hind leg. Both Defendants can be heard enthusiastically encouraging the dogs throughout. In the fourth and final video McKee cuts off the goat's head and throws it to the dogs.

A Veterinarian concluded from watching the footage that the goat would have been in extreme pain from the fractured leg and the prolonged attack by the dogs. A high level of violence was displayed and the Defendants encouraged and enjoyed the violence.

"This case is an example of an alarming increase in what you could call 'recreational cruelty'," says Ric Odom, CEO of SPCA New Zealand.

"This tends to feature young men and the subjects of their cruelty are usually so-called pest species, like possums, goats, and rabbits. They often film themselves doing it and then post the videos on YouTube or Facebook. Sometimes they justify their behaviour by saying the animals are 'just pests'.

"Let's be very clear about this: New Zealand legislation is designed to protect all animals against this kind of abuse. Even though the act of hunting and killing an animal is a lawful activity in New Zealand, once an animal has been 'captured' for the purpose of killing it, people are legally obliged to kill it in such a way that the animal doesn't suffer unreasonable or unnecessary pain or distress.

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“The recently passed Animal Welfare Amendment Act has strengthened these obligations by creating specific offences for the reckless and wilful ill treatment of wild animals. It is simply unacceptable to encourage dogs to attack a wild animal that has been captured and we will vigorously investigate anyone who does so.”

“Some people may believe that because the outcome is the death of the animal, how it arrives at that state doesn’t matter. SPCA New Zealand takes the contrary view and our position is backed up by legislation.

“Animals are sentient beings that can feel fear, pain, and a range of other emotions. If anyone kills an animal it is critically important that they do so humanely without causing the animal unnecessary pain or distress.”

In summing up the case, Judge JC Down said: “...the hunters responsibility remains to humanely dispatch that animal as soon as possible ... Not all hunters will be aware of codes of practice. But all hunters are, in my view, subject to the law as it stands in the statute book. It is often stated that ignorance of the law is no defence and there is no clearer example of that than in this case...”

ENDS.

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