

September 18, 2024

Farm Animal Welfare Program  
Department of Agriculture  
PO Box 2285 Stn Central  
Halifax NS B3J 3C8

***Via Email***

To Whom It May Concern:

**Re: Concerns with Nova Scotia Stampede**

I write to you on behalf of Animal Justice, Canada’s leading national animal law organization to alert you to possible violations of Nova Scotia’s *Animal Protection Act*, SNS 2018, c 21 [“**the Act**”] and the *Criminal Code*, RSC 1985, c C-46 that are scheduled to take place during the Nova Scotia Stampede from September 27-29, 2024 at the Nova Scotia Provincial Exhibition Complex at 73 Ryland Avenue in Bible Hill, Nova Scotia.

Overview of Events

Rodeo events expose animals to pain, fear, and stress as they are forced to perform in front of noisy audiences in an unfamiliar arena. These events can also cause injury and even death to animals. As such, these events appear to run contrary to the *Act*, which prohibits causing an animal to be in distress and, prohibits a custodian of an animal from permitting an animal to be in distress.<sup>1</sup> As the body tasked with enforcing the *Act* as it relates to “farm animals”,<sup>2</sup> we urge you to prevent the rodeo events from taking place at the Nova Scotia Stampede. At minimum, law enforcement ought to monitor these events to ensure the most harmful activities (such as the use of prods or improper physical handling) do not occur and to make sure veterinarians are on site to monitor the wellbeing of all animals involved and provide emergency veterinary care if needed.

The bull riding, bareback and saddle bronc riding events scheduled to take place at the Nova Scotia Stampede pose particularly significant animal welfare risks. Bull riding, as well as bareback and saddle bronc riding, involve individuals sitting on top of a bull or horse and attempting to stay mounted while the animal bucks and tries desperately to get the rider off their back. Vigorous bucking is not a natural behaviour and results from a combination of selective breeding and deliberately aggravating an animal, including through the sensation of a predator on their back. In short, animals buck because they are in distress.

Dr. Malgosia Mosielski, a veterinarian who previously worked in the animal welfare branch of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, has commented to Animal Justice that “bull riding is an activity that relies entirely on inciting a fear response in the bull. Bucking and aggressive behaviour is an evolutionary response to a perceived threat, such as having a ‘predator’ on their back.”

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<sup>1</sup> Section 26(1)(-2).

<sup>2</sup> The definition of “farm animals” includes cattle and horses. See section 2(1)(g)(i).

To compound matters, a “flank strap” or “bucking strap” is commonly cinched tight around the animal’s torso before they are released into the arena. This significant discomfort further distresses the animal in order to cause extreme bucking as the animal flails wildly to get the strap off. Riders also commonly wear boots with hard metal spurs. Before animals are released from the chute, in many instances they are kicked, subject to tail twisting or other painful treatment, and even electrically shocked to ensure they are angry, fearful, and bucking wildly when they enter the arena.<sup>3</sup> This is all the while animals are subject to the noise of the cheering crowd and being forced into an unfamiliar arena.

Rodeo events, and bronc riding in particular, can also cause injury to animals and even result in death when animals are euthanized following such injuries.<sup>4</sup>

### These Events Appear to Violate Federal and Provincial Law

Nova Scotia’s *Animal Protection Act* prohibits anyone from causing an animal to be in distress, and prohibits a custodian of an animal from permitting the animal to be in distress.<sup>5</sup> Distress includes where an animal is “injured, sick, in pain or suffering undue hardship, anxiety, privation or neglect” and where an animal is “abused”.<sup>6</sup> While there are narrow exceptions including for activity prescribed by regulation, there are no exceptions that apply to rodeo events and no regulatory standards whatsoever to protect animals used in rodeo events.

Additionally, the *Criminal Code* provides that everyone commits an offence who “willfully causes, or being the owner, willfully permits to be caused unnecessary pain, suffering or injury to an animal or a bird.”<sup>7</sup> Any pain, suffering, or injury inflicted upon bulls or horses as part of these events must be considered unnecessary, as these events exist for entertainment purposes only.

### Conclusion

You have the ability as well as the responsibility to bring violations of animal welfare and other laws before the courts, but also to take preventative action where possible to ensure that animal cruelty does not occur. For these reasons, we request that you take action to prevent these harmful events from taking place at the Nova Scotia Stampede.

Several of the problematic activities listed above (such as causing pain and distress to animals in the chute or the use of electric prods) are difficult to observe from a distance so at the very least if this event does proceed we urge you to ensure law enforcement officials are present and able to effectively observe the handling of all animals and take swift enforcement action in the event of

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<sup>3</sup> “Humane society alleges electric cattle prod use at Chilliwack Fair rodeo”, *CBC News* (August 17, 2018), online: <<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/humane-society-alleges-electric-cattle-prod-used-at-chilliwackfair-rodeo-1.4789902>> See also recent prod use at “Vancouver Humane Society files cruelty report after Clinton rodeo footage reveals alleged inhumane use of electric prod on bull” (July 8, 2024), online: <<https://vancouverhumanesociety.bc.ca/posts/clinton-rodeo-footage-reveals-inhumane-use-of-electric-prod-on-bull/>>;

<sup>4</sup> “Kind of barbaric’: Horse dies of injury during rodeo in Selkirk”, *CTV News Winnipeg* (July 17, 2023), online: <<https://winnipeg.ctvnews.ca/kind-of-barbaric-horse-dies-of-injury-during-rodeo-in-selkirk-1.6483630>>; “Rodeos: Inherent Cruelty to Animals”, *Humane Society Veterinary Medical Alliance* (January 15, 2015), online: <[https://www.hsvma.org/rodeos\\_inherent\\_cruelty\\_to\\_animals](https://www.hsvma.org/rodeos_inherent_cruelty_to_animals)>.

<sup>5</sup> Section 26(1)-(2).

<sup>6</sup> Section 2(2)(b) and (d).

<sup>7</sup> RSC 1985, c C-46, section 445.1(1)(a).

particularly severe physical or psychological distress caused to animals. We also urge the Ministry to have veterinarians present to ensure the wellbeing of animals at all times.

We would appreciate hearing from you on the steps you plan to take to address these concerns and prevent violations of the law at these events.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact me if we can be of further assistance to your offices.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alexandra Pester', written in a cursive style.

Alexandra Pester (She/Her)  
Staff Lawyer