

July 21, 2010

Distinguished Members of the Parliament of Catalonia,

We believe that bull-fighting cattle are little different from any other strains of domestic cattle (*Bos Taurus* L.) and, therefore, they are capable of experiencing pain and suffering. Pain, the sensation associated with actual or potential tissue damage that elicits an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience, is a warning that damage has occurred or may occur, and modifies physical and behavioral responses to alleviate the feeling (Mellor et al., 2000). It is an adaptive, biological signal that is essential for survival.

Bullfighting is a brutal event. During the contest, picadors and banderilleros pierce the bull's skin and muscle with lances and banderillas, sharp pointed flags, which are forced under the skin over the bulls' shoulders. These instruments cause bleeding and the bull reacts from the pain. Pain receptors are abundant in skin and muscle. The bullfight does not end until the bull becomes weakened from loss of blood and from pain.

The evidence that cattle are capable of experiencing pain and suffering is overwhelming (Benson, 2004). There are numerous studies showing that surgical interventions such as castration (Fell *et al.*, 1986; Robertson *et al.*, 1994; Obritzhauser *et al.*, 1998; Fisher *et al.*, 2001; Early and Crowe, 2002; Stafford and Mellor, 2005a; González et al., 2010), horn dis-budding (Taschke and Folsch, 1997; Stafford and Mellor 2005b; McMeekan *et al.*, 1998; Mellor and Stafford 1999; Graf and Senn, 1999; Grondahl-Nielsen *et al.*, 1999; Faulkner and Weary, 2000) and branding (Lay *et al.*, 1992a; Lay *et al.*, 1992b; Schwartzkopf *et al.*, 1997) are extremely painful. There is also good evidence that cattle are capable of suffering in other ways such as from fear (Price and Wallach, 1990; Boissy and LeNeindre, 1997; Grignard *et al.*, 2001).

Previous reports, published in the scientific literature, are very skeptical of the argument that bulls do not feel pain during a bullfight (e.g. Ödberg, 1992). Pain may be a necessary prerequisite to stimulate aggression in the bull (Ödberg, 1992). A bull must be tormented and provoked in order to give the matador a "good" fight, and even if stress were to inhibit pain during a bullfight, this raises the ethical question of the acceptability of substituting one form of suffering for another. It is not ethically acceptable to inflict serious tissue damage on an animal and argue that the pain experienced will be less severe because the animal has been tormented and enraged beforehand.

The claim that pain perception can be bred out of a line of animals is a very serious assertion, since a false claim would undoubtedly lead to substantial animal suffering. To produce an animal who was insensitive to pain, one would have to specifically measure pain sensitivity in the progeny of each mating, a procedure that is highly unlikely in breeding programs for fighting bulls. The hypothesis that pain sensation has been reduced deserves considerable experimental investigation, especially given that the vast

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majority of studies on pain in cattle would suggest otherwise. The work by Dr. Illera and others questioning pain during bullfights has yet to be published in a respected international journal, where it would undergo critical peer review, and given the lack of details in his papers thus far, scrutiny of his methodology is impossible. This body of work is not substantial enough to serve as a basis for any kind of parliamentary decision regarding bullfights.

We remain unconvinced and instead believe that fighting bulls like other bovines feel pain and suffer in the bull ring. Our opinion is based on the irrefutable science of anatomy, physiology and neurology governing pain receptors in the skin and muscle of the bovine. The average length of time for a bull to be killed in the bull ring is in excess of 20 minutes. Fear, aggression and rage cannot override these pain receptors for that length of time. The bull is subjected to ongoing acute pain caused by repeated lance and banderilla wounds during the bull fight. Therefore, the pain receptors are constantly stimulated.

Sincerely,



Dr. Gary Block DVM, MS, DACVIM, Past President Rhode Island Veterinary Medical Association



Dr. Holly Cheever, DVM, HSVMA Leadership Council member



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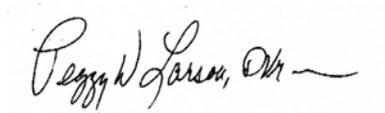
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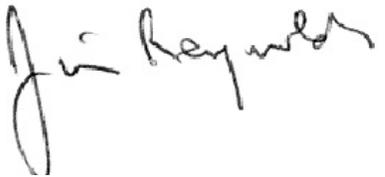
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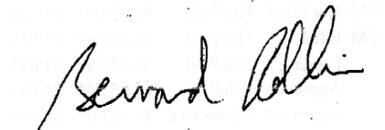
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Dr. Sara Shields, Ph.D., animal behavior and welfare consultant, Humane Society International

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cc: General Council of Veterinary Schools of Spain, Veterinary Councils of the Autonomous Communities, and the Councils of Provincial Veterinary Schools

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