

A LIFE WORTH LIVING WITH DR. DAVID MELLOR



Dr. David Mellor is a leading animal welfare thinker and the Foundation Director of the Animal Welfare Science and Bioethics Centre at Massey University's Institute of Veterinary, Animal and Biomedical Sciences in New Zealand.

Dr. Mellor has more than 50 years of teaching and research experience and has developed animal welfare standards, regulations and legislation internationally. He has been widely

recognized for making major contributions to animal welfare around the world through consultation, teaching and more than 500 scientific publications. We sat down with Dr. Mellor during his time in Toronto this spring to discuss animal welfare in Canada and advancing our thinking for the betterment of animals.

CFHS: In a nutshell, what do you think Canada's major issues are in terms of the barriers to moving forward with animal welfare?

DR. DAVID MELLOR: As a country, you're having the same difficulties as Australia and the USA because of the federal/provincial element. That's a major barrier to rapidly moving forward with animal welfare because you have different laws and communication issues particular to that situation. I also get the impression that the rural population in Canada is very influential indeed in animal welfare areas and is more robust in its concerns about the animal welfare movement because they fear that, if things move too much with regard to changing the management of animals, they'll be put out of business.

One of your strengths, which is demonstrated through the National Farm Animal Care Council (NFACC), is that people are now willing to talk to each other. When I came here 10 years ago, NFACC was surprised to be able to get people around the table. Now everyone is quite happy to come, and they are more confident in the process.

One of the problems of communicating across vast distances is finding ways to get people into the same room, to build confidence in talking to each other constructively. NFACC is doing that. Every time real progress is made among people with diverse

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interests, it builds confidence in their capacity to discuss things constructively. I can't comment on what needs to be done in Canada, but I can say your real strength in moving forward will be in sitting and talking in a constructive way – where you're actually dealing with the issues, and not simply fighting each other for influence. Constructive dialogue like that involves thinking in terms of the next decade instead of just next year. In that process, everyone moves forward and understanding improves, and that improved understanding is disseminated outward.

CFHS: What made you decide to accept our invitation to join us at the CFHS National Animal Welfare Conference this past April?

DM: I think it's very important to understand the development of ideas within any subject – and animal welfare is no different. It helps us to put into perspective where we are now, where we have come from, how we've arrived at where we are now, and to see how we can move forward more effectively. Without that history, people think that all that has ever existed are the problems we have at the moment. The reality is, if we do see the progression of ideas, we are much more realistic and effective about solving current problems. I contacted [CFHS CEO] Barbara Cartwright about this, as well as the RSPCAs in Australia, New Zealand and the UK, and they all said they'd like to have discussions about updating animal welfare thinking. I was keen to participate in your conference because I was given the opportunity to outline some ideas about that.

CFHS: In your conference presentation, you spoke at length about updating our thinking on animal welfare – about moving beyond The Five Freedoms and, instead, considering whether animals have lives that are worth living. What kind of feedback have you received on those ideas?

DM: I've encountered enthusiasm and a desire to move forward. Any information that can be made available that assists in that enterprise is really worthwhile.

One of the things that I find in animal welfare organizations is that there is unity of purpose in progressing things so that the lives of animals improve – even if there isn't a unity of expression. In fact, uniformity of approach can be a disadvantage. You actually want varied approaches because that gives you a range of actions to take that will actually further things more comprehensively than if everyone had exactly the same idea and moved forward on that narrow front.

CFHS: What are your impressions of the environment that we're building at the National Animal Welfare Conference?

DM: In terms of the objectives of the humane societies, the desire for change and so on, it's impressive. I think that there's a unified feel to the Federation members and

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the people at this conference. You have a full spectrum of people – from those who are perhaps not very well-informed about the practical realities of animal welfare and its management to those who are really well-informed. A very wide spectrum, so that's actually quite interesting.

I spoke to one conference participant who was really concerned about farm animal welfare. I applauded and affirmed her concern, and I said, "Keep making noise about it because that's actually what's going to move things forward, but you probably need to be realistic that it's not going to happen tomorrow. However, if you stop making noise, it won't even happen in 10 years' time."

The presentations have been really interesting and closely focused on the Canadian context, of course. It's been great to update my understanding of where animal welfare is in Canada.

CFHS: How does the Canadian context compare to New Zealand?

DM: The advantage of a small country like New Zealand is that you don't have to go very far, so it is easier for more people in the country to talk to each other. In this way we are like one big province. The level of concern of farmers about process is somewhat less in New Zealand because, being a small country with the ethos of everyone talking to each other – which is what we do – they feel they have access to the decision-making process. I would say that they don't feel quite so disenfranchised; they don't feel quite so helpless. In fact, they maybe don't feel helpless at all because Federation Farmers sits on the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee. That gives them comfort because they know what's going on.

I understand why developing animal welfare practices in farming may be more intimidating for farmers here in Canada than we have encountered in New Zealand. There has been farmer pushback in Australia, as well, especially since the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy was disbanded by the federal government. That was a tragedy.

CFHS: Can you speak to the progress we've made globally in animal welfare in recent years?

DM: Animal welfare has come a long way in the last 30 years – since it became an area of legitimate scientific interest. Ideas change as we move forward; as we come to know animals better, and how they interact with themselves, the environment and people. The more we know, the better we can manage them in humane and acceptable ways. Even what we understand now as acceptable is changing as we acquire better knowledge.

We're now in a situation where we need to move beyond the basics of nutrition, the

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indoor environment and health to correct some of the problems created by previous improvements that were made in good faith, but which had unexpected downsides. So now we're addressing crowding, close confinement and an inability to move around and engage in much more pleasant behaviours in much more pleasant circumstances.

Progress has been made in enriching environments, and more will follow, especially as we flesh out husbandry practices that minimize the negative experiences animals can have, yet at the same time provide them with more opportunities to engage in a wider range of rewarding behaviours. Of course, your own world-leading animal welfare scientists are making major contributions to these initiatives in Canada, as are CFHS members.

To learn more about Dr. Mellor's thoughts on advancing and modernizing animal welfare, download his presentation, [Updating Animal Welfare Thinking: Moving Beyond the 5 Freedoms Toward a Life Worth Living](#) from the 2016 CFHS National Animal Welfare Conference and an educational poster on The Five Domains model of animal welfare.

For more information on the 2017 CFHS National Animal Welfare Conference, visit conference.cfhs.ca.

