

# Kiwi SPCA supremo spreading his wings

The walls of Neil Wells' New Lynn office are covered with posters exhorting: "Protect Seals", "Save the Whales", and "Stop Vivisection".

Wells is an animal protection campaigner of old, having worked for the SPCA for 18 years, most recently as national director.

Now he has cast his net wider as South Pacific director of the World Society for the Protection of Animals.

The worldwide body is an umbrella society for 360 animal protection groups in 66 countries, and two months ago established a South Pacific branch in New Zealand.

Its arrival means animal cruelty issues Downunder will be closely scrutinized, says Wells.

The WSPC influence was last felt here the live sheep export debate.

The society was unable to stop the exports, but was responsible for ensuring a veterinary surgeon accompanied each shipload, he says.

As head of the South Pacific branch, Wells will oversee animal protection rights in 27 countries, of which only four have animal rights watchdog groups.



WELLS

He admits he has a tough row to hoe, particularly as animal protection is a very "Western" ideal.

"We have to be careful not to impose Western standards on other countries." In Korea, he says, rather than force the locals to stop eating dogs, WSPC concentrates on to ensure they are transported and slaughtered humanely.

In the campaign to halt the slaughter of animals for their fur, the society tried to influence the buyer nations rather than the slaughterers.

The real problem is knowing what issues to tackle first. He aims this year to become actively involved in the Antarctic animal protection issue, although, he adds, the society's methods of bringing about change will be quite different to those of Greenpeace.

Where Greenpeace uses action, the world society tries conciliation, using its influence as a non-governmental organisation of the United Nations with speaking rights at assemblies.

Wells stresses, however, there is need for both types of protest.

Also this year he will push to establish a Cook Islands SPCA. As well, there will be endless rounds of fundraising and membership drives.

WSPC has 30,000 members, of which 500 are in New Zealand. Wells hopes to improve that, for while New Zealand's animal protection record is good, increased public awareness is always necessary.

"There is not a country in the world which can say it has perfect animal protection policy. It's just a question of degrees.