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House debates

Craig Kelly (Hughes, Liberal Party)

In the last parliamentary sitting week I had the great privilege of hosting the launch of ACRES (Asia-Pacific). ACRES, the Animal Concerns Research and Education Society, is a pioneering Singaporean based charity founded in 2001 with the aim of promoting and improving animal welfare. ACRES (Asia-Pacific) was launched in parliament here in October as the Australian arm of the NGO with the aim of expanding the work, campaigns, projects and fundraising of the organisation. ACRES has improved the lives of thousands of animals throughout Asia by focusing on various programs including a zoo animal welfare program, wildlife rescue and rehabilitation, wildlife crime investigation, humane education and community outreach. Further, they influence and are respected by countries in the region because they emphasise working with developing countries, changing entrenched thinking and promoting economic benefits of protecting the environment through such opportunities as tourism.

The launch was honoured by the attendance of the former young Singaporean of the year Mr Louis Ng, the founder and director of ACRES. Louis delivered a compelling speech on ACRES's newest and most ambitious project to date, the bears and wildlife protection program, launched to phase out the cruel practice of bear bile farming in Laos, as used in traditional Chinese medicine. The practice of bear bile farming is the most cruel and inhumane in the animal world today. These bears spend their lives in cages little bigger than they are and are stabbed in the stomach daily while they eat so their bile can be collected. Louis showed a heart-wrenching video that he and his Australian colleague Michelle Minehan filmed in Laos. The stream of cruelty was painful to watch and the physical trauma caused to the bears was also obvious. Bears on bile farms are deprived of food, water and movement. They suffer chronic pain, illness and abuse and some live with a catheter or hole punched in their abdomen to have their gall bladders drained of the bile. The bears and wildlife protection program will demonstrate that promoting and improving animal welfare and economic growth can be complementary, creating both jobs and tourism.

I would like to note that work of Michelle Minehan, who established the Australian arm of ACRES. Michelle is a determined young woman and without her tireless work ACRES (Asia-Pacific) in Australia would simply not exist. I commend her and her team and wish them well in the future. Finally, I would like to thank my colleagues, the members for Mackellar, Macarthur, and Flynn, for coming along to support this wonderful young organisation. Of course, my deepest appreciation goes to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and shadow foreign affairs minister Ms Julie Bishop, who was on hand to officially launch the ACRES (Asia-Pacific) Australian chapter.