



**From Viral to Harmful:  
Understanding Animal Cruelty  
Content Online**

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## **WARNING**

Some of the images and topics addressed in this presentation can be distressing.

1.

## SOCIAL MEDIA ANIMAL CRUELTY COALITION



# SMACC MEMBERS



# OUR APPROACH

## 1 PUBLIC

- = stopping the demand
- = raising public awareness about the issue
- = persuading the public to stop engaging

## 2 PLATFORMS

- = supporting platforms
- = providing information and training

## 3 NGOs

- = uniting and strengthening our voices
- = eliminating duplication

## 4 POLICY

- = using policy and legal routes
- = pushing stakeholders to act

2.

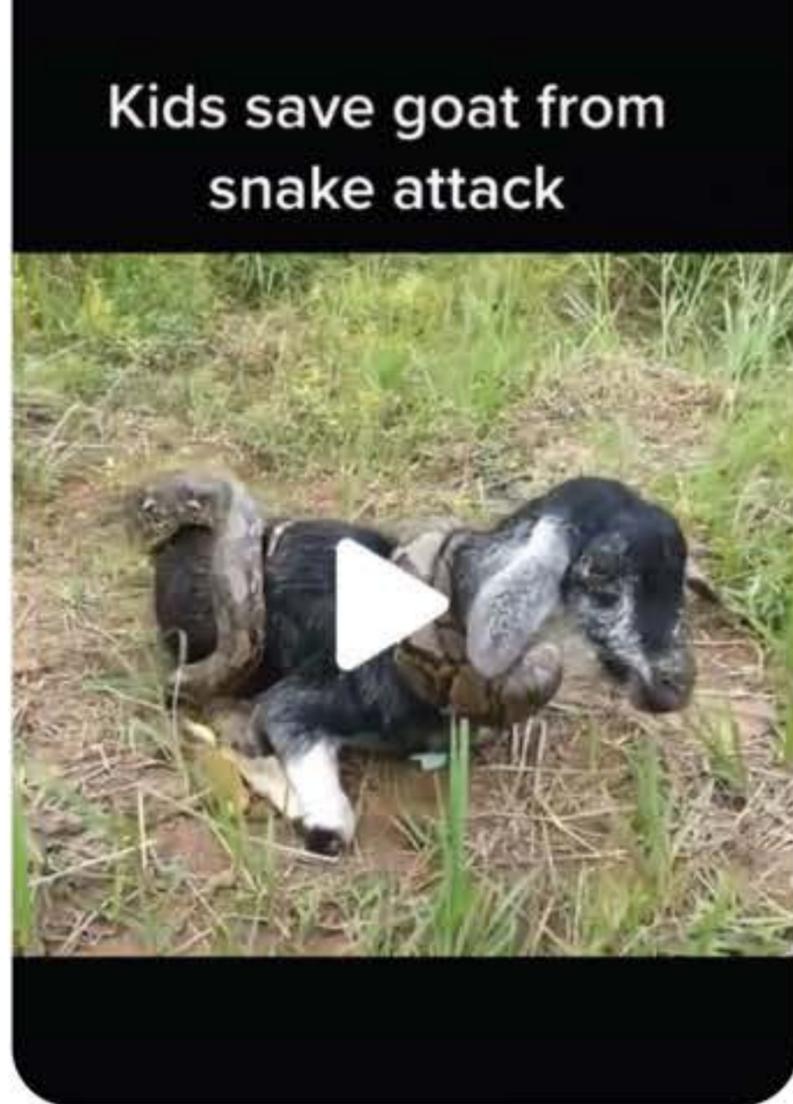
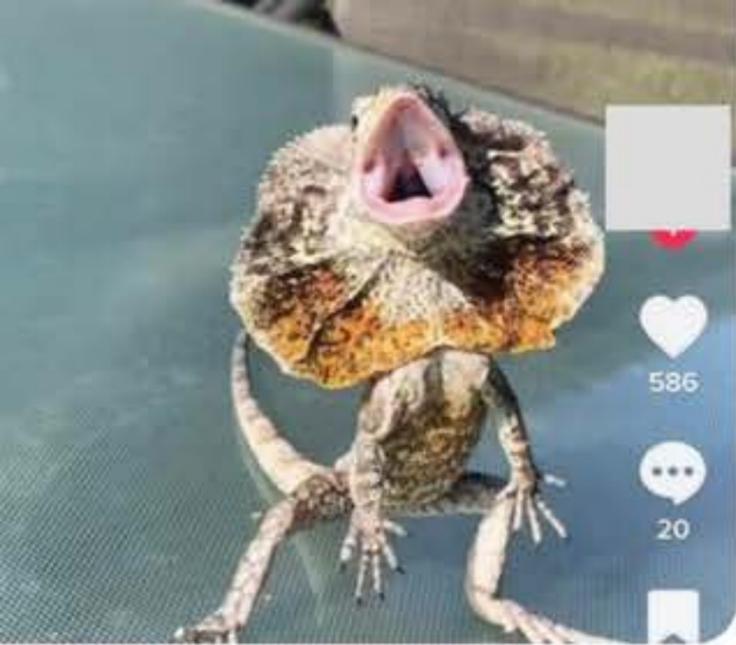
THE ISSUE



# WHAT IS ANIMAL CRUELTY CONTENT?

*"...anything that **has been posted on a social media platform** by an individual, organization, or business, that **depicts animal cruelty or suffering for any reason** apart from valid campaigning, journalistic or educational purposes."*





# INTERSECTING CRUELTIES

- Animals as entertainers
- Causing/Prolonging death
- Deliberate physical torture
- Deliberate psychological torture
- Eating live animals
- Fake outrage
- Fake rescue
- Hunting
- Sale of wild animals
- Monkey hatred
- Other
- Performing animals
- Teasing
- Unintentional abuse
- Wild animals as pets
- Wild animal selfies/tourism

beating

burning

causing or encouraging animals to fight

crushing

cutting or stabbing

dismembering or mutilating

dragging

drowning

inappropriate food

live burial

maternal deprivation

poor conditions

rough handling

scaring with another animal

sexual abuse

social isolation

spraying

withholding food

scaring with mask/prop

Restrictive clothing

Dangerous substances

Appears to be drugged

Abandoning/releasing in the wild

## 2024 DATA



**83,000+**  
**links**

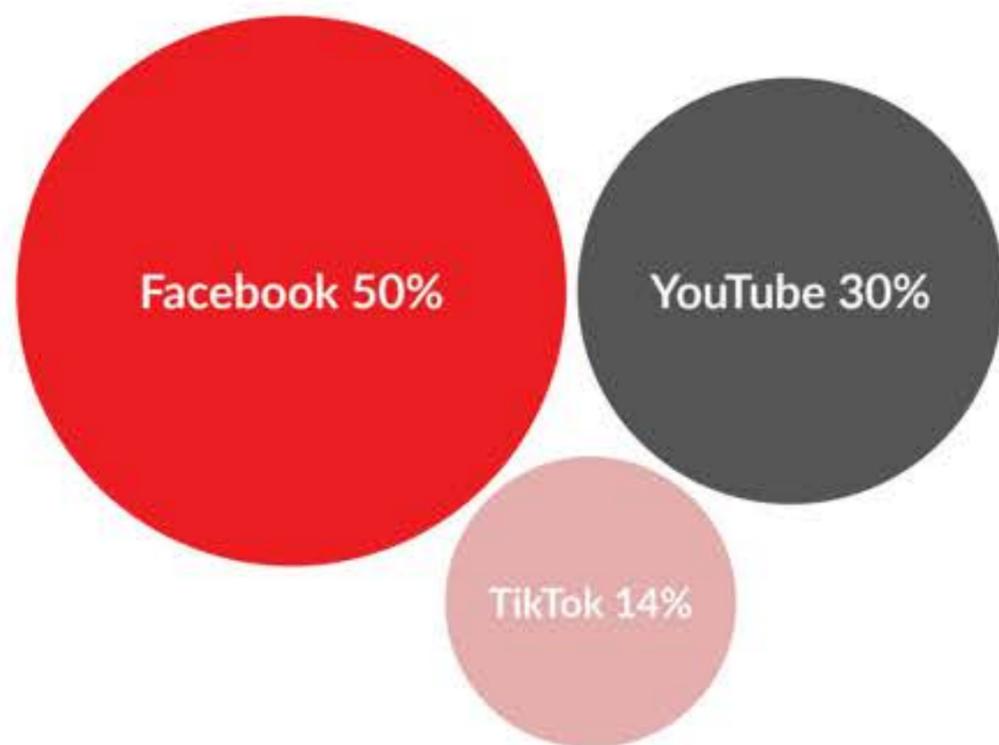
**80,000+**  
**public**

**87.5%**  
**Facebook**

**Top themes:**  
Monkey hatred,  
physical abuse, wild  
animals as pets

# VOLUNTEER DATA

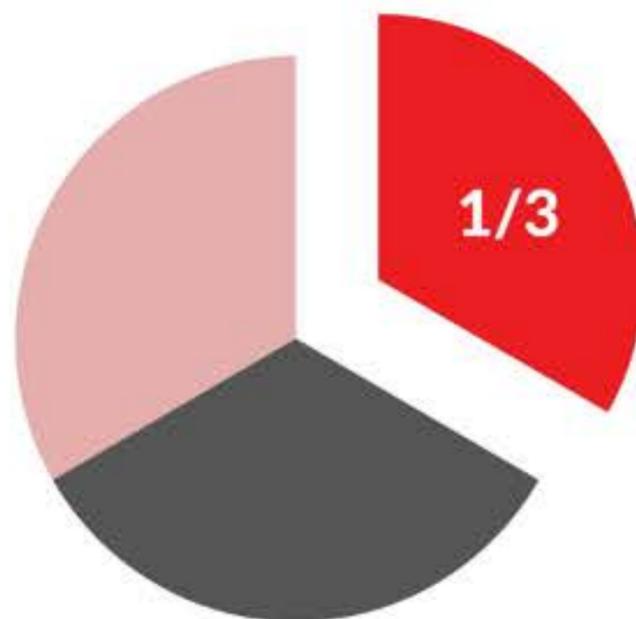
## PLATFORMS



## CRUELTY THEMES

- Entertainers
  - Physical abuse
  - Wild pets
- 
- Infant animals most exploited - often separated, handled roughly, kept in poor conditions.
  - Most targeted groups: primates, dogs, cats.
  - 12% of animals on IUCN Red List, including Endangered species.

## REMOVED



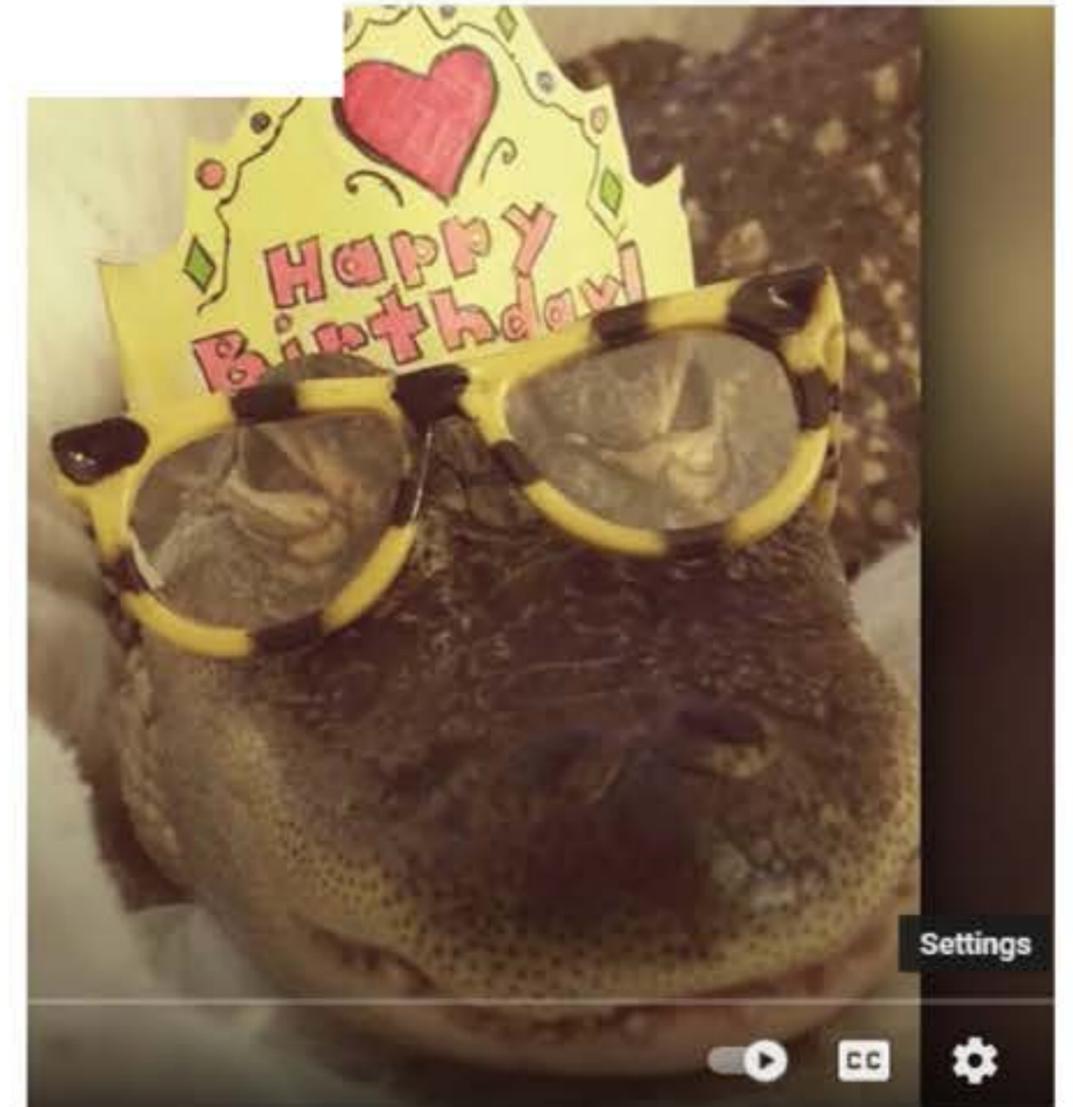
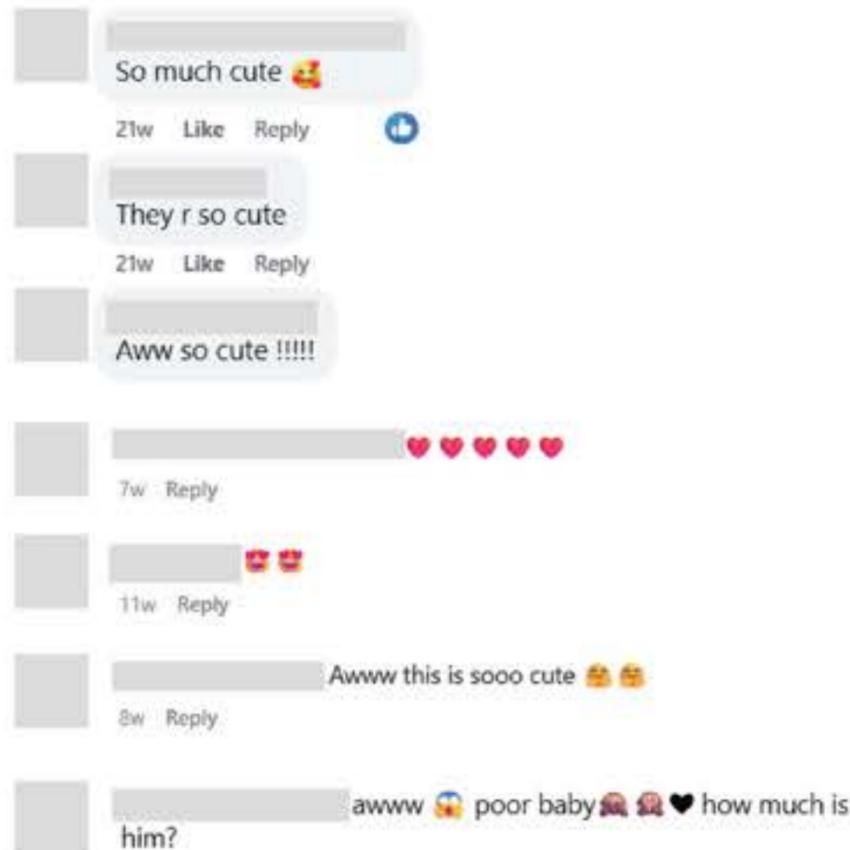
# HARM + NORMALISATION

- **Direct harm to animals on-screen:** pain, fear, injury, stress.
- **Normalization:** harmful treatment presented as “cute”, “funny”, or “training”.
- **Undermines** welfare education and desensitizes viewers.
- **Copycat risk:** trends can encourage imitation (viral “challenges” and hashtags)

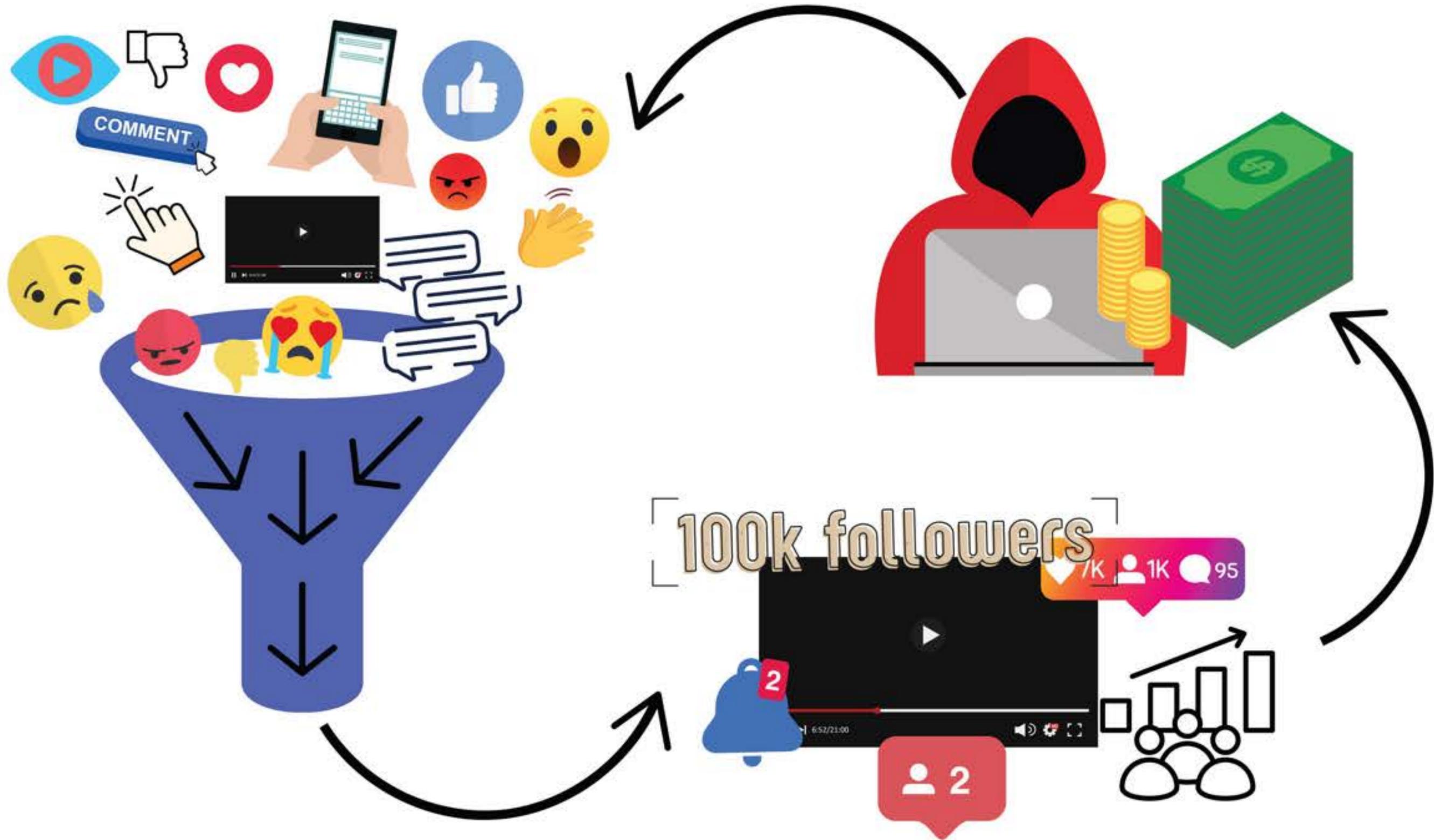


## Exotic pet trade in Canada: The influence of social media on public sentiment and behaviour

Michelle Anagnostou, Brent Doberstein



# THE ENGAGEMENT LOOP



# ABUSERS ORGANIZE AND PROFIT



Biological Conservation

Volume 287, November 2023, 110321



Profiting from cruelty: Digital content creators abuse animals worldwide to incur profit

 INDEPENDENT

Bulletin >

NEWS SPORT VOICES CULTURE LIFESTYLE INDYBEST DEALS TRAVEL MORE

News > UK > Home News

**YouTube, Facebook and TikTok 'earning millions' from horrific animal-cruelty videos**



**SMACC REPORT 2021**

**Making Money from Misery**

*How social media giants profit from animal abuse*

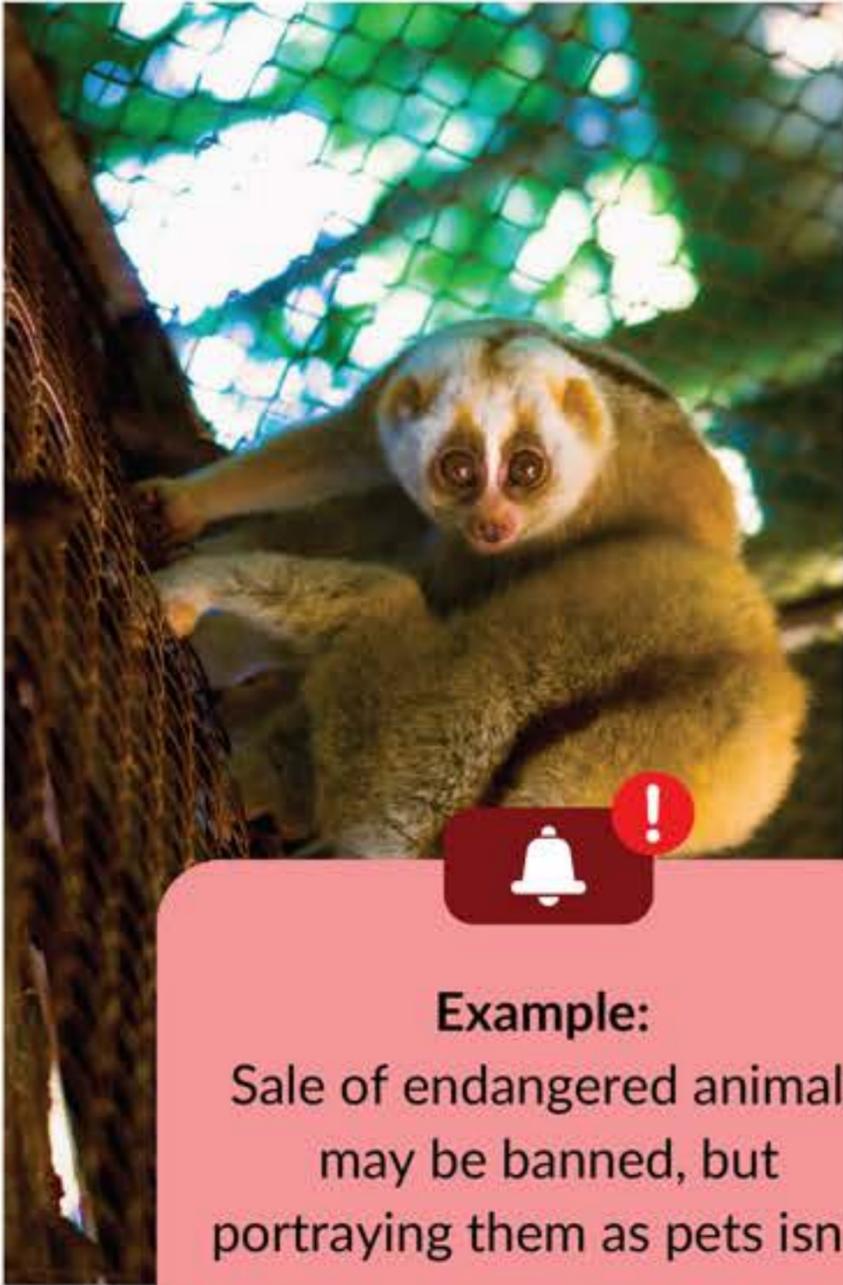


3.

SOCIAL MEDIA  
COMPANIES



# CHALLENGES



**Example:**  
Sale of endangered animals  
may be banned, but  
portraying them as pets isn't.

- **Visible violence focus:** psychological harm is rarely named; “physical abuse” is often defined narrowly as direct violence.
- **No clear definition of animal cruelty:** unclear whether this includes off-camera factors like husbandry conditions and “pet” suitability.
- **Contradictions & loopholes:** policy wording may prohibit “animal suffering” or “mistreatment” but a wide scope of such content exists.
- **Fragmented enforcement:** inconsistent moderation; persistent NGO and public frustration.
- **Poor policy maintenance:** policies often fail to keep pace with creators who adapt to evade moderation.

# PROGRESS

- **Working relationships:** regular channels with major platforms, better escalation and follow-up.
- **Policy movement:** clearer policy language in key areas, where it was previously vague.
- **Fake rescue policies:** introduced by some platforms, important precedent.
- **Enforcement wins:** removals/action through escalations (even if inconsistent).
- **A growing foundation:** evidence-sharing and clearer asks over time.



YouTube

#### Animal abuse content

- Content in which humans coerce animals to fight.
- Content in which a human maliciously mistreats an animal and causes it to experience distress outside of traditional or standard practices. Examples of traditional or standard practices include hunting or food preparation.
- Content in which a human unnecessarily keeps an animal in poor conditions outside of traditional or standard practices. Examples of traditional or standard practices include hunting or food preparation.
- Content that glorifies or promotes serious neglect, mistreatment or harm towards animals.
- Content that shows an animal rescue that is staged and puts the animal in harmful scenarios.
- Graphic content that features animals and intends to shock or disgust.



#### Animal Abuse

TikTok is a place that respects animals and celebrates the role they play in our lives across different cultures. We don't allow animal abuse, cruelty, neglect, or any other form of animal exploitation.

Learn more about [animal abuse](#), including how to contact animal welfare organizations in your region.

More information

**Poaching:** Wildlife hunting without clear legal permission.

**Bestiality:** Sexual activity between a human and an animal.

#### NOT ALLOWED

- Showing or promoting inhumane slaughter, mutilation, or abuse of animals, including staged animal fights
- Showing or promoting mistreatment or neglect of animals, such as malnourishment
- Showing dismemberment, mutilated, charred, burned, or severely injured animals
- Poaching
- Bestiality



Meta

#### Coordinating harm and promoting crime

##### Harm against animals

- Coordinating, threatening, supporting or admitting to acts of physical harm against animals (in written, visual or verbal form) except in cases of:
- Coordinating, threatening, supporting, depicting or admitting to staged animal fights or depicting video imagery of fake animal rescues except in the context of awareness raising or condemnation or redemption.



Snap Values

Policy

#### THREATS, VIOLENCE & HARM

- Content that glorifies, or risks inciting, violent or harmful behaviour toward people or animals.
- Snaps of gratuitous or graphic violence, including animal abuse.

# PROGRESS

## What is animal abuse?

As outlined in our [Community Guidelines](#), we do not allow animal abuse, cruelty, neglect or other forms of animal exploitation, and remove content in which distress or harm is caused to animals.

Animal abuse involves inflicting physical or psychological injury or harm to an animal. This includes the use of force against animals that can cause physical injuries, denying an animal basic food, water, sanitary or medical needs, harming or causing distress to an animal for entertainment, and subjecting animals to cruel or inhumane practices.



Being aggressive or violent towards an animal



Shouting and subjecting an animal to constant auditory distress



Inappropriate feeding of animals



Animals are trained or forced to attack each other



Filthy sanitary conditions affecting the animals' health and well-being



Absence of proper medical care when there's evidence of injury



[How can I make a difference in celebrating and caring for animals?](#)

[How can I safely share experiences with animal welfare on TikTok?](#)

Learn more about identifying animal abuse from our Safety Partners:

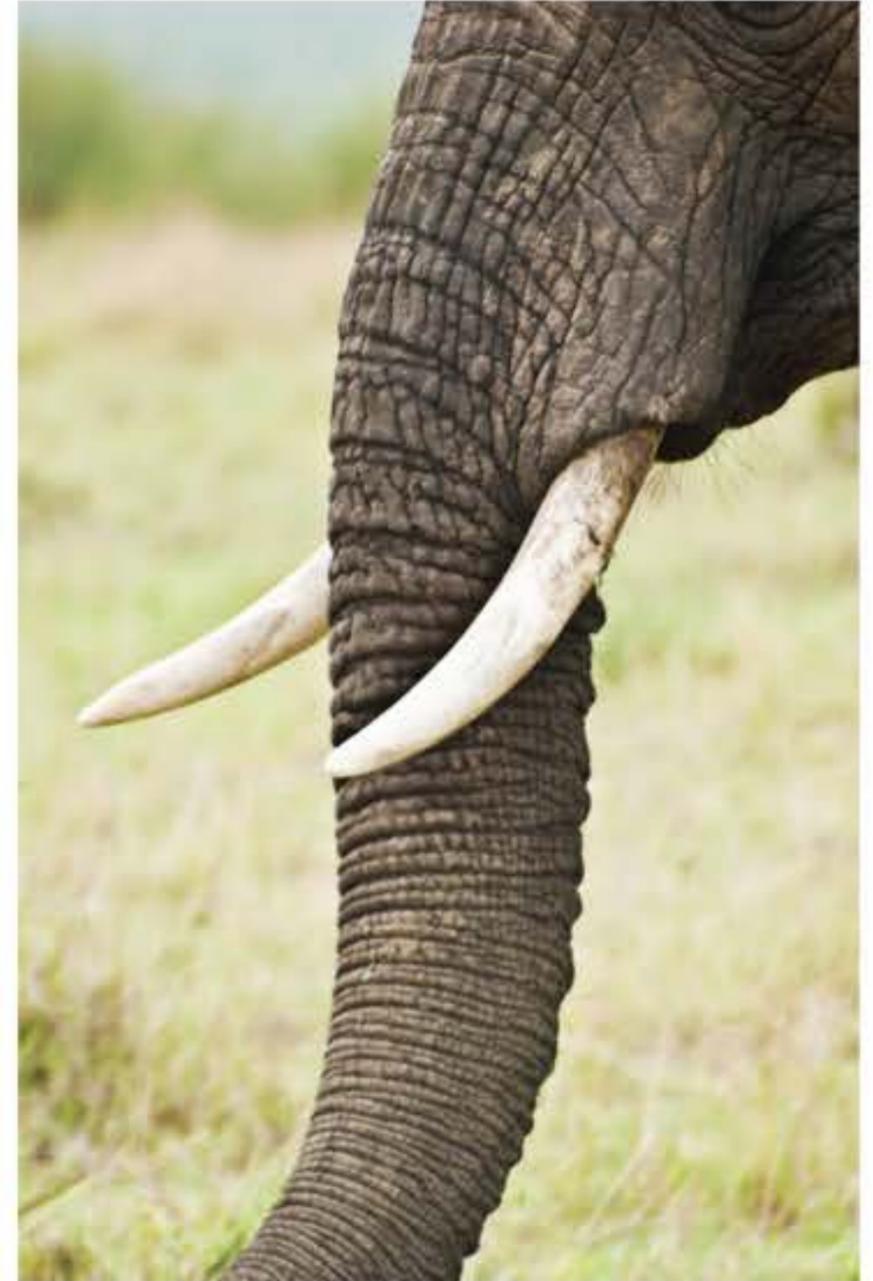
- [How to identify animal cruelty](#)
- [\(In\)Appropriate feeding](#)

# POSSIBILITIES

- **CSAM, terror/extremism:** hash-matching to prevent known reuploads at scale (*Tech Coalition, 2024. Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism, 2025*).
- **Hate speech:** AI detection tools (*Niesen AI, Cardiff University, 2025*), EU Code of Conduct requires transparency reporting (*EU Commission, 2025*).
- **Wildlife trade:** cross-company coordination to detect/remove listings; key-word lists; educational pop-ups; reporting pathways specifically for suspicious wildlife content (*Coalition to End Wildlife Trafficking Online (EWTO), 2024*).

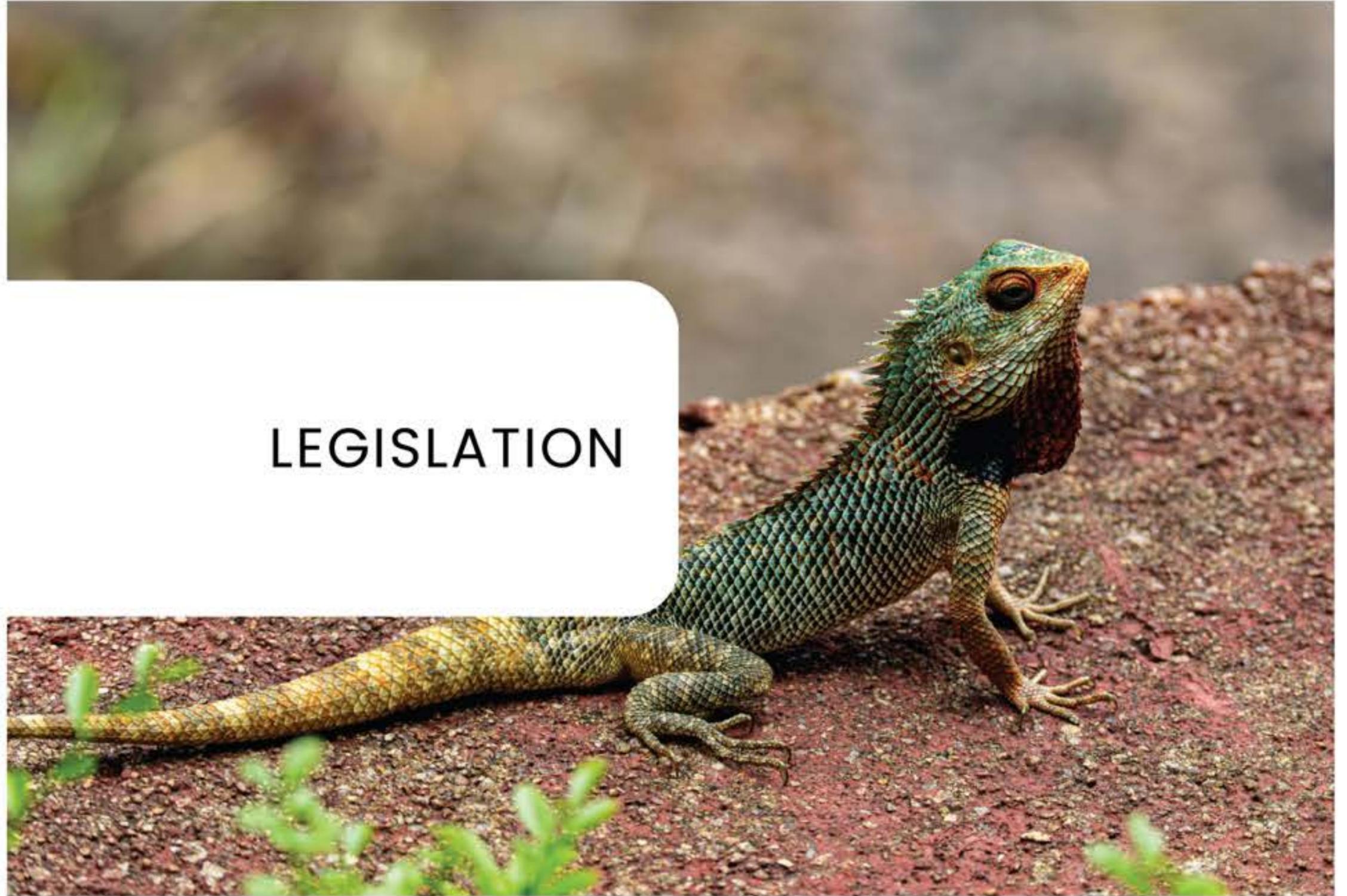


Not a tech-impossibility problem. It's about prioritization, maintenance and accountability.



4.

LEGISLATION



# CHALLENGES



Online cruelty is a recent problem that most animal protection laws don't address.



Users lie about their name and country, and may use a VPN so they are untraceable.



Identifying the location of the perpetrators can be challenging.



Global and borderless - successful prosecution may require multiple enforcement agencies.

# RESPONSIBILITY

## Perpetrators must be accountable

- Clear offences for cruelty content.
- Covers filming, distributing and profiting.
- Enables investigation and prosecution.

## Platforms must be accountable

- Prevent foreseeable harm (risk-based systems).
- Preserve evidence for serious cases.
- Act on repeat offenders and networks.
- Transparency on enforcement outcomes.

# PROGRESS

## Platform regulation

- **UK Online Safety Act:** explicitly includes animal cruelty as a “priority offence”, with stronger duties on services.
- **EU Digital Services Act:** doesn't name animal cruelty, but sets duties around illegal content, risk, and transparency.
- **Taiwan:** Taiwan Animal Protection Act goes beyond the abuser – Article 27-1 prohibits disseminating/broadcasting/selling recordings of specified animal cruelty acts.

## Perpetrator prosecution

- **US PACT Act:** targets creation/distribution of “animal crush” videos.
- **Monkey torture prosecutions:** real law enforcement action and prosecutions, including cross-border investigations and indictments.
- **Bulgaria:** penalties increased for cruelty filmed for distribution, up to multi-year prison terms.



Online Safety Act 2023

2023 CHAPTER 50

An Act to make provision for and in connection with the regulation by OFCOM of certain internet services; for and in connection with communications offences; and for connected purposes.

[26th October 2023]



5.

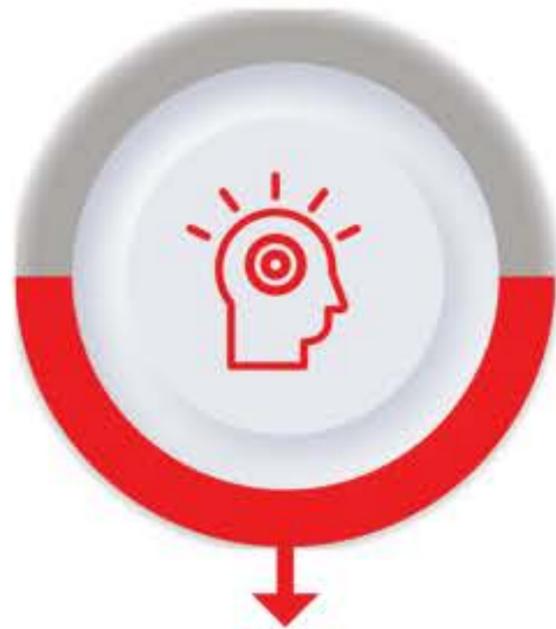
THE PUBLIC



# 3

## STEPS TO STOP ONLINE CRUELTY

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**BE AWARE**

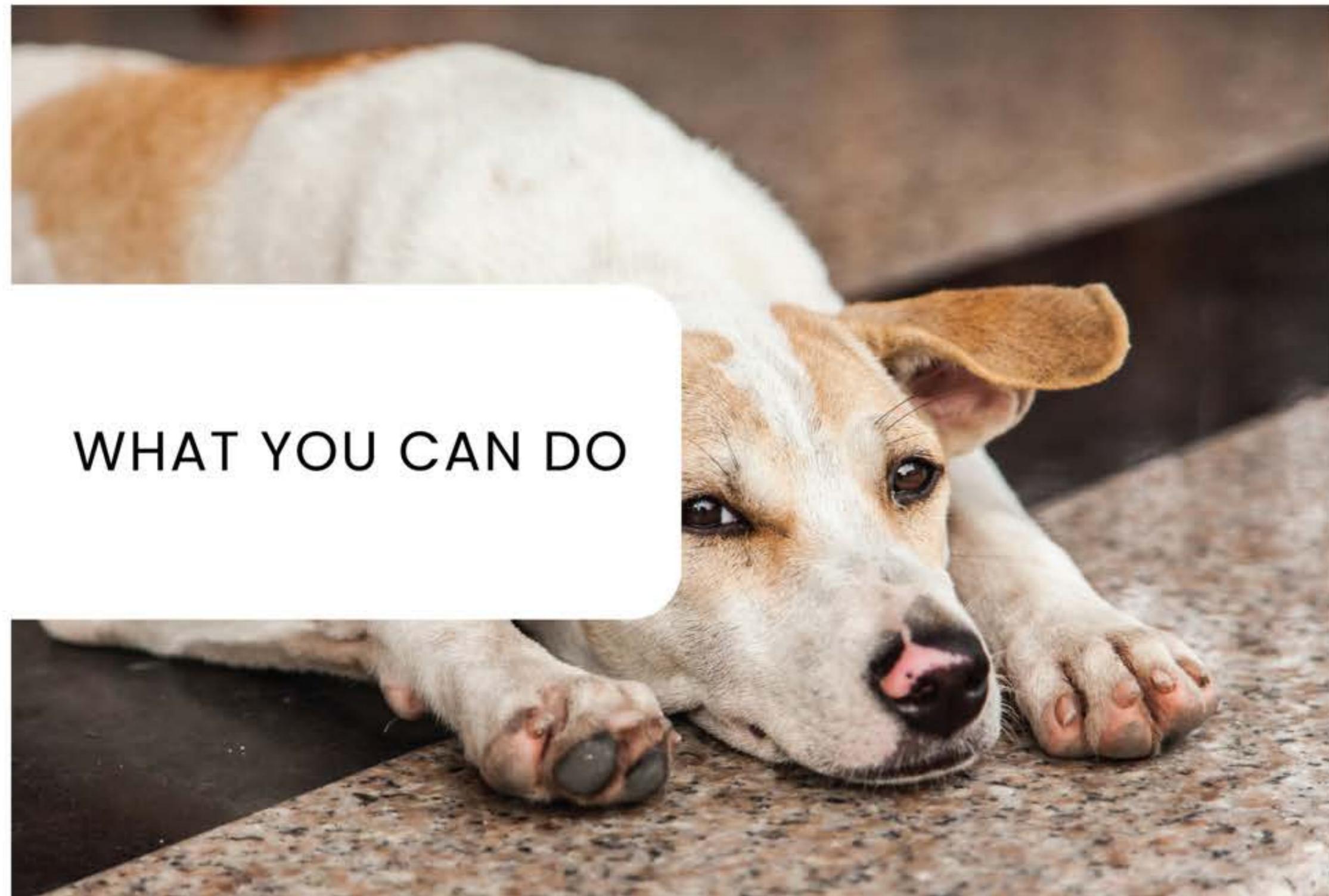


**DO NOT ENGAGE**



**REPORT**

5.



WHAT YOU CAN DO

# WHERE YOUR WORK FITS IN

## If you influence public understanding:

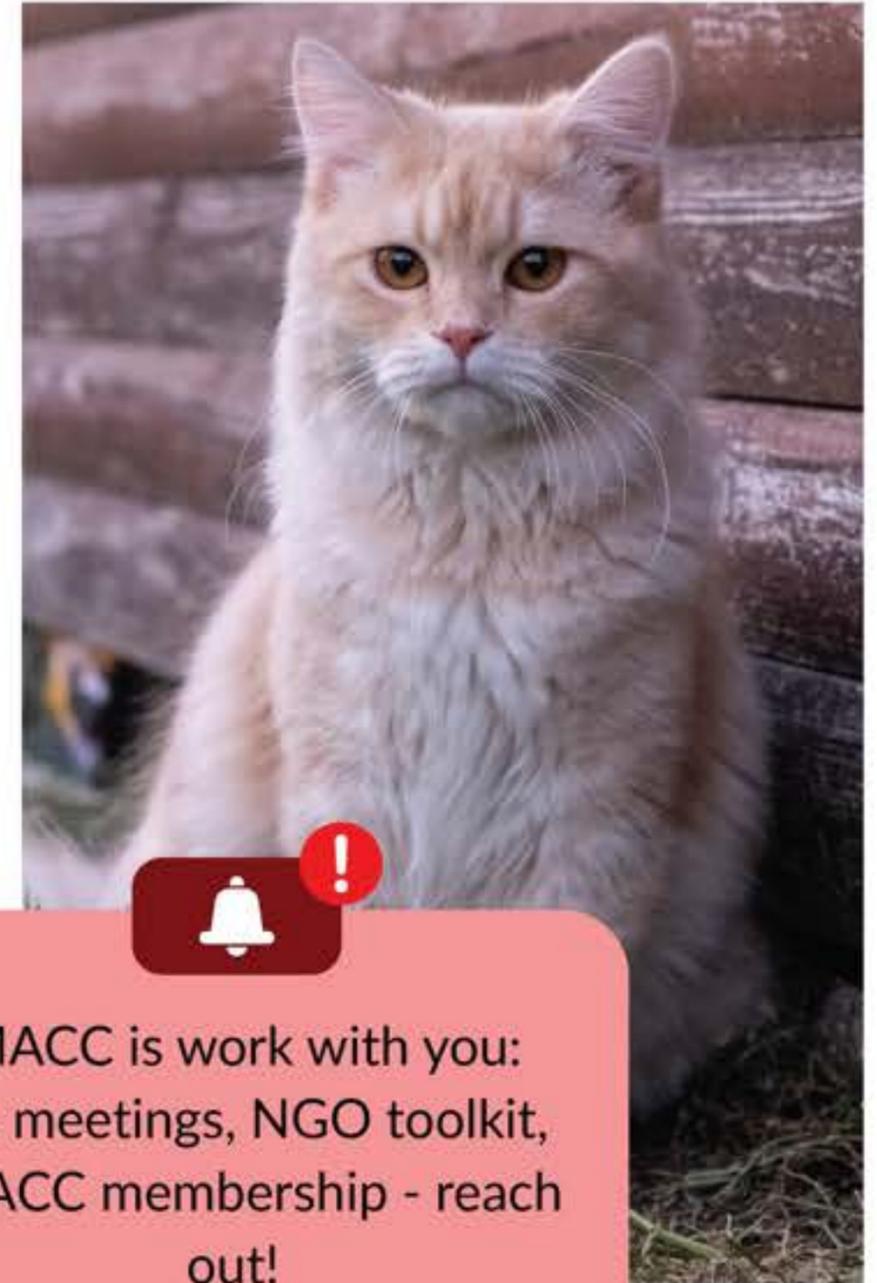
- Share the 3 steps.
- Educate on animal behavior and “how to spot cruelty”.
- Promote ethical animal content.

## If you work with platforms/tech:

- Push for system fixes: demonetization of cruelty creators.
- Educate on animal behavior and “how to spot cruelty”.
- Stronger policies and enforcement.
- Formal commitment to protecting animals.

## If you work on policy/regulation:

- Push for online animal cruelty in welfare legislation.
- Make online cruelty enforceable: clear offences for perpetrators and distributors.
- Platform duties and transparency.
- Strengthen cross-border pathways.



SMACC is work with you:  
1-1 meetings, NGO toolkit,  
SMACC membership - reach  
out!

# UPCOMING EVENT



[ASIAFORANIMALS.COM/EVENTS](https://asiaforanimals.com/events)

[ASIAFORANIMALS.COM/MAILING-LIST](https://asiaforanimals.com/MAILING-LIST)



# SMACCC GLOBAL SUMMIT 2026

**Bali, Indonesia**  
**June 18-20**

[endcrueltyonline.com/summit-2026](https://endcrueltyonline.com/summit-2026)

**THANK YOU!**



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[www.endcrueltyonline.com](http://www.endcrueltyonline.com)