

**TRACY-LYNNE GEYSEN,  
45, ANIMAL RIGHTS LAWYER**

**T**o be walloped by floods or cyclones is one thing. But recently Queensland has also been scarred by an upsurge of brutality towards innocent creatures great and small. It's the stuff of nightmares for normally effervescent

Brisbane solicitor Tracy-Lynne Geysen. "Sometimes," she says, "I wake up in the middle of the night and I think somewhere right now, somebody is abusing an animal. Maybe it just keeps motivating me to try to do something about it."

Geysen heads an extraordinary legal army called BLEATS (Brisbane Lawyers Educating and Advocating for Tougher Sentences), which is marching to war against animal cruelty. She started BLEATS in 2007 after viewing, one Sunday, a shocking television news item about a dog hanging from a tree. The animal survived, but the next day Geysen strode into her office at law firm Barry & Nilsson and unleashed her angst: "I said to one of the [administrative staff], who did volunteer work for the RSPCA, 'What can we do about this?'" Meetings were convened with key RSPCA Queensland personnel, including CEO Mark Townend. Geysen

learned that the charity's inspectors investigated thousands of animal cruelty cases a year and the figures have continued to climb. She discovered successful prosecutions were few, and penalties manifestly inadequate. Crucially, Geysen established that the organisation had a wildly insubstantial legal budget of \$50,000. With this, she'd found her entrance. Her idea was to round up the state's legal professionals and commit as many as were willing to serve the RSPCA in pursuing pro bono prosecutions. If lawyers didn't want to be directly involved in court, they could still assist by way of advice, document preparation and agitating for legislative change. At last count, she had attracted more than 150 barristers and solicitors to the BLEATS cause.

In August 2009, Geysen also founded her own family law firm, with an animal aspect. "There are pet custody disputes," she points out. "When parties separate, who gets the pets?"

Last month, amendments strengthening the Animal Care and Protection Act – which supplies the inspectorate's enforcement powers – were introduced to state parliament. The maximum jail sentence will be lifted from two to three years for animal cruelty. Additionally, police will have the ability to prosecute cases reported to them under a new law soon to be enshrined in the Criminal Code. The offence of "serious animal cruelty" will carry a prison term of up to seven years.

Geysen estimates BLEATS has so far donated at least \$1.7 million worth of legal work to the RSPCA. She owns two Himalayan Persian cats (*pictured*), sisters Lucy and Charley; her "powder puffs". But she says her devotion to animals should not be misread as fanaticism. "BLEATS aren't bleeding hearts, but we do want to stop animal cruelty. It's the injustice and inhumanity ... I am passionate about this. I honestly believe you can change the world." **MATTHEW FYNES-CLINTON** ▶

