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Hog-dog fighting ban on the cards

AP, COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA

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Lawmakers in the state of South Carolina are considering a ban on bloodsport fights between hogs and dogs, but an opponent fears it would send the state down the road of banning all animal sports, such as hunting and dog shows.

"They're stamping out rabbit hunting in England," hog-dog supporter John Foley warned a Senate panel on Wednesday, noting the wider efforts of animal-rights activists. He cited specifically Britain's decision last year to outlaw the use of dogs to kill foxes.

But the sponsor of the measure said hog-dog fights have nothing to do with sport and hunting.

"It's nothing but cruelty to animals," said Senator Larry Grooms, a Republican whose bill calls for fines of US\$5,000 or up to five years in prison for people who stage or attend hog-dog events.

"These folks aren't a benefit to society when they get perverse pleasure out of watching something like that -- they may well strike out against humans," Grooms said. "They're going to beat their wives. They're going to beat their children."

Grooms said people involved cut the tusks from hogs and leave them with no defense to dogs.

Foley responded that it is common to cut hog tusks so they aren't a threat to handlers. He added that dogs need to be protected while they learn to lawfully hunt the feral hogs that destroy crops and wildlife habitat.

"If you really want to train a dog, don't you want to train the dog in a realistic circumstance with a hog with tusks?" asked Senator John Hawkins, a Republican chairing the panel.

Foley said he wants his son "to be able to ride a bicycle, but I start out with training wheels. I don't throw him out there on a Harley."

Critics of the fights say the ills go beyond cruelty. Oran Smith, president of the Palmetto Family Council, said gambling and drugs are often tied to animal fighting.

"We believe that hog-dog fighting is simply bad for families and doesn't belong in South Carolina," he told the panel.

The US Humane Society, which opposes the fights, says on its Web site that the activity is relatively in common in some southern states and has been around for more than 25 years.

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