

Renewing the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy



Australian Government
Department of Agriculture,
Fisheries and Forestry

Renewal of the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy

Animal Care Australia submission



Approved: 28th March 2024
“Animal welfare is animal care”



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ACA Background

Animal Care Australia Inc. (ACA) represents the interests of all hobbyist and pet animal keepers nationally. Our members are comprised of most major animal keeping representative bodies including those representing dogs, cats, birds, horses, small mammals, reptiles, fish and exhibited animals. Some individual members also work in the rescue, care, and rehabilitation sectors.

Opening statement

As a nationally recognised animal welfare organisation, Animal Care Australia consulted during reviews of animal welfare legislation across the country.

It is frustrating that each State has the ability to not only determine what they believe are the needs of animals but that they can be so different each time one crosses a border. If, as we are led to believe, animal welfare is based on the 5 domains then surely the needs and the legislation should be the same? It should only be where a species requires additional care that sits outside of the 5 domains that differences could be justified.

Increasingly, animal rights leaning politicians draw attention to horrific cases of animal cruelty to 'justify' their calls for stricter legislation, however, those cases represent a tiny minority of animal owners, and the legislation proposed (and often assented to) unfairly disadvantages the majority of animal owners who are actually doing the right thing by their animals. Time and experience has shown also that most of this more restrictive legislation either has 'unintended consequences' causing other issues not conducive to animal welfare, or completely fails to make an impact on the practices it purports to restrict. Most often the practices continue as they are generally conducted 'under the radar,' and are not visible to authorities unless reported by members of the public.

The fact that different state legislations do vary so greatly is a strong indicator of how allowing animal rights activism and species-bias can be disruptive and detrimental to real and improved animal welfare outcomes. This is especially true because there are currently three tiers of responsibility for implementing and enforcing animal welfare legislation. The three tiers – federal state and local governments – allow for greater infiltration of those seeking to re-write 'animal welfare' to their own ideologies and in doing so diminish the ownership of animals by humans.

This places a direct threat on agriculture, pet ownership, species conservation and much more. All of which are part of the intrinsic Australian values where responsible animal ownership is our social licence to operate, and should be protected and, that far too many of us take for granted and should work harder to protect.

The Australian government is in a prime position to ensure we can protect those values and has the responsibility to do so through the development of this renewed Australian Animal Welfare Strategy.

Animal rights and ideological biases have no place in animal welfare legislation.

Responses to the Strategy and Discussion Paper

Scope

A renewed AAWS will facilitate joint leadership from the Australian Government and state and territory governments to animal welfare, with a view to:

- ***establishing a national framework for bringing key stakeholders together on animal welfare issues of national significance***
- ***providing a forward direction for animal welfare in Australia to address community and international expectations***
- ***maintaining Australia's commitment to modern, sustainable animal welfare practices informed by science and evidence.***

Animal Care Australia supports the three components as stated above, however, with some caution around:

- Who will be considered as 'key stakeholders'
- The process that will determine the true perspective of 'community expectations'
- An appropriate scope for the assessment of 'modern science' that is truly respected and accepted across the scientific community rather than 'contemporary science' where the peer review has been limited – usually on purpose.

Approach

The strategy will be released in chapters, each dedicated to one of 6 animal groups, with the final strategy expected in 2027:

- ***livestock and production animals***
- ***aquatic animals (including aquatic animals in production and wildlife)***
- ***animals in the wild (native, introduced, and feral animals)***
- ***companion animals***
- ***animals used for work, sport, and recreation***
- ***animals used in research and teaching.***

Animal Care Australia acknowledges the above 6 chapters are recognised across the country and are either already implemented or are being implemented at a state level. The six category groups describe the manner in which animals interact within different environments and scenarios. They do

not define species or species groups. Recognising that we have some concerns with the potential conflicts that exist with at least two of the six. Those being:

➤ **Companion animals:**

Different species of animal are defined as companion (or domestic) animals across different states, with some solely focused on dogs and cats.

Horses (and other equine) are kept as companions and pets and are only dealt with under legislation and regulations for livestock which compounds the ability for owners who do keep these animals as pets as they need to ensure they meet standards designed for the keeping of commercial livestock.

Animal Care Australia represents those who keep animals in captivity as pets or for hobby purposes.

The term companion animal is arguably the closest, but is still a poor descriptor. Animal Care Australia recommends replacing the "Companion animals" category with "Animals kept in captivity as companions, pets or for hobby purposes."

If the term "Companion" is locked in then **Animal Care Australia recommends the term is always expanded as "Companion animals, in this context, refers to animals that are kept in captivity as pets or for hobby purposes."**

Equally, many companion/pets are actively involved in recreational activities with their owners. These activities are vastly different to other 'activities' such as rodeos or the animal sporting (racing) industry and yet are categorised incorrectly as being the same thing – with the same need for control, restrictions, and regulations - where that is unnecessary. Which brings us to:

➤ **Animals used for work, sport, and recreation:**

This category is far too encompassing. It is a gregarious collective that does not accurately reflect the levels of need for oversight when considering animal welfare outcomes.

It is also the one category where the states themselves confuse the different activities with what they perceive to be similar activities – while in reality they are worlds apart.

Currently these misconceptions are driven by the animal rights ideology that the animals within all three sections are being 'used by humans' and simply should not be permitted requiring stronger regulatory control.

It is an unfounded claim that is being accepted and adopted by certain states and local governments.

In nearly all circumstances recreational activities and interactions including some 'sporting' activities such as pony club or dog agility are done so as part of a hobby and not part of the animal sporting (racing) industry. This provides further justification for this category to only include sporting (racing) and selective working animals.

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Animal Care Australia strongly recommends that ‘recreation’ is removed from that current category with some allowance for discussion on whether there is any need to include any specific activities within the task group discussions for ‘companion animals.’

Animal Care Australia also recommends that ‘companion animal’ is clearly defined as stated above and the task group discussion looks at what ‘interactions’ should be included and how that should be implemented across the country in order to remove the variations and unnecessary overlaps currently experienced by those who keep particular species such as equine, small mammals or native animals as pets.

There is a strong need for some nationally recognised clear delineations.

Vision:

“To establish an Australian animal welfare system that brings stakeholders together, identifies national priorities with actions and outcomes, and demonstrates to the public and international partners that Australia values the welfare of all animals.”

Question 1: Does this vision statement reflect everything you feel an Australian Animal Welfare Strategy should aim to achieve?

No. It lacks the actual intent of having animal welfare legislation – improving animal welfare. It should also reflect a statement indicative of the strategy’s aim to only include scientific evidence.

Question 1a: Is there anything else it should include?

Yes. Proposed new Vision.

“To establish an Australian animal welfare system that strives to improve animal welfare by bringing stakeholders together, identifies national priorities with actions and outcomes, free of ideological influences, which demonstrates to the public and international partners that Australia values the welfare of all animals.”

Work streams

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Proposed work streams for the strategy

- *Leadership and coordination – this stream establishes governance arrangements to oversee strategy implementation and coordination of activities.*
- *Research and development – this stream implements a coordinated approach to animal welfare research and extension activities.*
- *Standards and implementation – this stream implements an overarching framework for standards development that identifies national priorities and streamlines development and adoption by jurisdictions.*
- *Education and communication – this stream promotes best-practice to industry and showcases outcomes to domestic audiences and international partners.*
- *Reporting and compliance – this stream establishes systems to track outcomes and monitor compliance.*
- *International engagement – this stream contributes to our sustainable trade credentials by showcasing and maturing Australia's national approach to animal welfare.*

Question 2: Do the above proposed streams cover the right priority areas for the strategy?

Yes. However, they do require expanding:

'Education and communication – this stream promotes best-practice to industry and showcases outcomes to domestic audiences and international partners'

This should not just include showcasing outcomes to domestic audiences, it MUST include the requirement of funding for the development of "animal welfare education" targeted at the domestic audience.

'Reporting and compliance – this stream establishes systems to track outcomes and monitor compliance.'

This MUST include consultation with the domestic audience (i.e., the public) on the preferred enforcers/agencies authorised to enforce compliance.

Across Australia the RSPCA has for too long been the automatic go-to for governments – with the exception of the Northern Territory. For the past decade RSPCA State Branches have all been the subject of Parliamentary Inquiries, and investigations including damning reports from Attorney General investigations. This must be addressed by the strategy with stronger emphasis on enforcement officers being employed by the State governments. There must include a mandate

requiring the states to allocate funding for the purpose of employing enforcement officers within the public service sector and no longer utilising charitable organisations as a financial excuse.

This will send a strong message that the Federal Government is serious about animal welfare because it is no longer acceptable to 'farm out' the responsibility of compliance.

If this Strategy is truly seeking to reflect public values AND social consciousness then those authorised with the powers to enforce must equally be agreed to by the public and not dictated by the funding/ economic gains of state & territories.

Question 2a: Are there other priority areas that you think are important and should be added to the strategy?

Yes. Greater cohesion of state & territory legislation through the provision of required (re: mandated) national definitions governing the legislation.

Definitions of animal welfare; animal rights; animal protection are important;

Animal welfare: Animal welfare means the physical and mental state of an animal in relation to the conditions in which it lives and dies.

An animal experiences good welfare if the animal is healthy, comfortable, well nourished, safe, is not suffering from unpleasant states such as pain, fear and distress, and is able to express behaviours that are important for its physical and mental state.

Animal Care Australia recommends the strategy adopt the definition and guiding principles of animal welfare as outlined by the World Organization for Animal Health. ¹

Animal Rights: Animal rights is an ideological philosophy which puts forward as fact – that no animals should be used by humans for any reason. This includes for food, labour, and entertainment, among other ways animals exist in modern society. Animal rights activists, then, have a specific goal in mind: Ending the use of animals by humans.

Animal protection: is the more socially appealing term for animal rights.

These should be incorporated within 'Leadership and coordination'

Also, within the 'leadership and coordination strategy' there is a requirement of greater representation of the industry stakeholders on Animal Welfare Advisory Councils. Currently membership is dictated by the states and varies too greatly including an overwhelming number of animal rights ideological representation instead of experienced animal welfare representation.

¹ [World Organization for Animal Health – definition & guiding principles](#)

It is also missing a stream for 'Environment' – from local, national, and global perspectives. Eg : habitat or domestic care -> environmental protections -> global warming. These are all important and a crucial input to obtaining positive welfare outcomes

Question 2b: Are there any you feel are not a priority area?

No.

Question 3: Are there any shared factors affecting animal welfare that cut across all, or multiple, animal groups?

Yes. In addition to the three examples provided, the largest contributing factor to the decline of animal welfare is the infiltration of animal rights and animal protection ideology/activism.

Inter-departmental and cross government conflicts also contribute to the decline and contradiction of animal welfare implementation.

For example: Local Government animal management plans often contradict state legislation by including local bias against specific breeds or animals. Planning Departments' priorities conflict with conservation of native animals where animal welfare is blatantly ignored in the name of profitable expansion of housing, business and so on.

Question 3a: How can the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy address these in a practical way?

Set minimum national requirements/strategies.

Challenges

Engagement with animal welfare groups, industry, governments, First Nations people, farmers, researchers, and other stakeholders across Australia's animal welfare system over several years has identified several pressing challenges that impede progress across various priority areas.

The animal welfare system in Australia operates through a combination of laws, regulations and practices designed to ensure the well-being and humane treatment of animals in the country. The animal welfare system contains various elements, such as national standards and guidelines, laws preventing animal cruelty, powers for inspection and enforcement, the operation of animal shelters and rescue organisations, the presence of organisations dedicated to animal welfare and education and awareness campaigns. The system aims to strike a balance between the interests of humans and animals, promoting responsible pet ownership, humane treatment of livestock, and the regulation of activities like research, recreation, and entertainment.

Question 4: What do you think are the biggest challenges facing Australia's animal welfare system?

Firstly, the term 'community expectation' is subjective and currently reflects more on 'the loudest activists' rather than the actual expectations or opinions of the broader community (social licence to operate).

Those who yell, lobby, and actively vocalise their minority opinion gain the greater attention of the decision-makers. People who do not own animals, do not believe in owning animals and actively lobby to stop others from owning animals are not legitimate stakeholders in the AAWS.

Far too many consultation processes are not sufficiently promoted within the greater community – in fact, it is our experience this is done on purpose, particularly when a government (state or local) wants to introduce what it knows to be unpopular changes to legislation that negatively impact animal welfare.

The newest addition of 'survey-based consultation only' is a major tool utilised for this purpose – so as to provide the ability of manipulating statistical responses rather than 'explained responses.' These statistics are then used to justify that 'wanted outcome' and not social expectation.

Animal rights activism and propaganda is providing widespread disinformation to the public in an attempt to influence social licence to operate and cease animal ownership in Australia. This needs to be addressed head on.

Animal Care Australia has ranked the listed Challenges in the following order:

1: Animal welfare is primarily a state and territory responsibility providing challenges with a harmonised approach to decision-making.

Again, this can be alleviated by setting minimum guidelines and requirements that all state legislation must adhere to. This is particularly important where certain states (such as Victoria) are predominantly governed by animal rights politics.

2: There is a complex relationship between animal welfare regulation, productivity, and community expectations.

The complexity only exacerbates once you allow the 'animals should not be owned or eaten by humans' element to enter the conversation. By keeping the animal rights/ protection voices at arms-length reduces the complexity and allows for a greater conducive and productive debate to occur.

3: Community values and expectations about animal welfare issues are constantly changing, while improvements in animal welfare science can take time to develop and implement.

As previously stated, community expectation is subjective. Animal welfare science requires the time to develop and implement in order to ensure that the science is sound and agreed to across a multitude of levels. This is currently clear when we view the policies of the RSPCA Australia and Australian Veterinary Association. Their current policies are predominantly ideologically based, are usually based around 'research' that is produced by their own members and peer-reviewed by other

members of their associations and not more broadly assessed or reviewed. Once quoted the research is then adopted by other organisations that support the ideology rather than independently assessing the strength of the science being claimed.

4: Developing a fit-for-purpose national strategy that suits all audiences, taking into account that different groups of stakeholders may have different expectations and interests.

There is the first mistake – the strategy SHOULD NOT be trying to suit all audiences. The strategy MUST be aimed at ensuring and improving animal welfare outcomes – not providing for the expectations of ‘non-industry’ stakeholders.

The strategy must be aimed at the ‘industry and directly affected’ stakeholders – that is those who own, breed or work with the animals. Only including these stakeholders provides for a more suitable animal/human balance.

5: The national standards development system is complex and not currently meeting all stakeholder needs.

Agreed. Greater funding is required to ensure that individual Task Groups can be established at a national level to produce, review, and maintain the standards. Similar to the approach now being undertaken – but this must be permanently established (legislated) and not at the whim of each new federal government.

Question 5: Are there additional challenges in the animal welfare system that have not been listed above, which the renewed strategy should consider?

The ability to streamline an accepted set of definitions and strategy outcomes that keep animal welfare on a level playing field across local, state, and federal government legislations.

Opportunities

Despite the challenges, there are opportunities for meaningful change within Australia’s animal welfare system. Animals are important for Australia socially, culturally, and economically. Animal welfare is a priority for the community, the agriculture industry, and Australian governments. A renewed strategy provides an opportunity to consider animal welfare in the context of contemporary science and evidence and reflect on the needs and expectations of all stakeholders. All Australian governments have committed to address standards setting for animal welfare. This work has been directed by Agriculture Ministers and is being led by the AWTG.

Identifying opportunities for meaningful improvements in Australia’s animal welfare system will be an important part of developing actions under a renewed strategy.

Question 6: What do you think are the biggest opportunities for Australia's animal welfare system?

Animal Care Australia has ranked the listed Opportunities in the following order:

- 1: Animal welfare has become part of national conversations including biosecurity, animal health and productivity.**
- 2: Animal industry and animal-related industries are increasingly building animal welfare into industry-level sustainability plans and work practices.**
- 3: There is a strong research community, focused on developing and considering contemporary animal welfare science and evidence and coordinating research and data collection across jurisdictions.**
- 4: Agriculture Ministers are focused on animal welfare and work is underway to improve national standards setting.**
- 5: There is a changing social licence, reflecting the intrinsic value of animals and their importance to people.**
- 6: Overseas trading partners are increasingly interested in Australia's animal welfare credentials.**

General comment regarding the above Opportunities:

Animal Care Australia is wary of the use of the following:

- contemporary science' – as it is constantly used by the animal rights movement to include research that is not peer reviewed or cited outside of animal rights groups. This is an attempt to bypass the scientific process to change legislation
- 'Social licence to operate' is what society truly does understand and expect. Animal rights groups use the term out of context to attempt to falsely present an extreme anti-animal keeping view as that of society. It is the obligation of the AAWS to genuinely reflect social licence to operate (meeting the expectations of the general community) and not just the 1% of the population that are animal rights activists.

Question 7: Are there additional opportunities for improvements in the animal welfare system that have not been listed above, which the renewed strategy should consider?

Changing social licence needs to be considered as it is heavily influenced by disinformation and ideological ideas not grounded in reality.

Education of the public needs to reset realistic expectations and make it easy for people to learn about the species-specific welfare needs of animals. This needs to go beyond setting standards for

how we use animals, but to educate the public on what the animals actually need and want in order to live fulfilling, happy lives – without anthropomorphising them, as animal rights groups tend to do.

Question 8: Is there anything else you would like to be considered in the development of the strategy, within the scope described in this discussion paper?

An emphasis within the strategy for greater inclusion of animal keeping and breeding organisations – particularly nationally-based organisations at all levels of government and consultation.

Animal Care Australia welcomes any questions you may have as you continue to finalise this review. We welcome the opportunity to meet with the department, the Minister, and other members of parliament in order to ensure an appropriate animal welfare Act is produced.

This submission can be publicly listed.

On behalf of the Animal Care Australia Committee,



Michael Donnelly
President
Animal Care Australia

This submission has been developed in consultation with a range of members of Animal Care Australia. This submission provides a broad perspective across all species of pets and companion animals.