



Election Platform

2019 New South Wales State Election

Submission from the
Australian Veterinary Association Ltd

February 2019

The AVA

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the national organisation representing veterinarians in Australia. Our 9,500 members come from all fields within the veterinary profession. Clinical practitioners work with companion animals, horses, livestock and wildlife. Government veterinarians work with animal health, public health and quarantine systems while other members work in conservation, welfare, industry for pharmaceutical and other commercial enterprises. We also have members who work in research and teaching in a range of scientific disciplines. Veterinary students and veterinary professionals are also members of the Association.

Veterinarians

Veterinary roles extend beyond caring for the health and welfare of our pets and production animals. Veterinarians are the inspectors, field officers and pathologists that secure the safety of our food, ensure market access for our exports, and help to safeguard the human population from zoonotic diseases (those that pass from animals to humans).

The veterinary profession strives to protect the health and welfare of our animals and our community. The Australian Governments, at federal as well as state and territory levels, have a crucial role to play in leading and supporting these efforts.

The AVA is calling on all political parties and candidates to commit to improving animal welfare, strengthening resources available for biosecurity and improving regulation for the veterinary profession.

Biosecurity

NSW veterinary practitioners play an important role in monitoring private properties for outbreaks of exotic, zoonotic and emergency animal diseases. These diseases, such as African Swine Fever currently affecting China, can cause significant economic and social impacts to the NSW economy if an incursion occurs and the diseases are not readily detected.

In 2015 the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) reviewed Australia's veterinary services and recognised Australia as a world leader in animal health and biosecurity. It did, however, raise concerns about the nation's ability to manage a disease emergency with the current government veterinary staffing levels.

The AVA recommends that the government proactively employs and trains veterinary graduates to fill gaps left by retiring government veterinarians, and fund appropriate biosecurity training for private veterinarians who continue to monitor private properties as part of their core activities.

Councils and Pounds

There are ongoing and multiple incidents and complaints from NSW veterinary practitioners that their local councils are unwilling to pick up stray animals either in a timely fashion (or at all, especially stray cats). It is important that local businesses (i.e. NSW veterinary clinics) are not acting as 'pseudo-pounds' by providing housing, feeding and rehoming stray animals "Free of Charge" for the local community at a cost to their own businesses.

Veterinarians are seeking improved relationships with their local council or shire by recommending a range of initiatives, including: (i) having standardised arrangements across the state with local governments with regards to management of stray animals and access to pound services; and (ii) standardised rates of pay to veterinary clinics who provide assistance to local government where required (for example for provision of housing and treatment of strays prior to impounding).

The provision of ongoing training of veterinary employees and improvements in the pet registry technology would assist with improving favourable outcomes for lost animals.

The AVA recommends that the government implement standardised regulations and policies for local governments with regard to these issues. Further, that dedicated funds should be made available for the veterinary profession to cover any contingencies to ensure community confidence that the welfare of stray animals is optimised.

Anaesthesia-free dentistry for cats and dogs

Anaesthesia-free dentistry refers to the practice of attempting to perform a scale and polish on a fully conscious animal – often performed by non-veterinary providers such as pet groomers. This practice is painful for the animal, of no medical benefit, and highly likely to have longer term negative psychological and behavioural consequences for the animal.

Dental examination, diagnosis and treatment cannot be properly done whilst an animal is conscious without compromising animal welfare. Dentistry is a discipline that is reliant on detailed examination and thorough knowledge of anatomy, physiology and pathology to make a diagnosis to enable appropriate treatment.

Anaesthesia-free dentistry offers no health care benefits and can mask underlying dental pathology resulting in delayed treatment of dental disease.

The AVA recommends the introduction of legislation that prohibits non-veterinarians and non-veterinary businesses from providing commercial dental procedures on cats and dogs.

Improving standards for minimising the breeding of genetic defects e.g. Brachycephalic breeds

Certain dog breeds have serious health and welfare problems because they have been bred with exaggerated features, to achieve a particular look or extreme breed standard.

In recent years there has been a rise in the popularity of certain breeds with a genetic mutation known as chondrodysplasia, especially the brachycephalic breeds such as Pugs, French Bulldogs and Boston Terriers. Unfortunately, these exaggerated features can lead to serious health and welfare problems, which the veterinary community are faced with managing, to try to give these animals a more comfortable life.

Brachycephalic breeds have serious difficulty breathing as the length of their muzzle has been progressively shortened through selective breeding. However, the soft tissue inside the nose, mouth and throat is not reduced, blocking their airways. Their nostrils and windpipes may also be constricted, making it even more difficult to breathe. Some dogs will faint or collapse due to a lack of oxygen, especially when exercising or excited. Others may overheat, sometimes fatally after exercise or during periods of increased environmental temperature. Dogs may be forced to sleep sitting or standing up, because of their breathing problems. These dogs often need major surgery to try to improve their quality of life. They have a formally recognised medical condition called Brachycephalic Airway Obstruction Syndrome.

In 2016, the AVA partnered with RSPCA Australia to develop the Love is Blind campaign which aims to raise awareness of the animal welfare issues associated with exaggerated features, and also encourage breeders to change their breed standards to select for more normal, healthy features.

The AVA recommends that the NSW Government consider introducing a code of practice similar to *Code of Practice for Breeding Animals with Heritable Defects that Cause Disease* which is a code of practice under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 in Victoria.

Wild Horse Management in Kosciuszko National Park

The Australian Veterinary Association is very concerned with the current situation in Kosciuszko National Park, in particular the overabundance of horses and consequential damage, loss and degradation of biodiversity and habitat in Australia's most famous national park. Appropriate wild horse management is extremely important in order to restore balance and more humane management of the park resources and pristine environment. An effective and humane approach to the management of the wild horses in the park is essential.

The AVA has a specific policy and made a detailed submission in 2016, both of which can be utilised to develop an effective and balanced management program into the future (refer to references).

The Australian Veterinary Association strongly supports a balanced approach to the management of wild horses in Kosciuszko National Park, in line with other scientific, ecological, humanitarian, conservational and animal welfare organisations.

AVA Endorsement of RSPCA priorities

The AVA endorses those priorities of RSPCA Australia that will result in improvement in Animal Welfare.

1. Make animal welfare codes of practice mandatory:

Currently Codes of practice are rules to guide persons to achieve good welfare but are not mandatory. The creation of minimum standards applying to all persons with animals under their care and the implementation of mandatory codes of practice would improve animal welfare and provide animal welfare enforcement agencies increased tools for compliance.

2. Include "duty of care" in animal welfare legislation:

Currently the successful prosecution of animal cruelty cases is hampered by the requirement of proving the offence 'beyond reasonable doubt'. If persons in charge of animals have a legal obligation of 'duty of care', animal welfare enforcement agencies would be allowed to intervene in the management of an animal before harm occurs. Placing a legal obligation on persons in charge of animals would allow authorised officers to intervene before an animal is harmed.

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References

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AVA Policy Genetic defects in domestic animals
<https://www.ava.com.au/policy/1513-genetic-defects-domestic-animals>

Code of Practice for Breeding of Animals with Heritable Defects that Cause Disease
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AVA Policy on Control of Feral Horses
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