
Select Committee into the operations of The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Western Australia (Inc)

Submission from the Australian Veterinary Association Ltd



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The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the national organisation representing veterinarians in Australia. Our 8500 members come from all fields within the veterinary profession. Clinical practitioners work with companion animals, horses, farm animals, such as cattle and sheep, and wildlife. Government veterinarians work with our animal health, public health and quarantine systems while other members work in industry for pharmaceutical and other commercial enterprises. We have members who work in research and teaching in a range of scientific disciplines. Veterinary students are also members of the Association.

Terms of reference

The AVA does not have detailed knowledge of the funding or operations of the RSPCA WA (Inc).

However, we have some comments in relation to enforcement of animal welfare legislation as it applies in WA and more widely around Australia.

Enforcing animal welfare legislation

RSPCA WA Inc is funded by the WA Government to enforce the *Animal Welfare Act 2002*, and the RSPCA is funded in every state and territory to provide services to the community. In some jurisdictions, this funding supports a dedicated inspectorate, but in all states and territories RSPCA officers are authorised to enforce animal welfare legislation.

There are widespread shortfalls in resources for enforcement of animal welfare legislation across Australia. In WA in particular, there are very low numbers of inspectors (regardless of who employs them) who are responsible for enormous geographical areas.

There have also been recent transfers of some investigative responsibilities to the Department of Agriculture and Food of WA (DAFWA) without the necessary resources to effectively fulfil them.

The AVA encourages the WA Government to take further steps to implement the Act more effectively, including the necessary education to ensure that stakeholders understand their responsibilities. There is potentially a role for private veterinary practitioners, particularly in rural and remote areas. We have recently raised some options with the panel currently reviewing the *Animal Welfare Act 2002*.

Summary

Currently, enforcement of WA's *Animal Welfare Act 2002* is piecemeal and inadequate due to insufficient resources. Unfortunately recent trends in most states and territories have been to scale back expenditure on this type of regulation, and this has been to the detriment of animals and the community.

For example, there is a well-established link between animal cruelty and violence towards humans. Through inadequate enforcement of laws to punish malicious cruelty to animals, governments are missing opportunities to detect or prevent violence against people, particularly women.

In the agricultural sphere, there is increasing community pressure for livestock to be well treated and cared for in all production systems. Education as well as visible and appropriate enforcement of existing legislation are vital to maintain public confidence in our important animal industries.

The government is not meeting community expectations in relation to enforcement of WA's animal cruelty and welfare legislation. The WA Government needs to make a serious attempt to address the shortfalls in the existing system, including more appropriate funding levels, at the earliest opportunity.