



WA Firearms Act 2024

Submission of the
Australian Veterinary Association Ltd
July 2025

About the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA)

The AVA is the peak professional body representing veterinary professionals and students across Australia. For more than 100 years we have been the united voice of the veterinary profession.

Veterinarians are among Australia's most trusted and respected professionals, dedicated to safeguarding animal health and welfare and supporting the communities they live in.

Our vision and purpose

Vision *A thriving veterinary profession*

Purpose *Building a vibrant future for veterinary professionals.*

At the AVA we champion the veterinary community, advance professional excellence, foster connectivity, and deliver exceptional member experiences to achieve our vision of a thriving profession.

Essential role of the veterinary profession

Veterinary services are essential to Australia's animal health, food security, and economy. They help secure Australia's animal health and livestock supply chain, protecting hundreds of thousands of jobs and easing cost of living pressures through a safe and reliable food supply.

Beyond agriculture, veterinarians support companion animals and their owners, strengthening the human-animal bond and promoting the associated mental and physical health benefits of pet ownership. Animals are not just a part of the Australian way of life; they are deeply embedded in it - socially, culturally, environmentally, and economically, and veterinarians are an essential part of every vibrant Australian community.

Veterinarians play a pivotal role in maintaining the social licence of animal industries, ensuring animal health and welfare meets community expectations. Like human healthcare and education, veterinary services provide both private benefits to individuals and critical public benefits to society, in areas like biosecurity surveillance, wildlife treatment and health and emergency animal disease management.

Recognised among Australia's most ethical and trusted professionals, veterinarians are highly respected and trusted members of their communities. The Governance Institute of Australia's 2023 Ethics Index ranked veterinarians among the nation's top 10 ethical occupations¹.

¹ Governance Institute 2023 (<https://governanceinstitute.com.au/app/uploads/2023/11/2023-ethics-index-report.pdf>)



Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Committee regarding the *Firearms Act 2024* and the potential impacts that the proposed changes from the previous legislation may have on the veterinary profession.

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is primarily concerned that the changes may restrict access to firearms for the purpose of animal euthanasia, which could, in turn, have adverse implications for animal welfare. The AVA seeks to ensure that registered veterinarians are able retain appropriate access to firearms for professional purposes for use to end an animal's suffering.

Background

There are several situations and circumstances in which firearms can be the most appropriate tool for the euthanasia of animals. While veterinarians do have access to other means, such as lethal injection and captive bolt devices, these methods generally require close physical proximity to the animal, which may pose significant safety risks in certain circumstances.

Examples include;

- Distressed and unrestrained large livestock, such as may be encountered on properties with poor facilities or following incidents such as motor vehicle collisions or livestock truck rollovers.
- Distressed and injured wildlife. Larger species such as kangaroos can inflict serious injury during attempted restraint.
- Particularly aggressive and unapproachable animals. Our members have occasionally used firearms to euthanase large and aggressive dogs.
- Where large numbers of animals need to be euthanased quickly and efficiently such as following bushfire and other natural disasters.

Categories of licence

Under the previous legislation (*Firearms Act 1973*) some veterinarians may have held an individual licence by virtue of also being a primary producer or competitive target shooter. Others may have had access to firearms via a practice "Corporate Licence". The Act did not specifically restrict the properties upon which those firearms could be used and also allowed for a firearm to be discharged in some public places such as a road with "lawful excuse".

The *Firearms Act 2024* appears to be particularly prescriptive in relation to where specific firearms licenced under certain categories may be used. This may mean that an any individual licence holder (including a veterinarian) may be contravening the authority of their licence if they were to use a firearm to euthanase an animal at a place not directly associated with the granting of their licence, this could include a client's property. Some incidents leading to the euthanasia of animals may also occur in a public place such as a roadside.

The newly introduced "Business Licence" category appears to replace the former "Corporate Licence"; however, it does not explicitly reference veterinary practices. Instead, under Section



52: Professional Shooter Business Licence, it refers to the "*euthanasia or other humane destruction of animals by means of a firearm*". While it is acknowledged that legislators may intend for veterinarians and veterinary practices to be licensed under this category, the AVA notes that this classification does not appear to be appropriate or reflective of the distinct role and responsibilities of the veterinary profession.

The "Business Licence" category does however allow for a business to be prescribed in the Regulations;

53. Prescribed Business Licence

(1) In this section —

prescribed business means a business prescribed by the regulations as a business for which a Business Licence can be granted.

(2) A Business Licence may be granted for a prescribed business as a Prescribed Business Licence.

(3) In addition to the standard authority of a Business Licence, a Prescribed Business Licence authorises the use of a business firearm as provided by the regulations.

(4) In the case of a Prescribed Business Licence, the regulations may limit or disapply any authority conferred by the standard authority of a Business Licence.

Section 43 defines a business as;

business means —

(a) any commercial or professional activity; or

(b) any activity that is prescribed by the regulations as a business;

Access to appropriate firearms

The AVA notes that that established guidelines for the euthanasia of large livestock specify the use of high-powered firearms. Access to firearms from Category A and B would allow these requirements to be met in almost all cases.

Recommendation:

The AVA proposes that both individual registered veterinarians and veterinary practice businesses be prescribed as a business for which a "Business Licence" can be granted. Also, that veterinarians holding such a licence be permitted to use firearms, from the appropriate categories, for the euthanasia of animals without specific restriction on the places that they may be used.

Conclusion

The AVA acknowledges that the primary intent of the *Firearms Act 2024* is to enhance public safety by promoting the responsible ownership and use of firearms within the community. Nonetheless, the Association remains keen to ensure that veterinarians will continue to have appropriate access to firearms where required for the humane euthanasia of animals, and



that increased regulatory measures do not inadvertently compromise animal welfare outcomes.

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