



Election Platform

2018 Victorian State Election

Submission from the Australian Veterinary
Association Ltd

October 2018



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 biosecurity and improving veterinary regulation.

Biosecurity

Victorian veterinary practitioners play an important role in monitoring private properties for outbreaks of exotic diseases. 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.



Animal welfare in abattoirs

There have been incidents of mistreatment of animals exposed in Australian abattoirs in recent years. It is important that Victoria implement the highest standards of animal welfare in abattoirs in line with community expectations. Improvements in animal welfare can be brought about by a range of initiatives, including having veterinarians in all abattoirs, dedicated animal welfare inspectors, ongoing training of employees, and use of technology such as CCTV to assist with monitoring outcomes.



The AVA recommends that the government implement improved monitoring and training, and have dedicated veterinary and welfare inspectors in all abattoirs to ensure community confidence in animal processing.

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-veterinary providers performing dental procedures on cats and dogs.



Restricted acts of veterinary science

A major issue in Victoria is that restricted acts of veterinary science are not defined or legislated (the only jurisdiction in Australia to not have this enshrined in legislation). The AVA believes that any act of veterinary science must be restricted to registered veterinary practitioners. This is essential to protect the welfare of animals and to protect the animal-owning public.

The AVA defines 'acts of veterinary science' as services which form part of the practice of veterinary surgery and medicine, and includes: the diagnostic confirmation of, treatment of, and provision of management advice for infectious disease, physiological dysfunction or injury in animals; performing surgical operations on animals; administering anaesthetics to animals; the prescribing of scheduled poisons for use in animals; prescription of vaccines; and the provision of veterinary certificates.

The veterinarian is uniquely qualified to understand the systemic impacts of medical or surgical interventions on the individual patient. This level of knowledge and expertise is essential in order to minimize adverse welfare consequences and yield successful outcomes for the patient.

The AVA recommends that Victoria adopt a similar approach to New South Wales which lists declared acts of veterinary science in the *NSW Veterinary Practice Regulation 2013*. *These regulations list specific procedures and cover treatments requiring anaesthesia.*

Ability for vets to return stray animals to owners

Under section 84D of the Domestic Animal Act 1994, anyone other than an authorised officer must deliver a stray dog or cat to the council in the municipality that it was seized. This means that veterinary practitioners cannot legally scan for a microchip and attempt to reunite the animal with its owner. The offence is punishable by 5 penalty units – currently a fine of \$792.85.

This means that the animal is required to be transported to the council's pound where the animal is impounded and then scanned for a microchip by council or their agent. The RSPCA quote that 53,000 stray animals are impounded in Victoria each year with 21,600 reclaimed by their owner.





Impoundment creates significant stress for both animals and their owners looking for their pets. Significant costs and time are borne by councils by way of animal rangers and pound fees and it does not make sense to needlessly delay the process of reuniting an animal with its owner.

The AVA recommends that section 84D of the Domestic Animal Act 1994 be amended to allow veterinarians to reunite microchipped animals with their owners.

Brachycephalic breeds to be recognised

Certain dog breeds have serious health and welfare problems because they have been bred with exaggerated features, to achieve a particular look. These features are a result of a genetic mutation causing a syndrome known as “chondrodysplasia”. In recent years there has been a rise in the popularity of certain breeds with chondrodysplasia, especially the brachycephalic breeds such as Pugs, French Bulldogs and Boston Terriers. Unfortunately, these exaggerated features 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 is not reduced, blocking their airways. Their nostrils and windpipes may also be constricted, making it even more difficult to breathe. These dogs endure the constant and excruciating sensation of being suffocated. Some dogs will faint or collapse due to a lack of oxygen, especially when exercising or excited. Others may overheat, sometimes fatally. Many have chronic sleep deprivation and 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 particular exaggerated features, and encourage breeders to change their breed standards to select for more normal, healthy features.

The AVA recommends that Brachycephalic breeds be recognised under the *Code of practice for breeding animals with heritable defects that cause disease*.



AVA Endorsement of RSPCA priorities

Make animal welfare codes of practice mandatory

Codes of practice should be compulsory rather than advisory (as they currently are). Creating minimum standards that apply to all persons in control of animals and making codes of practice mandatory would provide increased tools for enforcement and improve animal welfare.

Include “duty of care” in animal welfare legislation

Placing a legal obligation on persons in charge of animals would allow authorised officers to intervene before an animal is harmed. Currently it is very difficult to successfully prosecute cases beyond a reasonable doubt that would likely result in suffering of an animal.

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