



AVA Queensland Election Platform 2017

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The Australian Veterinary Association is the national organisation representing veterinarians in Australia. Our 9000 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.

The five strategic priorities for the Australian Veterinary Association include:

Improving animal welfare
Planning an effective veterinary workforce
Ensuring economic sustainability
Better regulation
Fighting antimicrobial resistance

We pursue these priorities in various ways, including advocacy with decision makers as well as through educating our clients in electorates across the state.

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is committed to contributing to the economic sustainability of Queensland through the protection of its livestock industries from disease. Maximising animal health and welfare leads to improved livestock sector productivity and profitability. As well as supporting our valuable livestock industries, the veterinary profession also works to protect the health and welfare of all animals in Queensland, including companion animals and wildlife.

AVA Election Priorities

There are a number of key areas where the AVA strongly recommends that action be taken by the government. These include:

1. Review of the *Veterinary Surgeon's Act 1936*, and appointment of members to the Veterinary Surgeon's Board
2. Strengthening the role of veterinarians in disease surveillance in Queensland - getting more veterinarians onto farms, and getting samples to the laboratory
3. Hendra Virus prevention and management
4. Lay pregnancy testing of cattle
5. Empowering veterinarians to euthanase suffering animals under the *Animal Care and Protection Act 2001 (ACPA)*
6. Banning inhumane feral animal control methods in preference for more humane options.
7. Facilitating people to keep pets in rental and body corporate accommodation

1. Review of the Veterinary Surgeon's Act, and appointments to the Veterinary Surgeon's Board

There has been no progress from the current government in revising the 81-year old Veterinary Surgeons Act (despite this process having commenced under a previous ALP Minister, and continuing under the LNP). A comprehensive consultation process and review report occurred in late 2014. The AVA strongly recommends that this review be continued, to accommodate the changing nature of veterinary practice over the last 80 years, and that the NSW model for practitioner regulation be followed (i.e. an independent state statutory body reporting directly to the Minister).

Furthermore, despite election of members to the Veterinary Surgeons Board by the profession in the first half of 2016, elected members still have not been appointed to the Board some 15-18 months later.

These delays significantly harm the veterinary profession and, by extension, negatively impact on Queensland's livestock industries and the health and welfare of pets and other animals.

Recommendation:

- That the government continue with the review of the Veterinary Surgeons Act, and work toward establishing the Veterinary Surgeons Board as an independent statutory body reporting directly to the Minister for Agriculture & Fisheries.
- That the appointment process to replace properly elected members be expedited in a timely fashion.

2. The role of veterinarians in disease surveillance in QLD - getting more veterinarians onto farms and getting samples to the laboratory

Veterinarians are highly trained professionals who are at the forefront of recognizing potential disease disasters well before the disease progresses into escalating deaths on multiple farms. The key to avoiding a catastrophic impact from exotic disease such as Foot and Mouth Disease is early recognition. In order to do this, veterinarians need to be on the farms.

Biosecurity Queensland regularly engages with the profession, seeking to build a partnership to help identify early disease incursions. Despite several years of conversations, there remains no formal partnership framework to support such a collaboration, and there remains a significant challenge in attracting sufficient numbers of veterinarians into rural practice.

The pressure to deregulate certain acts of veterinary science (as defined under the Act) will likely exacerbate this lack of veterinary surveillance. For example, up to 40% of cattle practitioners' income arises from pregnancy testing cattle, and if this were to be deregulated, a further decrease in rural veterinary practitioner numbers is very likely. Veterinarians will not be in a position to recognize early clinical signs and raise the alarm. This poses a significant threat to biosecurity and thus to maintain Australia's favorable animal health status and valuable export markets.

Recommendations

- That formal partnerships between government agencies and private veterinarians be pursued to enhance surveillance and significant disease investigations within the state. This will protect both the sustainability of the state's livestock industries and the viability of rural and regional veterinary practice. Training in significant disease investigation and emergency animal disease management is necessary for maximum effectiveness. For many years now, all governments, both state and federal, agree with this in principle but schemes to progress this have been under-resourced and under-utilised.
- That the government provide funds to offset the costs of transporting diagnostic samples from remote and regional areas of the state to the only central laboratory in Brisbane. Current costs to clients in excess of \$600 to investigate livestock mortalities are a significant barrier to reporting.

3. Hendra Virus

Veterinarians are the group most at risk of contracting potentially fatal Hendra virus infections from horses, yet continued reliance on personal protective equipment (PPE) remains the government's only strategy to protect humans from this disease. A person can be infected by Hendra virus while an infected horse appears to be clinically healthy, and no obvious need is seen for PPE – hence there are compelling reasons for a different and more effective approach.

The incidence of this disease could be effectively eliminated if vaccination was taken up by horse owners in areas where Hendra has occurred.

Currently, lives are being put at risk because of delays in Hendra virus testing of samples taken from northern and western QLD horses. This is because there is only one laboratory in QLD which does this testing. Results from a sample taken from a suspect horse on a Friday will not be known until the following Tuesday – mostly due to the logistics and cost (several hundred dollars) of transporting clinical samples over the weekend. This clearly is risking human lives, yet is a situation which could be readily improved – clinical samples from other ill animals (using private veterinary pathology providers in Brisbane) receive much shorter turn-around times.

Recommendations

- That vaccination for Hendra virus be made compulsory for horses in areas where Hendra has occurred and for horses that are travelling through those areas (generally the eastern seaboard).
- That Hendra virus testing technology be extended to a laboratory in the north of the state by utilising or upgrading laboratories to PC3 status - possibilities include QLD Health laboratories or university laboratories.
- That the government pays the transport costs of sending suspect Hendra samples to a diagnostic laboratory.
- That the government prioritizes Hendra virus testing, as delays in diagnosis can delay the administration of potentially life-saving monoclonal antibodies - where without this treatment, the death rate in people is 60%.

4. Lay pregnancy testing of cattle

There has been considerable pressure to deregulate cattle pregnancy diagnosis so that lay people can perform this act of veterinary science as a business. Non-compliance with legislation in this state is widespread, as lay pregnancy testers advertise freely on the internet and media. The Veterinary Surgeon's Board will send a letter to the lay person warning of the non-compliance if the Board becomes aware of it, but more resources need to be available to effectively enforce this.

The benefits of this remaining an act of veterinary science include:

- Regular farm visits by veterinarians to perform pregnancy diagnosis allow for large groups of animals to be assessed for endemic and potentially exotic diseases, which would otherwise go undetected. These diseases pose significant risk to animal productivity and welfare.
- Provision to provide support for veterinarians' businesses means more veterinarians stay in rural communities thereby establishing better access to veterinary care, biosecurity and animal welfare outcomes in rural areas.
- Confidence that our export trade will not be compromised by incorrect diagnoses. Correct diagnosis (the AVA's PREgCHECK system requires a rigorous examination with a 100% accuracy result) is critical for animals being transported by air, sea or road to avoid potentially serious welfare issues relating to calving. In addition, if a pregnant animal is missed before speying, there are potentially catastrophic animal welfare impacts for the animal.

Currently there are conflicting government messages on the role of rural veterinary practitioners. If the government supports changes to deregulate cattle pregnancy diagnosis, this will reduce rural veterinary practice viability and reduce or eliminate private veterinary surveillance on rural properties.

Recommendations:

- That the government maintains pregnancy diagnosis as a restricted act that may only be performed by veterinarians.
- That the Veterinary Surgeon's Board be resourced to enforce compliance with legislation in relation to lay persons performing acts of veterinary science.

5. Veterinarians able to euthanase suffering animals under the *Animal Care and Protection Act 2001 (ACPA)*

Currently under the ACPA, a veterinarian is not allowed to euthanase an animal without the owner's consent, even if the animal is suffering badly and there is no hope of recovery. On many occasions, unowned animals will be presented after hours to veterinarians, and while the veterinarian will generally do what they can to save the animal, the injuries or sickness may be extreme.

Currently there is no authority or protection for the veterinarian should they decide to euthanase the animal on humane grounds. Only an inspector appointed under the ACPA can authorize euthanasia. Ironically, the inspector will seek the advice of a veterinarian when making that decision. As many, if not most, of these situations occur after hours, it is usually not possible to contact an inspector to give this approval. The veterinarian is therefore breaking the law should they decide to euthanase the animal to relieve its suffering. In other states, such as NSW, veterinarians are empowered to make this judgement and perform euthanasia if treatment is not an option and suffering is severe.

Recommendation:

- That veterinarians are empowered under the ACPA to euthanase animals to alleviate animal suffering.

6. Banning of inhumane feral animal control methods in preference for more humane options.

For many years now, there have been recommendations to introduce the Codes of Practice for Humane Vertebrate Pest Control as legislation under the *Animal Care and Protection Act 2001*. In particular there are 5 control methods that are deemed unacceptable as they cause extreme cruelty and should be replaced with the more humane alternatives available. These methods include:

CSSP (yellow phosphorus) for pig control
Strychnine bait for dogs, foxes and cats
Serrated jawed traps
Warfarin bait for pigs
Chloropicrin fumigation for rabbits

Recommendation:

- That the government ban the 5 methods of feral disease control, above, and use more humane alternative options.

7. Facilitating people to keep pets in rental and body corporate accommodation

In the 2017 review of property law in Queensland, the AVA is concerned that the recommendation about pets will be to adopt a "no pets" by-law which will be added to the community management statement (CMS), and this can only be amended by a resolution without dissent.

Ownership of pets contributes to a number of human health benefits such as fewer doctor visits, reduction in stress, overall improvement in mental health and increased social support for individuals. Pet ownership can improve cardiovascular health - with dogs in particular acting as a stimulus for exercise. Research shows that pet ownership encourages physical activity, and that children aged 5-6 in families which own a dog are less likely to be overweight or suffer from allergies compared with those who do not own a dog. Studies have found a correlation between the presence of companion animals and the alleviation of depression, loneliness and low morale, and improved ability to cope with chronic illnesses such as heart disease, dementia and cancer. All of these health benefits contribute to significant savings in human health expenditure each year.

One of the greatest barriers to pet ownership is pet-unfriendly property. Over half (53%) of Australians would like a new type of pet, but of those, only 13% confirmed that they intended to buy a pet in the next 12 months, which indicates there are significant barriers to owning a pet. The shift towards higher-density housing in urban areas of Australia to manage population growth is the biggest current threat to pet ownership in Australia – particularly in the current environment of landlords disallowing tenants to have pets and strict body corporate or strata rules which exclude pets in multi-dwelling developments. Owning a pet and seeking rental accommodation that will allow you to keep your pet can be very challenging and can unfortunately lead to the pet owner having to choose between their ideal home and keeping their pet, resulting in pets being surrendered to animal shelters. This is neither a good result psychologically for the owner nor a good outcome for the pet.

Victoria has recently changed state legislation to make pets in units permitted as a default position, in recognition of the important role pets play in the wellbeing of the family and community.

Recommendation

The QLD government should adopt a more compassionate and outcome-driven approach which considers the impact on unit dwellers, and is more in line with community values. The AVA therefore recommends that the default option in QLD legislation should be that the keeping of pets is permitted in a lot or on common property.