



Australian Veterinary Association
Queensland Division

2015 State Election Platform



Background

Animals play a key role in the prosperity of the Queensland's economy and community. The state's 2,500 registered veterinarians and two veterinary schools are in a prime position to contribute to this prosperity.

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the only national organisation representing veterinarians in Australia. Its 8,500 members come from all fields within the veterinary profession. Clinical practitioners work with companion animals, horses, farm animals, including 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.

Every day our veterinarians play an indispensable role in the community through helping protect the safety of food, supporting agricultural industries, and promoting the health and community benefits of companion animals. The AVA provides expert advice on public policy affecting animals, their owners, and veterinarians. Good public policy in these areas benefits animals, but also the health and welfare of Australians and the economy.

The key themes for the 2015 AVA Queensland election platform are:

1. Protection of industry and the Queensland economy through effective disease surveillance for livestock and companion animal exotic and endemic disease.
2. Protection of the community interests through confidence in the competency of the operator in veterinary procedures performed on animals and pets. This is achieved through good governance and regulation in the Veterinary Surgeon's Act to protect both animals and the consumer from unqualified and untested personnel purporting to have these skills.
3. Protection of animals, especially through:
 - Natural disaster planning including providing for companion animals, livestock and wildlife.
 - The use of animals in research and teaching.

Protection of Industry and the Queensland Economy

The beef industry is crucial to the Queensland economy. Queensland is the largest producer of beef in Australia and as a result the state has a significant stake in the maintenance of the disease free status of our state and national herd.

The recent disease outbreak of Bovine Johnes Disease (BJD) was an all too real example of the ease with which animal disease can spread, and the impact it can have on our farming communities, consumers and our economy. That this outbreak was a strain previously not seen in Australia points to a biosecurity issue that is yet to be resolved.

Queensland remains vulnerable to significant disease incursions. Foot and Mouth Disease would decimate the beef and sheep industry. As found in the UK experience of 2001 it would also devastate the tourism industry. Thus, two of the four biggest contributors (mining, agriculture, tourism and financial services) to Queensland's economy are at risk.

There are two key aspects to improving disease surveillance in Queensland. Firstly, there needs to be a restoration of early detection with increased laboratory effectiveness. Secondly, improved partnership with private veterinarians to cover the gap of reduced government services in this area.

The closure of the Townsville and Toowoomba laboratories in 2013 has not yet been offset by enhanced access to the remaining state laboratory. Many veterinarians are no longer sending samples for investigation because the transport costs are now prohibitively high. There is an important role for the government in covering some of these costs. The best defence for the control of disease is early detection before the disease has spread to numerous areas.

Partnerships with private veterinarians are currently limited to a couple of national schemes and some animal welfare work. Much more can be done in utilising this resource for Queensland.



Recommendation

- That the government provide funds to offset the costs of transporting potential disease samples from remote and regional areas of the state to the central laboratory.
- That formal partnerships with private veterinarians are pursued to fully utilise the resource and capability of veterinarians. Training in government protocols and processes are a necessary part of this process for maximum effectiveness.
- That the government partner strategically with veterinarians in input into disease control strategies and investigations.

Protection of the community

The community benefits from regulation of the veterinary profession. It means that they can have confidence in the standards of services afforded to their livestock and their pet animals.

There are many lay people who market themselves as experts, but who lack training, qualifications and oversight. Veterinarians are governed by the Veterinary Surgeon's Board. This system is robust and regularly reviewed to ensure veterinarians are trained to the highest standards. If things do go wrong, veterinarians are subject to investigation and scrutiny by the Veterinary Surgeon's Board to ensure standards are met.

In 2013 the Government initiated a review of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1936. The AVA has been involved with the review and support the majority of the recommendations of the initial report of the review committee. These recommendations aim to improve the operations of the legislation. In particular, the AVA strongly supports the need to retain a defined list of restricted procedures – often referred to as acts of veterinary science. These are veterinary procedures that require considerable skill and knowledge of veterinary anatomy, physiology, pathology, medicine and surgery. To safeguard the welfare of pets and livestock, it is essential that only fully qualified and registered veterinarians are permitted to perform them.

Further, there have been recent challenges through the Racing Board to set up a duplicate of veterinary oversight. The AVA believe that this is neither desirable or necessary to ensure adequate veterinary standards.

Veterinarians are already comprehensively regulated through the Queensland Veterinary Surgeon's Board. Additional regulation is unnecessary. It is inefficient and wasteful to have two separate statutory authorities investigating whether a veterinarian has breached their professional obligations. In fact, veterinarians guilty of serious misconduct are removed from the profession by the path initiated by the Veterinary Surgeon's Board. We see this as a critical tool in effectively enforcing the integrity of racing—one not available to racing authorities.

Recommendation

- That the diagnosis, treatment, the giving of anaesthetics and invasive surgical procedures in animals be restricted to registered veterinarians to ensure consumer confidence and the protection of the animal.
- Veterinarians should be registered solely through the Veterinary Surgeon's Act and not be subject to further licensing by racing authorities.

Protection of animals

In Queensland there are two areas where animals are especially inadequately protected. These include in times of natural disaster and in research and teaching.

Natural Disasters

Australia is a country of extreme weather, one side of the nation can be on fire while the other struggles to keep its head above water. As all Queenslanders know, our state is not immune from the devastating effects of nature.

The past decade has shown us the importance of pets in disaster situations. People will go to extraordinary lengths to protect their animals, even to the point of putting themselves in harm's way. It is for this reason that disaster planning must include clear mechanisms for the management and protection of animals in disaster situations.

In Queensland, when natural disaster strikes, the fate of animals are left with the individual disaster groups to manage. Unfortunately, this means the state has an inconsistent response to animal rescue with some areas providing facilities for pets to accompany owners and others not. It is not mandatory to include plans for animals although the Flood Commission Inquiry of 2011 recommended that planning be put in place by owners and the 2011 Council of

Australian Governments endorsed the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience, a feature of which is the recognition that the benefits of improved disaster planning extended beyond protection of human life and property to the broader social environment. Animals are part of our lives and in addition to minimising their suffering, there are compelling reasons to fully integrate animals into disaster management. The Northern Territory recognised this two decades after Cyclone Tracey in the 90's.

Recommendation

- That Queensland integrates planning for the care of animals in state and local disaster groups and includes the need to recognise the human animal bond.

Further Information

Dr Michael O'Donoghue
Queensland Division President
Qld Division Office
P: 07 3423 1844

Dr Laurie Dowling
Qld Division Executive Officer
Qld Division Office
P: 07 3423 1844
E: execqld@ava.com.au

