



# Election Platform

## 2021 Tasmanian state election

Submission of the  
Australian Veterinary Association Ltd

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## The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA)

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) is the national organisation representing veterinarians in Australia. The AVA consists of over 8500 members who 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.

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 Tasmanian state government have a crucial role to play in leading and supporting these efforts. As we head into the 2021 Tasmanian election the AVA is calling on all political parties and candidates to commit to strengthening biosecurity

## Executive Summary

Animals play a key role in Tasmania's economy and in the lives of people and the community. Livestock industries (aquatic and terrestrial) are a key contributor to Tasmania's economic prosperity. Tasmania has over 300 registered veterinarians and is the only state without a veterinary school.

Three areas of focus for the Tasmanian division of the AVA are:

1. The role of veterinarians role in biosecurity
2. An effective and sustainable veterinary workforce
3. The role of veterinarians in emergencies and in cat, wildlife and stray animal management

The AVA urges the Tasmanian government to commit to enhancing existing animal disease surveillance capability and capacity by ensuring adequate resources are provided to support strong partnerships between the public and private veterinary sectors. This would involve formal partnerships and a commitment to training veterinarians.

In emergencies animals must be included in response plans and veterinarians engaged in contracted roles.

The AVA will continue to lobby for the regulation of cat containment and consideration of the proposed Wildlife Veterinary Treatment Fund.



The AVA would like to see the establishment of contractual arrangements between local governments and local veterinary practices when these practices are engaged in urban animal management activities.

## Biosecurity

Agriculture and in particular the livestock sector (aquatic and terrestrial) is one of the major industries of Tasmania.

Disease outbreaks can have devastating and far reaching economic and social consequences. The movement of animals and people around the world has never been so rapid. In a single day a person can travel from one side of the globe to another. Tight border security and disease surveillance is critically important to maintain Tasmania's favourable animal health status and for the early detection of animal disease emergencies. Emergency animal diseases are a significant threat to animal industries, and veterinarians are key to Australia's surveillance capacity. The risks of emergency animal diseases will continue to increase as climate change impacts distribution of vector-borne diseases. The agricultural sector, at farm-gate, contributes 3% to Australia's total gross domestic product (GDP). The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) estimates that the gross value of farm production for 2018-19 will be \$61 billion. This is an asset that the government must protect. Every dollar spent on prevention and preparedness protects against potentially billions in losses. The equine influenza outbreak in 2007-08 cost Australian governments over \$370 million in response activities. It also cost a further \$1.5 billion in indirect costs to the horse industry and the Australian economy. This is dwarfed by the prospect of a foot and mouth disease outbreak, which has been estimated to cost at least \$7 billion and up to \$16 billion depending on the speed with which we contain the outbreak. The total amount could blow out to \$50 billion over 10 years. Effective disease surveillance and response capabilities, as well as animal traceability (such as the proposed horse traceability register) will mean the difference between a manageable outbreak, and a catastrophic impact on our important livestock industries.

Veterinarians are highly trained professionals at the forefront of providing information on disease prevention, detection, diagnosis, treatment and control. In the course of their day to day work veterinarians strive to maximise animal health and welfare and protect livestock from disease. On farms veterinarians are best placed to recognise early clinical signs of disease and identify a disease outbreak before it becomes widespread. Tasmanian veterinary practitioners play an important role in the monitoring of disease or passive surveillance and the early detection of an exotic, zoonotic or emergency animal diseases outbreak. An incursion of diseases like Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) and African Swine Fever (ASF) would cause significant economic and social impacts to the Tasmanian and the Australian economy and community.

Over the last twenty years government resourcing of government veterinary positions has decreased substantially leaving gaps in the ability of the public sector to deliver on biosecurity and placing reliance on the private sector veterinarians to fill these gaps. The AVA Workforce Modelling Report 2018 shows clearly that we are heading towards a significant undersupply of government veterinarians. 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 but raised concerns about Australia's ability to manage a disease emergency with the current and declining government veterinary staffing levels.



The Tasmanian state government needs to recognise not only the value of, but also the limitations of, an increasing dependence on the private veterinary sector to provide animal disease surveillance data.

While biosecurity is a shared responsibility, it is unrealistic to assume the private veterinary sector can and should provide data to support public health, market access and animal welfare expectations without assistance. This is outside the scope of current veterinary practice business models. Formal assisted partnership frameworks to support collaboration are necessary. That assistance includes enhanced information management systems, easy access to the existing local, high quality laboratory services and sufficient government veterinary staff to analyse the acquired data and develop appropriate responses and policies.

### Recommendations:

- The establishment of formal partnerships between government agencies and private veterinarians 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
- Enhanced provision of training in significant disease investigation and emergency animal disease management necessary for maximum effectiveness across the public and private sectors. Training must be recognised as a continuous process whose provision is adequately resourced in an on-going manner at all levels
- A commitment to employing and training veterinary graduates in the public sector to ensure that expertise is maintained at a level commensurate to the burgeoning livestock industries. We need to maintain and build on government veterinary roles to ensure a sustainable government veterinary workforce in the future

### Veterinarians pets and animals in emergencies

While recognizing that human life is prioritised in an emergency response there is much that can be done for animals aligning with community expectations.

### Recommendations

- Animals must be considered within formal emergency response plans
- The establishment of coordinated designated roles for veterinarians involved in a response to an emergency event. An example is veterinarians called upon to work with animals in or at an emergency evacuation centre. This should involve the establishment of uniform contractual arrangements between local governments and local veterinary practices in the emergency planning stage.



## An effective and sustainable veterinary workforce

Currently there is a national veterinary shortage affecting the supply of veterinarians at a time when veterinarians are very busy and the negative affect on the mental health of veterinarians is at the forefront of AVA activities. We are at an added disadvantage in Tasmania being the only state without a veterinary school. National statistics compiled by the AVA in 2018 showed that 61% of new graduates took a position in the same state as their university.

## Recommendations

- Consideration given to a bonded scheme for veterinarians like the successful scheme that operated in Tasmania in the 1970s and the current scheme in operation for optometrists in Tasmania
- That veterinarians wishing to come into the state to work continue to be granted “essential worker” status

## Cat management in Tasmania

“Effective control” (DCA 2000) or cat containment to a property is a core component of any effective animal management program.

The Tasmanian division of the AVA has been involved with the Cat Management Act since its formulation and inception in 2009, Regulations 2012 then review and more recently as a representative party on the Cat Management Working Group and Region Cat Management Strategy Working Groups. Over this period we have observed a change in the public’s and pet owning population understanding of responsible cat ownership. Cat owners we see in daily veterinary practice understand and appreciate the benefits of cat containment. The majority of owners already contain their cats and indeed the majority of cats we see are desexed and microchipped. The working group unanimously recommended cat containment in 2016 and again in 2019. Out of the 136 submissions received on the Draft Cat Management Amendment Bill 98 or 72% called for and said that they would support the inclusion of a provision for compulsory containment of cats to properties in legislation although the issue of containment wasn’t a standard submission form question.

Containment ensures the best cat animal welfare outcomes (less road and other accidents, less fighting and infectious disease and therefore greater longevity AVA 2016) and reduces the potential negative impacts of cats in the community: nuisance complaints (councils receive many calls about nuisance cats), the environment (wildlife predation), and agriculture (spread toxoplasmosis and sarcocystis).

A legislative requirement for containment is supported through education so that pet owners and community understand the benefits of containment and that it is easy to raise cats or train cats to



live indoors and or to be in runs. There are many inexpensive outdoor containment solutions that can be temporary/removeable.

Legislative requirement for containment will make it easier for councils to perform their role.

A legislative requirement for containment will place the onus of responsible pet ownership rightfully on the owner and make it easier for all of us working together to manage cats to the best of our ability in society.

It was with great disappointment that a pillar of effective cat management, cat containment, was left out of the legislative change in the reviewed Cat Management Act. The AVA will continue to advocate for cat containment to be regulated in Tasmania.

### Recommendation

- That cat containment be regulated in Tasmania

### Wildlife in Tasmania

Private veterinarians play an important role in the treatment, care and rehabilitation of wildlife.

It has been calculated that veterinarians treat pro bono wildlife at a cost of \$1.875 million per year.

In one survey veterinary practices which received reimbursement for some of their wildlife treatment over half had treatment costs reimbursed by members of the public and one quarter received funds from wildlife rehabilitation groups. No practice indicated that they received reimbursement for the treatment of wildlife from the government. Wildlife Health Australia provides some funding to clinics around Australia as part of their "Sentinel Clinic Wildlife Disease Surveillance Program".

The Tasmanian division of the AVA along with the Veterinary Surgeons Board Tasmania (VBT) give in principal support to the Wildlife Veterinary Treatment Fund proposal of wildlife community volunteer Ged Lagerewskji.

### Recommendation

- Consideration given to the merits of the Wildlife Veterinary Treatment Fund

### Strays in Tasmania

Veterinarians are presented with stray dogs and cats (sometimes feral) and wildlife and receive calls about them within and after business hours. Time and other hospital resources and costs are involved with receiving these animals, scanning them for microchip identification, housing them until their owners can be located and reuniting them with their



owners or alternatively contacting the local council who are mostly only available within business hours and many councils say that they are not responsible for cats. This is a vexed and increasing problem. Urban animal management is the remit of government not veterinarians. In addition it is not sustainable for the small business model of veterinary practice to be engaged in these activities which play no part in the core activity of medicine and surgery.

### Recommendation

- The establishment of contractual arrangements between local governments and local veterinary practices engaged in urban animal management activities

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