Victoria's Climate Change Strategy

Submission of the
Australian Veterinary Association Ltd

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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 vison 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 occupations[1].

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

Introduction

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to Victoria's 2026–2030 Climate Change Strategy. As frontline professionals caring for livestock, wildlife, and companion animals, veterinarians witness the tangible impacts of climate change on animal health and welfare.

We also recognise the veterinary profession's unique capacity to support emission reductions in agriculture and to build community resilience through a One Health approach (integrating animal, human, and environmental health). Additionally, the AVA strongly urges the Victorian Government to prioritise immediate emissions reductions across all sectors, to limit the worst impacts on animals, ecosystems, and communities.

This submission is underpinned by the AVA's official policy on **Climate Change and Animal Health, Welfare, and Production** (2022). In line with that policy, the AVA:

1. **Acknowledges** the scientific evidence that human activity is the primary cause of accelerating climate change, with serious negative effects on animals, people, and the environment;
2. **Recognises** veterinarians' responsibility to adopt and promote sustainable practices to reduce greenhouse gas emissions;
3. **Supports** policies and actions that promote sustainable practices, including striving for net zero carbon emissions in veterinary workplaces by 2030; and
4. **Urges** strong interim emission reductions across all sectors to achieve net zero carbon by 2030, in accordance with scientific recommendations.

These 4 points guide our recommendations to the Victorian Government. Below, we outline 4 key proposals, each with supporting rationale, implementation examples, and alignment with Victoria's climate objectives.

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1. Recognise Animal Health as a Climate Mitigation Strategy

Rationale

Livestock production is a significant source of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, accounting for around 13% of Australia's national total [1], with methane from ruminants comprising nearly half of agricultural emissions. Simply reducing livestock numbers to cut emissions is not a straightforward solution due to food security and livelihood implications [1]. Instead, improving animal health and productivity offers a potential win–win: healthier, disease-free animals convert feed more efficiently into meat, milk, or fibre, lowering emissions per unit of product [2][3]. In contrast, poor animal health leads to wasted inputs (feed, water) and reduced output (lower growth, higher mortality), thereby *increasing* emissions intensity [2]. Recent modelling in beef and pork systems has shown that controlling certain endemic diseases can yield a 9–22% decrease in GHG emissions per kilogram of product [2]. Thus, veterinary interventions (e.g. disease control, nutrition, genetic improvements) can help shrink agriculture's carbon footprint *without* reducing herd size [2].

These priorities echo the AVA's policy goal of minimising veterinarians' own carbon footprint and promoting sustainable animal production systems.

Implementation

The Victorian Government can embed animal health into its climate mitigation efforts by supporting veterinary-led disease surveillance, vaccination campaigns, and herd health planning. Incentive schemes could encourage farmers to partner with veterinarians on strategies that track improvements in productivity and reduced emissions intensity. Collaboration with industry bodies such as Meat & Livestock Australia or Dairy Australia can accelerate on-farm trials of methane-reducing supplements (e.g. red seaweed, tannin-rich feeds, 3-NOP, etc.), while also addressing ongoing food safety and efficacy research. Numerous dietary strategies are under investigation, and continuing R&D is critical to finding safe, practical solutions. Placing veterinarians in climate-smart agriculture programs ensures that recommended practices are consistent with both good welfare and low emissions. The Victorian Government should embed veterinary roles in emergency response frameworks—for instance, by establishing or strengthening a State-based veterinary emergency network.

Strategic Alignment

This recommendation aligns with Victoria's Agriculture Sector emissions reduction pledge and supports the State's interim targets (45–50% emissions reduction by 2030). It also contributes to adaptation efforts, since healthier herds tend to be more resilient to heat stress and drought.

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2. Integrate Veterinary Expertise into Climate Disaster Planning and Response

Rationale

Climate change is amplifying natural disasters—longer fire seasons, more frequent floods, extreme heatwaves—with devastating impacts on animals. The 2019–20 Black Summer bushfires, for example, affected an estimated three billion native animals in south-eastern Australia [4]. Veterinarians and wildlife carers were frontline responders, rescuing and treating injured wildlife, as well as assisting displaced livestock and pets. However, these efforts often rely heavily on volunteer goodwill. Formal integration of veterinary services into emergency management would reduce animal suffering, protect public health, and mitigate economic losses in agriculture.

In alignment with the AVA's policy, veterinarians already shoulder a significant burden in responding to climate-related disasters, and greater support from government would ensure these efforts remain sustainable.

Implementation

It should be acknowledged that Victoria has existing frameworks for incorporating veterinarians - particularly through the Chief Veterinary Officer - in welfare and disease emergencies. However, stronger support and training for private practitioners, along with more robust 'peacetime' preparedness, will further enhance veterinary capacity in climate-related disasters. The Victorian Government should look to embed veterinary roles in emergency response frameworks—for instance, by establishing a State-based veterinary emergency network. This would involve providing training, protective equipment, and funding for veterinarians in bushfire or flood zones. Emergency plans at state and regional levels must include animal evacuation and triage protocols, with clearly defined responsibilities for local vets. The Victorian Government should also consider paid retainers to vets, not just funding when required in disaster response. Coordination among agriculture, environment, and emergency agencies is crucial, as is including Chief Veterinary Officers on State Emergency Management committees.

Strategic Alignment

Strengthening veterinary disaster response supports the Strategy's pillars of Adaptation and Resilience. Animal welfare provisions in emergencies also promote quicker recovery for communities reliant on livestock and help protect biodiversity in bushfire or flood-affected ecosystems.

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3. Adopt a One Health Approach to Climate-Related Disease and Biosecurity Threats

Rationale

Rising temperatures and changing rainfall patterns are expanding the geographic range of many pests and pathogens. In early 2022, an outbreak of Japanese Encephalitis Virus in south-eastern Australia, including Victoria, was linked to extreme flooding and unusually high mosquito populations [5]. Veterinarians detected the virus in piggeries, warning public health authorities. This underscores how closely linked animal and human health can be, particularly under a changing climate. By embracing a One Health framework, Victoria can better anticipate, detect, and manage emerging diseases. This approach is foundational to the AVA's climate policy, which calls for a reduction of vector-borne diseases and robust surveillance systems.

Implementation

The government can enhance biosecurity by investing in ongoing veterinary surveillance programs, diagnostics, and early warning systems that combine climate data with animal health observations. A cross-agency One Health committee, bringing together the Department of Health, Agriculture Victoria, environment agencies, and the AVA, would ensure rapid responses to emerging threats. Communicating disease risks and prevention strategies to farmers, wildlife carers, and pet owners is another key veterinary role—supported by government-backed education.

Strategic Alignment

One Health strategies align with Victoria's commitment to safeguarding public health and primary industries under climate change. By reducing disease outbreaks in livestock (and limiting zoonotic transmission), this approach protects economic stability, maintains export viability, and defends community wellbeing.

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4. Empower Veterinarians as Climate Educators and Advocates

Rationale

Veterinarians are influential communicators in rural and urban communities, trusted by both farmers and pet owners. They already provide public education on issues such as pet safety in heatwaves, wildlife conservation, and sustainable animal husbandry. By formally supporting and resourcing veterinarians to extend these efforts, the government can foster widespread climate literacy and drive behaviour change. In this context, partnerships with organisations such as Veterinarians for Climate Action (VFCA) can extend the reach of climate-focused professional development and advocacy efforts, ensuring consistency and broad impact.

As per AVA's policy, veterinarians also have a duty to champion practices that reduce the overall carbon footprint, both within clinical settings and in animal production.

Implementation

The government could collaborate with the AVA on climate-focused professional development, preparing vets to advise on emerging risks (e.g. heat stress management, zoonotic diseases) and sustainable practices (e.g. water conservation, low-emissions feeding). Public outreach could include community workshops, school visits, and co-branded resources. Recognising and promoting "Climate Champion" vet clinics that adopt environmentally conscious operations can model best practice.

Strategic Alignment

This aligns with the Strategy's emphasis on community engagement and shared responsibility. Veterinarians, with daily interactions across diverse regions, are ideal messengers to motivate collective climate action.

Conclusion

The Australian Veterinary Association appreciates the opportunity to contribute these recommendations. We also wish to acknowledge that **veterinarians already volunteer** considerable time and expertise in climate resilience—for example, responding to bushfire emergencies, assisting wildlife, and educating the public on animal care in extreme weather. To sustain and amplify these contributions—and to meet the AVA's policy vision of reducing greenhouse gas emissions across the veterinary sector—**the Victorian Government should consider creating formal roles or funding pathways** that support veterinary professionals involved in climate programmes. By integrating vets more systematically into emissions reduction, disaster response, disease surveillance, and public education, Victoria can more effectively protect both animals and people from the growing risks of climate change.

References

[1] **Climate Council (2024).** *Farming Down Under: Agriculture's role in Australia's climate pollution.* Available at: https://www.climatecouncil.org.au
(Notes that agriculture contributes around 13% of Australia's greenhouse emissions, about half of which is methane from ruminants.)

[2] **Capper JL (2023).** *The impact of controlling diseases of significant global importance on greenhouse gas emissions from livestock production.*
One Health Outlook 5:17. doi: https://doi.org/10.1186/s42522-023-00089-y
(Shows that improved animal health can yield 9–22% lower emissions intensity in beef and pork production.)

[3] **Roque BM, Venegas M, Kinley RD, et al. (2021).** *Red seaweed (Asparagopsis taxiformis) supplementation reduces enteric methane by over 80% in beef steers.*
PLoS ONE 16(3): e0247820. doi: https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0247820

[4] **Herbert C, Dickman CR, Cope H, Gray R (2024).** *Hundreds of animals were rescued after the Black Summer bushfires, but how many actually survived?*
The Conversation. Available at: https://theconversation.com
(Estimates ~3 billion native animals affected in the 2019–20 bushfires, highlighting the immense need for organised veterinary/wildlife response.)

[5] **Nogrady B (2022).** *Australian floods lead to spread of mosquito-borne disease.*
The Lancet Infect Dis 22(6): 771. doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/S1473-3099(22)00301-2

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