

25 March 2020

The Hon David Littleproud MP

Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management

David.Littleproud.MP@aph.gov.au

Dear Minister Littleproud,

**Veterinarians – essential service providers during a COVID-19 shutdown**

During this challenging COVID-19 pandemic, I seek your assurance that veterinary services will be officially deemed an essential service during any further shutdowns of businesses. Of course, adherence to strict management procedures to limit any spread of the virus in this context is essential and accepted. The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) who represent the veterinary profession have already made a **formal submission1** to all levels of government requesting official recognition and classification of veterinary services as essential, and are prepared to work with the government to achieve this.

Veterinarians provide critical services for the care and treatment of all species of animals, including companion animals, equine, wildlife, aquatic animals and livestock. They are pivotal in contributing to **public health and biosecurity systems** – which is of the utmost importance at the present time. Equally essential are the broader industry including veterinary nurses, laboratories, pharmaceutical and equipment suppliers and other allied services whose support ensure veterinarians can continue to perform their important work.

The services provided by veterinary practitioners, consultants, regulators and food safety experts ensure the continuity of **food supply and product integrity** in the livestock supply chain. This is well recognised in response policies for other emergency contexts, such as the recent bushfire crisis. Food security and integrity must be maintained at this critical time. This includes significant role of vets in **surveillance** for exotic diseases such as FMD and African Swine Fever, which would devastate our economy if introduced.

Companion animals including pets and horses play an integral role in the lives of Australians. As valued members of Australian families, companion animals contribute to **human health** (lowering morbidity from cardiovascular diseases for example) and reduce the national spend on health care significantly. Perhaps more importantly is the role they play in the **mental health** of their owners, and this is especially the case for isolated or vulnerable members of our community. Veterinarians also have a very specific role in **public health** at this time, assessing and interpreting the role of animals in COVID-19 and providing surveillance for other potential zoonoses such as Hendra virus in horses.

It is now more important than ever that veterinary practitioners continue to provide services to communities given the stress of the current situation. Australia cannot afford catastrophic animal health or welfare incidents to occur at a time when public health is already critically challenged.

The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and The World Veterinary Association (WVA) have listed essential veterinary services required during this COVID-19 pandemic in a broader context, and their statement can be found at the link below**2**. **International precedents** also exist - with numerous European countries, US States and New Zealand already recognising and formalising veterinarians as an essential service.

The Australian commonwealth and state governments can be assured that veterinarians are taking seriously the absolute need to implement precautions that reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission. These measures are consistent with the recommendations of the federal and state health departments. Copies of **veterinary-specific infection control protocols and information sheets3** have been distributed to the profession by the AVA and veterinary boards. The measures include social distancing via client and staff management and promoting and enforcing hygienic practices. Contingencies are also being put in place for managing animals of owners either at high risk or infected by COVID-19.

On behalf of the veterinary profession and broader veterinary industry within Australia, I respectfully request that veterinarians be classified as essential service providers in the event of a national lockdown at any stage of the COVID-19 pandemic response.

I am available to discuss this request with you and look forward to your response.

Regards,

[Name]

[Veterinary Practice if applicable]

[STATE and POSTCODE]

[email address]

1. AVA Submission – Vets as Essential Services: <https://www.ava.com.au/siteassets/resources/coronavirus/ava---veterinarians-as-an-essential-service---covid-19.pdf>
2. OIE and WVA statement – Vets as Essential Services: <https://www.oie.int/en/for-the-media/press-releases/detail/article/covid-19-and-veterinary-activities-designated-as-essential/>
3. Veterinary infection prevention documents: <https://www.ava.com.au/coronavirus/>