

a veterinary prescription



Australian Veterinary Association Inc.

2016 Northern Territory Election Platform

Veterinary roles extend far beyond caring for the health and welfare of our pets and production animals.

Veterinarians are the pathologists, field officers and inspectors that secure the safety of our food, ensure market access for our exports, and help to safeguard the human population from zoonotic diseases.

The veterinary profession strives to protect the health and welfare of our animals and our community. The Australian Government, at federal as well as state and territory level have a crucial role to play in leading and supporting these efforts.

As we head into the 2016 Northern Territory election, the AVA is calling on all political parties and candidates to commit to improve animal welfare, stronger biosecurity and veterinary regulation, and better urban animal management.

Animal Welfare

The Northern Territory has made significant progress on improving animal welfare since the inquiry into animal cruelty at Mataranka Station. Both political parties are to be commended for the support they have given to the initial responses.

There is more work to be done to improve animal welfare in the NT. There are still a number of amendments to the Animal Welfare Act that are needed, including:

- improved national consistency through the adoption of national standards for animal welfare
- definition of 'Animal' be amended to include fish
- Standards and Codes of Practice to be adopted through regulations under relevant legislation
- creation of an offence in relation to non-compliance with a Code of Practice standard

Further, the AVA strongly recommends that the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (AWAC) be strengthened. Not only does this body allow the government to access the expertise of a range of organisations within the NT, but it also enhances communication with key stakeholders from the animal welfare sector. Unfortunately, currently its effectiveness and usefulness to the government and Minister is restricted by insufficient resources and support.

Recommendations

- That the review of the Animal Welfare Act be finalised and the resulting Bill be made a priority in the new parliament.
- That resourcing requirements outlined in the legislation and increased resources and support be made available to AWAC



Urban Animal Management

The lack of territory legislation on urban animal management has led to a haphazard approach to dealing with companion animals. By-laws and resourcing vary widely between different local government jurisdictions.

The AVA supports the view that effective companion animal welfare and management requires:

- clear animal welfare and animal management legislation
- adequately resourced and trained enforcement

For this reason the AVA supports the establishment of specific companion animal legislation in the Northern Territory. This legislation would address:

- the management of registration and identification of all cats and dogs (including compulsory microchipping)
- processes for dealing with dangerous dogs
- empowerment of local government (and other officers) to undertake the above tasks and make other relevant local by-laws

Recommendations

- That the development and adoption of dedicated companion animal legislation be made a priority in the next term of government.
- That local government are allocated sufficient resources for urban animal management.

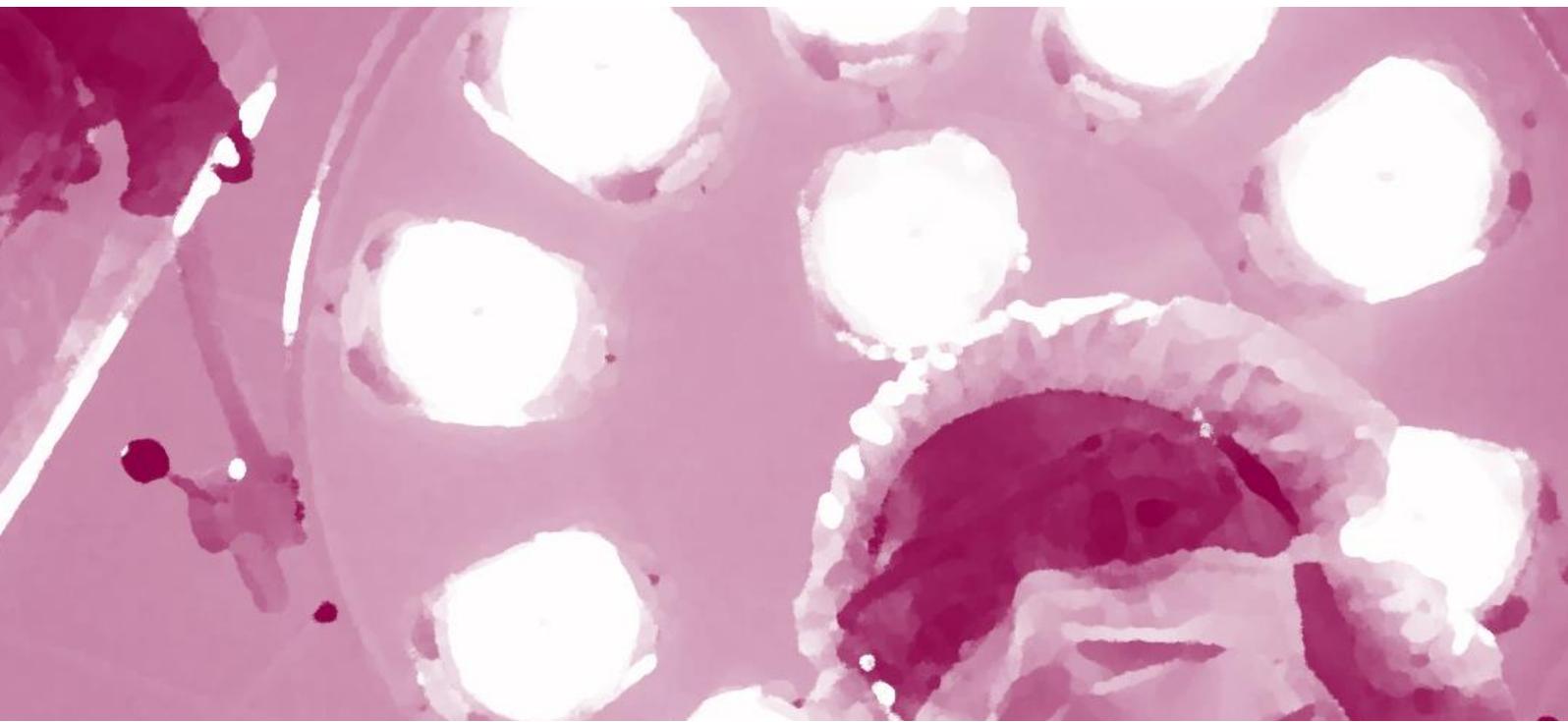
Biosecurity

The Northern Territory plays an important role in monitoring for outbreaks of exotic diseases, particularly through the National Arbovirus Monitoring Program (NAMP). The NT's proximity to international markets potentially places it at the front line of exotic disease outbreaks.

The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) recently reviewed Australia's veterinary services and recognised Australia as a world leader in animal health and biosecurity. However, it also raised concerns about the nation's ability to manage a disease emergency with the current government veterinary staffing levels.

Recommendations

- The next government proactively employs and trains veterinary graduates to fill the gaps as older government veterinarians retire, and invests in the development and retention of those already working in government roles to ensure their expertise is not lost.
- That the next government increase resourcing for animal biosecurity to ensure that it can meet the needs of the coming decade.



Veterinary legislation

Separate regulatory systems in each state and territory hinder the mobility of veterinarians within Australia, prevents interstate competitiveness, and inconveniences clients with interstate or national interests as well as those requiring particular veterinary expertise only available outside the Northern Territory.

National recognition of veterinary registration has assumed increasing importance in the past decade with the growing need to remove obstacles to the delivery of cross-border veterinary services. In addition, one of the objectives is to allow greater competition within the veterinary services market. As production animal enterprises consolidate or specialise and performance animals travel to compete nationally, reforms which enable the integrated delivery of veterinary services on an Australia-wide basis are vital so that the profession is able to meet existing and future market demand for veterinary services.

In conjunction with the Australasian Veterinary Boards Council (AVBC) and Australia's Animal Health Committee, the AVA helped to develop the model for national recognition of veterinary registration across Australia.

To date most Australian jurisdictions have adopted these changes, however the Northern Territory has only partially done so through free registration for visiting veterinarians. This still requires notification and processing of registration paperwork that is not required in other jurisdictions.

The 2015 Productivity Commission's report into mutual recognition schemes recommended that:

Current initiatives to adopt automatic mutual recognition for licensed professionals who provide services across borders on a temporary basis should be implemented.

The Governments of Western Australia, the Northern Territory and the ACT should, by 31 December 2016, legislate to extend the National Recognition of Veterinarians scheme to their jurisdictions.

Recommendations

- That the national recognition of veterinarians be fully implemented in the Northern Territory with appropriate amendments to the *Veterinarians Act 1994*.

Acts of veterinary science

Acts of veterinary science are those procedures that are only permitted to be performed by, or under the direct supervision of a qualified veterinarian. This is because of the extensive knowledge of veterinary medicine required and the significant potential for causing harm to animals.

Recent changes in the Veterinary Regulations has created loopholes for non-veterinarians to perform procedures that should be restricted. In particular, the scaling and polishing of dogs and cats teeth are services offered by most veterinary clinics.

While it is not necessary for these procedures to be delivered by the veterinarian directly, they should only occur, on an animal welfare grounds, on anaesthetised animals and under direct veterinary supervision.

Failure to do this will lead to poor outcomes for the consumers and animals, as well as placing service deliverers at unnecessary risk. The welfare of the animals can not be safeguarded without sedation and the procedure by "lay people" is unethical as a thorough assessment of the mouth for disease must only be done by a veterinarian.

Not only is the risk of injury high without proper sedation, the resulting 'cleaning' is likely to be very superficial as access to subgingival areas of every tooth is impossible in unanaesthetised animals. In dogs and cats, the teeth can appear normal, however, there can be advanced dental disease subgingivally.

Finally, veterinarians are accountable under the *Veterinarians Act 1994*.

This means that the community has an effective recourse to protect both animals and consumers against mistreatment.

Recommendations

- That the exemption in the Veterinarian Regulations for scaling and polishing of small animals teeth be removed.

Further Information

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