



AVA Queensland Election Platform 2020

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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 9000 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.

Summary

Animals play a key role in Queensland's economy and in the lives of people and the community. Agriculture is a key contributor to Queensland's economic prosperity and the beef industry where Queensland is the largest producer of beef and veal in Australia and Australia is the third largest exporter of beef in the world. Queensland has over 2,500 registered veterinarians and 2 veterinary schools and is in a prime position to contribute to this prosperity.

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 AVA is committed to contributing to the economic sustainability of Queensland through the protection of its livestock industries from disease. Maximising animal health and welfare leads to improved livestock sector productivity and profitability. As well as supporting our valuable livestock industries, the veterinary profession also works to protect the health and welfare of all animals in Queensland, including companion animals and wildlife.

AVA priorities

1. **Protection of the Queensland economy** through effective disease surveillance for livestock and companion animal exotic and endemic disease. Veterinarians through being a regulated profession with mandated standards of competencies provide credibility to our livestock export markets to substantiate Queensland's animal health status (freedom of diseases of concern) and to ensure animal welfare throughout the animal's life including accurate pregnancy diagnosis in cattle.
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 via the Veterinary Surgeons' Act to protect both animals and the consumer. The AVA also supports legislation to allow the keeping of pets in rental accommodation and units.
3. **Protection of animals** through education, disaster planning and responding to animals in need.



The AVA's 8-point plan to sustain and enhance these priorities is detailed below.

Protecting the economy: Biosecurity and Surveillance:

1. Ensure more veterinarians on farms for early detection of disease by:

- a) Forming formal partnerships with private veterinarians to fully utilise the resource and capability of veterinarians, who can be the eyes and ears for the Queensland livestock industry
- b) Set up active surveillance programs to ensure disease freedom
- c) Ensuring restricted acts of veterinary science are retained in legislation, including cattle pregnancy testing

Comment

The key to avoiding a catastrophic impact from exotic disease such as Foot and Mouth Disease is early detection. Veterinarians are highly trained professionals who are at the forefront of recognising potential disease disasters well before the disease progresses into escalating deaths on multiple farms. To enable this critical work to be performed, veterinarians need to be regularly present on farms.

The decision to deregulate certain acts of veterinary science (as defined under the Act) will result in an exacerbated lack of veterinary surveillance. Up to 40% of cattle practitioners' income arises from pregnancy testing cattle, and deregulation will see a further decrease in rural veterinary practitioner numbers. Veterinarians will not be on farms to recognise early clinical signs and raise the alarm. This poses a significant threat to biosecurity and thus to maintaining Australia's favourable animal health status and valuable export markets.

With lower veterinary engagement and on farm presence the ability for primary producers to access prescription animal medications (especially antibiotics) in a legal manner and to receive appropriate advice on how best to administer them, and how to manage residue and antimicrobial resistance issues will be vastly decreased. Antimicrobial resistance is one of the major One Health issues facing the world at the moment and deregulation will contribute to escalate this problem.

Animal welfare outcomes will also be jeopardised by this change. Not only will veterinarians be less engaged in the cattle supply chain, but serious welfare consequences exist when poorly trained and inexperienced lay operators are allowed to perform rectal palpation and ultrasound examination. A lay operator in one of the Australian states is currently under investigation after the rectums of 17 dairy cattle were perforated in a single episode resulting in the deaths of all 17 animals. The risks of incidents such as these occurring will only increase with greater numbers of lay operators performing pregnancy testing.

The reputational damage to our domestic and international markets from poor animal welfare outcomes will be significant. This decision places the cattle live export industry at much increased risk of reputational damage (and subsequent loss of market share) through inaccurate pregnancy diagnosis by lay operators. There have been many examples of this in states such as the Northern Territory and Western Australia where animals incorrectly diagnosed as being not pregnant have entered the live export supply chain only to calve either on board live export vessels or in destination markets.



2. Ensure minimum time delays in disease diagnoses by facilitating rapid testing:

- a) Ensure testing facilities are closer to risk areas. In particular, **reopen regional laboratories** or testing equivalent in **Townsville** and **Toowoomba**
- b) Provide free transport of samples to the laboratory (as NSW does)
- c) Have faster turnaround times for laboratory testing, in particular Hendra virus

Comment

Covid-19 has exposed a vulnerability in Queensland's ability to respond rapidly to disease. With only one laboratory in Brisbane for the whole of Queensland and restrictions on movements, and closures of airlines, there are no rapid means to get samples to Brisbane when required. This could result in a potentially catastrophic disease event that would affect Australia's export beef market and cripple the Queensland economy. From an **animal welfare** position, the very real delays in getting Hendra virus diagnosed results in delays in horses receiving treatment for colic or other conditions and the delay often results in prolonged pain and suffering for these animals because there is no north Queensland facility to do the testing.

Protection of the community

3. Complete the review of *The Veterinary Surgeons Act* and implement the recommendations of the 2014 review.

Comment

The community benefits from regulation of the veterinary profession in that they can have confidence in the standards of services afforded to their livestock and their pet animals. *The Veterinary Surgeons Act* has not been reviewed in its entirety since 1936. A full consultation review with recommendations was completed in 2014 but was discarded upon change of government. The 2014 review report and its recommendations were distributed to the AVA. The AVA supported the review findings and endorsed the recommendations. It was consistent with the AVA national paper "**Recommended key principles for veterinary practice acts in Australia**" which was endorsed by the AVA board on 24 April 2017. This paper was the result a detailed review of all the practice acts in Australia and was completed over 12 months by a taskforce comprised of veterinarians from different state Veterinary Boards.



4. Continue to ensure legislation supports the keeping of pets in rental accommodation and units.

Comment

One of the greatest barriers to pet ownership is pet-unfriendly property. The shift towards higher-density housing in urban areas of Australia to manage population growth is the biggest current threat to pet ownership in Australia. Ownership of pets contributes to a number of human health benefits such as fewer doctor visits, reduction in stress, overall improvement in mental health and increased social support for individuals. Pet ownership can improve cardiovascular health - with dogs in particular acting as a stimulus for exercise. Research shows that pet ownership encourages physical activity, and that children aged 5-6 in families which own a dog are less likely to be overweight or suffer from allergies compared with those who do not own a dog. Studies have found a correlation between the presence of companion animals and the alleviation of depression, loneliness and low morale, and improved ability to cope with chronic illnesses such as heart disease, dementia and cancer. All of these health benefits contribute to significant savings in human health expenditure each year.

Protecting Animals

5. Allow veterinarians to euthanase unowned animals where it is cruel to keep them alive.

Comment

Queensland and Western Australia are the only two jurisdictions in Australia where veterinarians are not allowed by law to put an animal out of its suffering if the owner is not known. This means that on weekends and after hours, the animal will suffer unnecessarily and may die a painful death due to unavailability of inspectors who can authorise the euthanasia. In Victoria, veterinary practitioners have a legal obligation under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 (POCTA)* to euthanase animals which in their professional opinion are distressed, diseased or disabled to such an extent that their condition cannot be satisfactorily relieved by veterinary care. In NSW, the law authorises and indemnifies veterinary practitioners to be able to euthanase an animal where it is so severely injured, so diseased or in such a physical condition that it is cruel to keep it alive. Similar legislation exists all other jurisdictions except for Western Australia. This must be implemented in QLD to address this serious animal welfare issue.



6 Ensure that the AVA Pets and People Education Program (PetPEP) which has been in Queensland for the past 22 years is adequately funded.

Comment

AVA PetPEP is the largest proactive animal welfare education program in Queensland which reaches over 20,000 students and over 400 primary schools each year. It is a collaborative effort between councils, veterinarians, Biosecurity Queensland, welfare groups and other animal professionals to deliver responsible animal management and welfare messages to primary school children. It is coordinated by the AVA and funding of this coordination has always been tenuous. With COVID-19 affecting organisations, there has been a pullback of support from many councils and welfare organisations. In order for this very valuable program to continue, the AVA requests a one-off funding grant to meet the shortfall and then to look at more sustainable ways to ensure that PetPEP continues to deliver proactive messages to our children.

7 Natural Disasters: Ensure that pets and animals are part of the formal disaster management response, rather than being an optional decision by the Local Disaster Management Group.

Comment

Animals are often excluded in natural disaster response plans. While recognizing that human life is prioritised in emergency responses, there is much that can be done for animals. Veterinarians and skilled animal welfare officers can contribute a great deal in coordinating disaster search areas to assess and treat animals after fire, floods or cyclones but often when their services are offered, there are no coordinated or designated roles for them. At times, animals are not permitted to accompany their owners during evacuations and whether that happens or not depends entirely on the individual rescuer. Shelters sometimes allow animals and others not. Veterinarians are an underutilised resource during emergencies in Queensland to the detriment of animal welfare, and this does not align with community expectations. Animals must be considered within formal response plans. Other states have more advanced plans to cater for this and Queensland would do well to review these plans and build a world class response.



8 Ensure regulatory response to cruelty is timely and appropriate and supported by adequate training of inspectors.

Comment

Gaps in enforcement of animal cruelty were demonstrated by the alarming treatment of horses as reported on the ABC's "The 7.30 report" in late 2019. The Martin Inquiry recommendations have since been adopted in principle by the Queensland government and significant improvements have been made. Vigilance needs to be maintained and AVA views the following areas as key components to ensure that these events do not occur again. Independent auditing and monitoring of all livestock processing establishments

- Mandatory reporting of all potential cruelty cases
- CCTV cameras established at all points of the abattoir process
- Codes for best practice for humane conduct and standards including recognition of multifactorial stress response in horses
- Training and upskilling of inspectors

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