

Submission from the Cat Protection Society of NSW to the Australian Government review of the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS)

The Cat Protection Society of NSW (Cat Protection) is a registered charity that has been caring for cats since 1958. Our vision is that every cat has a loving and responsible home. Our mission is to work with the community at all levels for the mutual benefit of cats, people and the natural environment.

We operate a best-practice feline shelter; work in partnership with veterinarians to provide community feline health and welfare programs including desexing and vaccination; participate in research and policy about feline health, welfare and wellbeing; and other activities that support the human-feline bond.

We operate in a One Health/One Welfare framework, which recognises that good welfare is fundamental to good health – animals and people with poor welfare have poor health. Good social, mental and physical health provide the foundations for people’s positive wellbeing, education, social and economic participation.

Poor welfare states (eg fear, anxiety, stress, mental anguish, overcrowding, poor nutrition, stress, lack of proper sleep and rest, lack of access to care, lack of exercise and mental stimulation, loneliness) lead to poor health outcomes in people and animals, and these negative outcomes continue to feed into a cycle of poor health and welfare.

The AAWS vision statement must:

- **commit to a One Health/One Welfare approach**
- **recognise animal sentience**
- **promote positive animal welfare outcomes**
- **advance an ethical framework.**

The “leadership and coordination” work stream must embrace these principles. An ethical framework requires transparency (including proper whistleblower protections) and accountability and will assist in building trust.

We acknowledge that animal welfare can be complex and involve competing views. For the AAWS to truly address animal welfare, an independent statutory office of animal protection/welfare must be established. Current arrangements prioritise commercial interests, not animal welfare, nor the health and wellbeing of people and the environment. The independent office should be supported by experts in animal welfare science; ethics; and human public health.

The Voiceless Animal Cruelty Index rates Australia (along with Belarus) as “worst” and notes that Australia is rated only a “marginal” performer under the World Animal Protection Index. Clearly this does not demonstrate “that Australia values the welfare of all animals” and certainly offers enormous opportunity for improvement.

<https://vaci.voiceless.org.au/countries/australia/>

One Welfare/One Health

Human health and wellbeing are interconnected with the welfare and health of animals and the environment: we all need clean air, clean water, and disease mitigation for good health. Our ecosystems are shared. A summary of the concept can be found here: [One Welfare – a platform for improving human and animal welfare \(onewelfareworld.org\)](https://www.onewelfareworld.org)

A clear example of the need for a One Health/One Welfare approach is the misuse and overuse of antimicrobials, which has led to the global health crisis of antimicrobial resistance (AMR). In 2019, the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared AMR as one of the top ten global public health threats. It is estimated that by 2050, there will be 10 million people dying due to drug-resistant infection. Hospitals are a key site for the transmission of AMR bacteria. AMR in agriculture and farming also pose a serious risk to human health (as well as animal health and the environment). [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/eclinm/article/PIIS2589-5370\(21\)00502-2/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/eclinm/article/PIIS2589-5370(21)00502-2/fulltext)

In a joint statement by Australia's Chief Medical Officer, Chief Veterinary Officer and Chief Environmental Biosecurity Officer to mark World Antimicrobial Awareness Week in 2021, they said: "Antimicrobial resistance is happening right now and affects all Australians. It also affects animals and the shared environment we live all live in." <https://www.amr.gov.au/news/joint-statement-australias-chief-medical-officer-chief-veterinary-officer-and-chief-environmental-biosecurity-officer-mark-world-antimicrobial-awareness-week-2021>

The Australian Government's *National Antimicrobial Resistance Strategy – 2020 and Beyond* states "In this long-term Strategy, Australia commits to tackling antimicrobial resistance in humans, animals, food and the environment as a priority. This will be done under the 'One Health' approach, which recognises the interconnection between people, animals, plants and their shared environment." (p2) "Infections are the core reason for antimicrobial use; therefore, efforts to prevent, reduce and control their spread helps lower the need for antimicrobials in the first place. The less antimicrobials used, the less opportunity there is for organisms to develop resistance." (p7)

As poor welfare leads to poor health, it follows that strategies to improve welfare will improve health, and thus play an important role in tackling AMR.

Finally, the *Strategy* also emphasises that AMR is "one of the most complex public health threats the world has ever faced: its potential implications range from economic, human and animal health, food safety and agriculture to environment and trade ... Reducing the need for, and use of, antimicrobials will require Australians from all walks of life – including patients, animal owners, consumers and civil society organisations – to gain a greater understanding and appreciation of the dangers posed by antimicrobial resistance." (p14) <https://www.amr.gov.au/resources/australias-national-antimicrobial-resistance-strategy-2020-and-beyond>

Good animal welfare is essential to dealing with the increasing threats of AMR. The proven link between cruelty to animals (sanctioned or illegal) and violence to people is another of the many reasons why the revised AAWS must commit to a One Health/One Welfare framework.

Veterinary workforce

Veterinarians are critical, frontline health practitioners who are vital to managing AMR; biosecurity; zoonotic diseases; and promoting human and non-human animal physical and mental health and wellbeing. Their work delivers profound direct and indirect economic, health and social benefits to our communities.

Australia has a veterinary workforce shortage that puts these benefits (and the veterinary workforce itself) at risk. The impact of this shortage has been the subject of a detailed inquiry by the NSW Legislative Council Portfolio Committee – 4 Regional NSW.

The Committee has tabled a comprehensive report with recommendations to address the many issues identified. This report must be considered in the development of a new Australian Animal Welfare Strategy.

[Report No. 58 - PC 4 - Veterinary workforce shortage in New South Wales.pdf \(nsw.gov.au\)](#)

The “research and development” stream needs to consider domestic capabilities for the development and production of essential veterinary medicines.

Animal sentience and welfare

The AAWS must recognise animal sentience and must promote positive animal welfare. Good welfare is not achieved by merely the absence of cruelty. Cat Protection recommends AAWS adopt the Five Domains Model as the framework to guide animal welfare assessment.

[Animals | Free Full-Text | The 2020 Five Domains Model: Including Human–Animal Interactions in Assessments of Animal Welfare \(mdpi.com\)](#)

Research using animals must be demonstrably necessary and ethically justified. There needs to be greater transparency and accountability, and alternatives to the use of animals prioritised.

Unnecessary procedures should be banned. Animals should not be subject to pain or distress. The use of 1080 should be subject to a nationwide ban.

Standards for animal welfare must recognise sentience, promote high positive animal welfare and must be clear, communicated and enforced. Bland guidelines that are not enforceable are not sufficient.

The AAWS should recognise that animal sentience and welfare are universal and do not depend on how an animal is categorised. Demonising a single species by labelling them a particular way (such as “pest” or “feral”) does not justify cruelty and does not rob those animals of their sentience. This continued misuse of language is a deliberate strategy to deny the pain and suffering caused to animals.

In any circumstance, animals deserve to be treated humanely, with respect for their intrinsic self, for their dignity and sentience.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

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