



3 August 2015

Committee Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee
PO Box 6100
Canberra ACT 2600

Via email: rrat.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Members,

Submission to Voice for Animals (Independent Officer of Animal Welfare) Bill 2015

RSPCA Australia thanks the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee (the Committee) for the opportunity to comment on the *Voice for Animals (Independent Office of Animal Welfare) Bill 2015* (the Bill).

We support the intent of the Bill. A national approach to animal welfare policy and independent oversight of the effectiveness of the live animal export regulatory framework is desperately needed.

In 2013 the Australian Government withdrew its funding support of the *Australian Animal Welfare Strategy* (AAWS) and disbanded the advisory groups that oversaw its implementation. As a result, Australia no longer has national leadership or direction on important matters of animal welfare policy such as achieving national consistency in animal welfare standards. State and territory jurisdictions are largely left to pursue their own agendas and this is creating a fragmented, reactionary and undemocratic approach to animal welfare policy and standards development. The Australian Farm Institute's (AFI) recent report on animal welfare policy stated that the dismantling of the AAWS framework 'leaves considerable ambiguity as to the way that scientific issues, community perceptions, and socioeconomic impacts will be represented.'¹ We agree with much of the AFI's analysis. There is currently no national government forum for stakeholders to come together to discuss animal welfare policy issues, nor is there any framework for reviewing and incorporating scientific advances on animal welfare into the development of animal welfare standards.

A national approach is needed to promote consistency and to develop a proactive strategy that addresses animal welfare issues before they become national headlines. This will create further certainty for business, investment and trade, reduce unnecessary duplication at a state government level, and most importantly, contribute to the sustained improvement of animal welfare standards across the country.

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¹ Australian Farm Institute, *Designing balanced and effective farm animal welfare policies for Australia*, 2015, p.42.



New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Canada and the European Union all have formally established expert animal welfare advisory bodies operating at the national or supra-national level. The absence of any equivalent body in Australia represents a lost opportunity for promoting better standards of animal welfare and is putting our industries at a competitive disadvantage when it comes to trade, market access and consumer confidence.

To be truly effective at leading national policy and standards development the establishment of a federal Office of Animal Welfare should ideally have the support of the state and territory jurisdictions. While we support the intent of the Bill and believe a federal Office of Animal Welfare would be a historic development in Australia's approach to animal welfare policy we would like to see further discussion and consultation with state jurisdictions before proceeding with the proposed model.

Accordingly, we call on the Australian Government to respond to the community's demands to see animal welfare taken seriously by facilitating consultations with key stakeholders on the establishment of a national approach to animal welfare policy and standards development. This will not only be in the interests of animal welfare and the growing number of Australians who are concerned about the treatment of animals, but it will also be in the long-term interests of Australian businesses and industries.

We trust our submission has been of assistance in conveying our position on the Bill. Please do not hesitate to contact our office should you require further clarification or information.

Yours sincerely,

Heather Neil
Chief Executive Officer
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