Renewing the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy

Survey

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Yes

2 [Blank question text]
Not answered

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Yes

4 Confirm that you have read and understand this declaration.
Yes

5 First name
Tara

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8 Who are you answering on behalf of?

Organisation

9 Organisation name:

Animal Defenders Office Inc.

10 What state or territory do you live in?

Australian Capital Territory

11 Where do you reside?

Metropolitan (capital cities, other metropolitan areas, population greater than 100,000)

12 Which sector best describes you or the organisation you work for?

Other: "Community Legal Centre"

13 Are you currently an agriculture, fisheries or forestry levy payer?

No

14 Which Rural Research and Development Corporation do you pay levies towards?

Not answered

15 Does this vision statement reflect everything you feel an Australian Animal Welfare Strategy should aim to achieve?

No

16 Is there anything else it should include?

The proposed statement is conservative and non-aspirational. It is does not directly reference animals. They remain the last-mentioned thing in the proposed statement, almost as an after-thought. It should refer to animals up front and for their own sake. It must refer to animals' sentience as the very reason their welfare matters. Similarly, the intrinsic value of animals must be acknowledged. Otherwise the renewed AAWS will

simply 'set a course for yesterday', where animal welfare remains a question of productivity and given relevance only by reference to humans.
The vision statement could incorporate wording about sentience and intrinsic value from an existing Australian animal welfare law (ACT) as suggested:
"To ensure an Australian animal welfare system that recognises that animals are sentient beings and have intrinsic value and that identifies national priorities with actions and outcomes based on this recognition, and to become a world leader in animal welfare."

17 Do the above proposed streams cover the right priority areas for the strategy?

Yes

18 Are there other priority areas that you think are important and should be added to the strategy?

Climate change could be its own priority area. The stream could implement a coordinated approach to identifying the contribution of farmed animals and other animal industries to causing climate change, and mechanisms for mitigating this that prioritise animal replacements (rather than refinement of animal use).

Community attitudes to animals and animal welfare could be its own priority area. The AAWS should enable monitoring and tracking of long-term trends in public attitudes about animals to ensure Australia's approach to animal welfare remains relevant and consistent with public values and expectations.

19 Are there any you feel are not a priority area?

Not answered

20 Are there any shared factors affecting animal welfare that cut across all, or multiple, animal groups? For example: climate change, innovation, workforce retention.

Animal sentience should be clearly indicated as a factor that cuts across all the animal groups.

A shared factor that cuts across multiple animal groups is the need for animal replacements in industry and research contexts, especially how that affects the long-term sustainability of those industries or animal-use sectors.

Equal representation of animal protection and advocacy organisations in all aspects of the strategy is another shared factor that cuts across all animal groups.

21 How can the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy address these in a practical way?

The AAWS should acknowledge animal sentience and the intrinsic value of animals at every point, reinforcing these as the reason animal welfare matters.

The AAWS could implement a framework for promoting and funding independent research into animal replacements in animal industry (especially food) and animal research (eg biomedical and toxicity testing) contexts.

The AAWS should clearly set out minimum representation quotas for organisations whose main object is the protection of animals (rather than their use by humans). This could be modelled on Animal Experimentation Ethics Committees but must ensure that animal protection/advocacy organisations have equal representation with animal user representatives, to ensure that outcomes reflect true consensus between these perspectives. Otherwise the current situation where industry and user interests that inherently conflict with animal welfare will continue to dominate.

22 What do you think are the biggest challenges facing Australia's animal welfare system?

2: Community values and expectations about animal welfare issues are constantly changing, while improvements in animal welfare science can take time to develop and implement.
3: There is a complex relationship between animal welfare regulation, productivity and community expectations.
4: The national standards development system is complex and not currently meeting all stakeholder needs.
5: Developing a fit-for-purpose national strategy that suits all audiences, taking into account that different groups of stakeholders may have different expectations and interests.
6: Animal welfare is primarily a state and territory responsibility providing challenges with a harmonised approach to decision-making.

23 Are there additional challenges in the animal welfare system that have not been listed above, which the renewed strategy should consider?

The lack of independent government-funded regulators is perhaps the biggest challenge facing Australia's animal welfare system. While animal welfare continues to be regulated by primary industry and agriculture or other animal-use government agencies, and largely enforced by private charities, animal welfare will continue to be deprioritised and sidelined. Community concerns over the perception of conflicting interests were noted in research commissioned by the federal Department of Agriculture in 2018 (Futureye, Australia's Shifting Mindset on Farm Animal Welfare). This inherent conflict of interest in most aspects of animal welfare in Australia, including governance and research, must be acknowledged and addressed by policy- and lawmakers if Australia's commitment to animal welfare is to be taken seriously by the public and international partners.

24 What do you think are the biggest opportunities for Australia's animal welfare system?

2: There is a changing social licence, reflecting the intrinsic value of animals and their importance to people.
3: Overseas trading partners are increasingly interested in Australia's animal welfare credentials.
4: There is a strong research community, focused on developing and considering contemporary animal welfare science and evidence and coordinating research and data collection across jurisdictions.
5: Animal welfare has become part of national conversations including biosecurity, animal health and productivity.
6: Agriculture Ministers are focused on animal welfare and work is underway to improve national standards setting.
7: Animal industry and animal-related industries are increasingly building animal welfare into industry-level sustainability plans and work practices.

25 Are there additional opportunities for improvements in the animal welfare system that have not been listed above, which the renewed strategy should consider?

Additional opportunities for improving the animal welfare system in Australia are:

- To recognise animal sentience and the intrinsic value of animals and to base animal welfare strategies, policies and laws on this fundamental recognition.
- To create a national independent office of animal welfare or animal welfare commission that can operate without a perception of bias or conflict of interest and with a true social licence; and to encourage and promote the creation of similar independent agencies at all levels of government in Australia.
- To encourage and promote the adoption at all levels of government in Australia of the

Five Domains model of animal welfare to better assess the welfare impacts of human interventions in the lives of other animals. This would help ensure that subjective experiences and mental states are taken into account when considering an animal's welfare.

26 Is there anything else you would like to be considered in the development of the strategy, within the scope described in this discussion paper?

The AAWS could identify some key animal welfare priorities based on the number of parliamentary and government inquiries and other measures of public concern about certain practices. These would be welfare priorities that past and current approaches have failed to lead to meaningful reform despite deep public concern about the way the animals affected by these industries or practices are treated. These priorities could include the use of battery cages for egg-laying hens, raising and slaughtering pigs in intensive conditions, the treatment of dairy bobby calves, the live export of all animals involving long-haul journeys by sea, the mulesing of sheep used to grow wool, the export trade in native wildlife products such as kangaroos, and the use of poisons such as 1080 for killing wild animals.