Animal Welfare Matters in the 2017 WA State Election
Contents

120 years of caring for animals .......................................................... 3
Animal Welfare in Western Australia 2017 and beyond ......................... 4
Area 1: Delivering regional equity in animal welfare .............................. 5
Area 2: Animal care and rehabilitation ................................................. 6
Area 3: Addressing puppy farming and irresponsible dog breeding .......... 7
Area 4: Delivering leadership and driving innovation in animal welfare 8-9
Area 5: Supporting family and domestic violence victims ....................... 10
References ......................................................................................... 11
120 years of caring for animals

RSPCA WA is Western Australia’s leading and most highly regarded animal welfare organisation. Eight out of every ten people in WA say our work is essential to the welfare of animals in this State.

The community respects our knowledge of animal welfare, which is grounded in science1 and based on experience. In the 120 years since RSPCA WA was established, we have helped thousands of animals in need in all kinds of situations: in homes, backyards, on farms, in the wild and sports arenas. Community trust and respect for our work, along with sound scientific evidence, is the foundation on which RSPCA WA is built.

RSPCA WA is calling on all Members of Parliament and the next State Government after the State election in March 2017 to show the people of Western Australia that they care for and support the welfare of all animals in our community.

During 2015 - 2016, RSPCA WA:
- Investigated over 6,400 reports of animal cruelty in WA
- Provided care for more than 200 animals everyday
- Provided information to thousands of people on animal welfare, responsible animal care and pet ownership through school, community and online education

Animals play a central role in the lives of many people. More than seven in every ten West Australians, whether they live in suburbia, on rural properties or in regional towns, say animal welfare is important or extremely important to them. Our role is to act as a conduit for the community’s concerns about animal welfare, to ensure those concerns are heard by our decision makers.

RSPCA WA is calling on all Members of Parliament and the next State Government to show the people of Western Australia that they care for and support the welfare of all animals in our community.

1 See page 11 for references
Animal Welfare in WA 2017 and beyond

The State election provides the opportunity for all political parties to reaffirm their commitment to animal welfare. This document sets out five priority areas to improve animal welfare in Western Australia, for which RSPCA WA seeks support. The organisation is experiencing enormous public demand for our services. This year, we have investigated 6,472 animal cruelty complaints. Community demands for better animal welfare are in line with independent survey results, showing the majority of West Australians believe animal welfare is important or extremely important to them.

We know we speak for the majority of West Australians when we say animal welfare should be high on the agenda of all political parties seeking office in the State election.

Animal welfare makes good social and economic sense. Producers and retailers continue to recognise the business benefits of good animal welfare practices as consumer demand increases for higher welfare food products. Governments, keen to diversify their regional economies, are seizing the opportunity in agriculture by stimulating innovation and growth to deliver a comparative and competitive advantage in clean, green and humane food production. RSPCA WA can, and does, play an important role.

We have identified five priorities that we believe will improve animal welfare and, in some cases, stimulate economic growth. These policy instruments are within the power of the State Government. They are a blend of recommended actions that will improve the lives of many animals, foster innovation for producers and support regional communities. They will enable us to continue to meet the increasing demands of the WA community for better animal welfare.

We are calling on MPs to demonstrate a genuine commitment to animal welfare by taking action in these five key areas:

**AREA 1**
Delivering regional equity in animal welfare: funding for six new animal welfare officers in regional Western Australia

**AREA 2**
Animal care and rehabilitation: co-investment in a new rescue and rehabilitation Animal Care Centre in the South Metropolitan Region

**AREA 3**
Addressing puppy farming and irresponsible dog breeding

**AREA 4**
Delivering leadership and driving innovation on animal welfare

**AREA 5**
Supporting family and domestic violence victims: through supporting a Pets in Crisis support program
RSPCA WA currently has seven animal welfare officers (Inspectors) working in the Perth Metropolitan area and four in regional areas of the State: Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Albany and Bunbury.

The Inspectors provide education for animal owners, the general public and schools, and deliver animal health and animal welfare compliance activities. They work with Local Government, the Police and Department of Agriculture and Food officers to enforce the law under the Animal Welfare Act 2002.

Whilst we have built a strong network with a range of partners, there is a significant and growing unmet need in rural and regional areas. More resources are required within the RSPCA WA Inspectorate team to meet community demand and to achieve regional equity.

Our focus on partnerships with Local Governments, schools and community groups is a valued and respected community resource. Funding animal welfare officers within RSPCA WA is cost effective and provides extremely good value for money. Whilst the organisation receives $500,000 per year from the State, the annual cost to deliver animal welfare services is in excess of $3 million. For every State dollar invested, the community receives a five-time return and this doesn’t include the savings made through our education services, which prevent animal cruelty and costly prosecutions.

Regional WA is disadvantaged by not having access to this service. Additional RSPCA WA Inspectors should be located in areas where there is a demonstrated need and where Local Government and community requests for additional assistance on animal welfare issues are regularly made. These areas include the Kimberley, Pilbara, Gascoyne, Goldfields- Esperance, Great Southern and South West regions of the State.

Area 1: Delivering regional equity in animal welfare

THE WAY FORWARD

A commitment of an additional $4.8 million over four years to six new animal welfare officers to be located in the Kimberley, Pilbara, Gascoyne, Goldfields- Esperance, Great Southern and South West regions of the State

Return on investment

• Thousands more animals protected from cruelty every year
• Greater support for Local Governments and the Police across regional WA
• Significant increase in education and public program activities relating to building empathy and compassion for animals, and responsible pet ownership
• Significant increase in compliance and enforcement coverage across the State
Area 2: Animal care and rehabilitation

RSPCA WA provides a safe haven for animals in crisis that have been neglected, abused or abandoned. We do this through accommodation at our animal shelter in Malaga, through partnerships with other animal welfare organisations and through our network of foster carers. Many animals require intensive care and rehabilitation at the shelter until they are ready for foster homes or permanent rehoming.

RSPCA WA’s Malaga shelter in the northern suburbs is typically full to capacity. These animals come to the shelter from all over the State and there is a growing need for an additional and more contemporary rescue and rehabilitation centre for animals in crisis. This includes holding facilities for companion animals, wildlife and livestock; a veterinary clinic; exercise and training yards; facilities for adoption and foster care programs; and community education programs.

The South Metropolitan corridor is one of the fastest growing areas of the State, with significant population growth and increased rates of animal ownership. This growth area is not serviced by a contemporary care or rehabilitation centre. Possible locations for a new service include the Town of Kwinana, City of Cockburn, City of Melville, City of Canning and City of Gosnells. This new facility would provide treatment, rehabilitation and rehoming programs for around 2,000 animals per year and generate employment for up to 40 full and part-time staff. It would provide pound services for Local Government Authorities in the region and develop and manage a program for approximately 100 volunteers, while delivering engaging and innovative education and prevention programs to schools and communities in areas of need.

RSPCA WA’s experience with a centre for animals in the northern suburbs has shown this model of service delivery is well supported by the community and is cost effective for the State and Local Councils. Savings and efficiencies will be realised through reduced animal transportation costs, targeted educational and cruelty prevention activities, more timely rehoming of animals and the growth of operational income streams to support ongoing costs.

The capital cost of this new facility is estimated at $12 million. Support from the State, in partnership with RSPCA WA and the broader community, will deliver this much needed community facility.

THE WAY FORWARD

A commitment to co-invest $8 million over the forward estimates for a new rescue and rehabilitation centre for animals in crises. This will be supported by funding of an estimated $23 million by RSPCA WA and its supporters over a five-year period.

Return on investment

- $8 million in State Government funding will be supported by $23 million in RSPCA WA funding over a five-year period. This will continue to grow and compound every year thereafter
- A new, high-value community asset in the growing South Metropolitan Region, which is forecast to employ 40 staff and a large number of volunteers
- A state-of-the-art pound facility providing a service to four Local Government Authorities and potentially 400,000 residents
- Care and rehabilitation for more than 2,000 animals each year
Puppy farming and irresponsible dog breeding can lead to poor welfare for the breeding animals and their puppies. It can lead to bitches having too many litters or breeding when they are too young. Indiscriminate breeding may also result in genetic faults in the puppies, leading to painful physical deformities and behavioural problems.

RSPCA WA Inspectors are regularly involved in investigating incidents relating to these poor breeding practices. Many rescued dogs require medical and behavioural training support for extended periods.

Another contributing factor to poor dog welfare is that there are no enforceable Guidelines or Codes of Practice for keeping a dog in WA, as in other states.

Mandatory de-sexing (with appropriate exemptions) should be the centrepiece of any proposed measures to control irresponsible dog breeding.

We believe the way forward is to modernise the WA Dog Act 1976 to include provisions that would prevent these cruel practices.

**THE WAY FORWARD**

Involves a commitment to:

Amend the Dog Act 1976 to:

- address compulsory de-sexing of dogs in WA with appropriate exemptions
- introduce compulsory breeder registration and ID
- stop puppy farming - ensure that point of sale regulations apply so that only dogs from registered breeders, recognised refuges and shelters can be sold in WA

Work with RSPCA WA to develop an enforceable Code of Practice for keeping a dog

**Return on investment**

- Great reduction in the number of abandoned, neglected and stray dogs
- Significant improvement in the welfare of thousands of dogs
- Decrease the number of puppies born with genetic disorders
Successive State Governments have recognised the challenges involved in transforming the Western Australian agriculture sector and are investing to secure new markets, attract new investment and build business skills, research and development.

RSPCA WA supports farming animals for food and fibre, as long as they are treated humanely. There is strong evidence that consumer sentiment has shifted to higher welfare, clean and green food. In response to consumer demand and contemporary science, countries, states and industry groups are phasing out traditional intensive farming practices². Australian retailers such as Coles and Woolworths have committed to sourcing higher welfare eggs and pork products³. However, in Western Australia industry reaction is piecemeal in response to international trends and consumer demand.

Humane farming is commercially viable on a large scale⁴. With the right industry strategy, Western Australia can get ahead of the game. There is the opportunity for proactive Government policy which stimulates higher welfare production systems, along with product branding and marketing to support producers and improve Western Australia’s domestic and international market positioning.

Area 4: Delivering leadership and driving innovation in animal welfare

Good legislation and policy is critical to drive reform. There has not been a review of the Animal Welfare Act 2002 (the Act) since its commencement. In order to achieve improved animal welfare outcomes in the State, the Act should be reviewed as a priority.

Currently, the Act centres on the criminal offence of cruelty (and a series of defences) with compliance and enforcement activities occurring as a reaction to offending. This creates a punitive and retrospective approach to animal welfare and does not prevent the cruelty from occurring in the first instance. The associated Regulations should be amended to improve animal welfare outcomes through the further development of Codes of Practice.

Also, Western Australia should adopt agreed national animal welfare Standards and Guidelines. For example the Government developed the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines: Land Transport of Livestock as appropriate management practice to minimise risks to animal welfare. This was endorsed by the Primary Industry Standing Committee in 2012. Western Australia remains the only State yet to take action and, as a result, livestock being transported in this State could be subjected to unnecessary stress and other welfare issues.

Animal welfare legislation that establishes basic standards of animal care could operate in a more proactive way, requiring owners to ensure that all the welfare needs of the animal are met, including a suitable diet and environment, the ability to exhibit normal behaviours and protection from pain, suffering, injury and disease. The new legislation should also retain the criminal offence of animal cruelty so prosecutions may be brought when necessary.

There is currently only a limited number of animal species covered and these could be extended across all animals, especially domestic animals for which there is currently no Code of Practice.
RSPCA WA seeks to work with the State Government, producers and industry to create an improved and innovative animal welfare sector in Western Australia. All animals deserve proper care and protection, whether they are in homes, backyards, on farms, in the wild or in sports arenas.

“WA can be an agrifood leader in the Asian Century by catalysing and encouraging growth opportunities in new and emerging markets.”

(Coriolis, Finding the Road Forward, Opportunities to Increase WA Agrifood Exports, Sept 2015)

THE WAY FORWARD

Involves a commitment to:

- Develop a Higher Animal Welfare Food Industry Strategy to drive innovation and growth in Western Australia’s agrifood sector

- Develop a Western Australian Animal Welfare Strategy which positions the State as a national leader in the way it cares for its animals

- Establish an Animal Welfare Advisory Council which brings together scientific experts, industry groups and community interests, to proactively address animal welfare issues throughout Western Australia

- Review the Animal Welfare Act 2002, associated Regulations and develop Codes of Practice, shifting from a punitive and retrospective approach to a focus on cruelty prevention

- Adopt the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines: Land Transport of Livestock to bring WA in line with all other States

Return on investment

- Improved animal welfare standards for thousands of animals
- Western Australia is positioned as the animal welfare leader nationally
- Significant growth in Western Australia’s Agrifood sector

See page 11 for references
Area 5: Supporting family and domestic violence victims

For many West Australians, a decision to leave their home because of a domestic violence situation becomes all the more challenging when family pets are involved.

Women, children and their much loved pets are trapped in violent households because the practical issues around leaving are overwhelming.

Some refuges have foster care arrangements for some types of pets, especially dogs, but most are not able to cater for any type of pet. RSPCA WA Inspectors frequently investigate animal cruelty cases linked to family violence and it is clear that a dedicated Pets in Crisis program is needed, aimed at providing facilities for the care and rehabilitation of affected animals and a ‘release’ for affected people.

This initiative would directly support The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022 and the State Government’s Western Australia’s Family and Domestic Violence Prevention Strategy to 2022.

THE WAY FORWARD

A commitment of $100,000 in one-off funding to RSPCA WA to establish a Pets in Crisis support program for domestic and family violence victims. This program will have the capacity to assist up to 30 families and their companion animals at any one time through the provision of veterinary, animal health and behavioural training services, and foster care programs.

Return on investment

- Dozens of at risk animals provided with safety at any given time
- Greater support for women and children trapped in violent households
- Greater support for agencies working with domestic and family violence victims
References


2 Australian Pork Limited, the peak pork industry body, announced in 2010 that it would "commit to pursuing the voluntary phasing out of the use of sow stalls by 2017" (Australian Pork Limited Annual Report 2010-2011).

Sow stalls have been banned in New Zealand, Switzerland, Netherlands, Finland and nine US States; they have been partially banned in the United Kingdom and Sweden. In Australia, the ACT and Tasmania have taken action to prohibit or restrict the use of sow stalls through law reform.

The European Union has legislated to phase out battery cages, as has California, Michigan and Ohio in the USA. In Australia, the ACT and Tasmania have legislated against battery cages.


4 In 1981, Switzerland established new requirements for the housing of chickens, which came into effect in 1991, effectively eliminating battery cages and making aviaries the most common method of raising hens.