

# Animal Welfare

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AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS ACTION PLAN  
ANIMAL WELFARE  
ENVIRONMENT AND HERITAGE

*Animals have an intrinsic worth - a value completely separate to their usefulness to humans. The Australian Democrats recognise animals as sentient beings, not just commodities, deserving of respect and protection from inhumane treatment. Suffering is suffering, regardless of the species.*

## Our Action Plan

- Advocate a nationally consistent approach to animal welfare strategies and policies that promote responsible management, care and use of animals, including a National Animal Welfare Bill
- Support the development and adoption of a UN Declaration on Animal Welfare
- Adequately fund animal welfare agencies so they can monitor and enforce animal welfare laws and codes of practice
- Improve training for legal and enforcement agencies in animal welfare, including the links between animal abuse and domestic violence
- End live exports and support on-shore humane halal and kosher slaughtering practices and the expansion of Australia's chilled, frozen and refrigerated carcass trade
- Ban battery cages and sow stalls
- Provide incentives to ensure the wool industry meets its commitment to end mulesing by 2010.
- Introduce national food labelling legislation that identifies the production system for animal derived food and provides mandatory standards for the labelling of vegetarian and vegan suitable products
- Advocate long term planning for animal population control and support non-lethal options such as relocation and sterilisation of the animals concerned wherever possible, with strictly limited, environmentally sensitive and humane culling a last resort
- Oppose trophy hunting of animals
- Provide more funding to animal welfare agencies to promote sterilization of intact dogs and cats and require licensing and permanent identification through

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microchipping and support public education campaigns that encourage responsible pet ownership

- Establish a national database on animal experimentation
- Support alternative techniques to animal usage in scientific and educational research and experimentation
- Improve and increase frequency of monitoring and review of all organisations and facilities using animals for research and experimentation
- Ensure zoos/animal parks provide the environment and conditions that the animals need
- Improve zoo standards to ensure that all zoos operate at a standard that replicates natural habitats and circumstances as closely as possible
- Remove all non-domesticated and exotic animals from circuses
- Ban rodeos
- Extend existing bans on jump racing of horses to all states and territories.

## The Issues

### Legislation

Australia has a **hodge-podge** of state and territory animal welfare legislation which makes it virtually impossible for there to be any rapid advancements in animal welfare. Diverse and incongruent state and territorial legislation minimise the opportunity to create binding codes of practice, reduce knowledge-sharing, render comprehensive monitoring impossible, ensure “uniform standards” remain lower common denominator, and put comparative state-by-state reviews out of the question. Despite most states and territories having revised or enacted their respective animal welfare legislation, it largely remains reactive. The emphasis seems to be on occasional expressions of outrage about acts of cruelty to individual animals after the event, rather than striving to prevent them. **Commonwealth legislation** would ensure consistency, effectiveness and efficiency

Individual state and territory legislation is further complicated by the fact that their animal welfare legislation has a large criminal component within it but it is not driven by their respective state or territory police forces. Instead, we see animal welfare legislation largely being enforced by the RSPCA Inspectorate, with some states and territories also granting special constable status to officers within a state Department of Primary Industries or equivalent authority. Enforcement is often impossible when **little or minimal resources** are made available.

Divergent state and territory legislation has contributed to inconsistency in judicial decisions and sentencing in relation to animal cruelty offenders. Animal cruelty and abuse are rarely isolated incidents. Research has established links to other forms of violence and the connection between animal abuse and violence against humans, such as domestic violence, is well documented.



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Billions of animals around the world are affected by humans, and rely on people to treat them with compassion. But sadly, in many countries there is little national and **no international protection** for animals. Animal welfare organizations around the world are urging the United Nations to adopt an international agreement on the welfare of animals.

## Farm Animals

Each year, millions of Australia's ½ billion farm animals suffer from inhumane treatment and cruelty that most people would consider unacceptable. These cruel practices such as battery hen farming, sow stalls, mulesing and live exports continue because they are not illegal and many people are not aware of the suffering associated with intensive farming practices.

**Battery hens** are kept in wire mesh cages only 40 cm high with a floor area about three-quarters of the size of an A4 piece of paper. Battery cages do not allow the hens to stand properly, preen their feathers, stretch out or flap their wings. Battery hens cannot perch, cannot roost, cannot dust bathe, cannot forage for food, and can not satisfy their urge to lay their eggs in a nest. The welfare of the battery-caged layer hen is the most compromised of all farm animals.

In Australia, the majority of the 300,000 female breeding pigs (sows) are kept inside sheds, continually pregnant and confined in tiny metal '**sow stalls**' for their entire 16 week pregnancies. These stalls are so small they cannot turn around or take more than one step forward or back, they have no bedding and are forced to give birth on a hard floor. Pigs are sociable creatures and have the cognitive ability of a 3 year old child. Despite the increasing public objection to the practice and phasing out of sow stalls in other industrialised countries, in April 2007 agriculture ministers decided to extend for another 10 years the practice.

Australia is one of the world's leading sheep producers and exporters with a national flock of an estimated 135 million sheep. Whilst the majority of sheep appear to have been less affected by intensive farming practices compared with other farm animals, their rearing can still involve considerable suffering and welfare problems. **Mulesing** is particularly contentious. This is where the skin around a lamb's backside is cut off (usually without pain relief) so that a bald scar area develops. It is intended to stop the accumulation of faeces and urine in wool that creates a paradise for blowflies to lay their eggs. Flystrike occurs when the maggots hatch then burrow into the flesh of sheep. The wool industry has proposed that surgical mulesing will be phased out by 2010 but there are no guarantees and millions of lambs will be subject to this painful process in the meantime. The Federal Government has given its full support to the wool industry, with Peter Costello even proposing the idea of new laws targeted at animal rights organisations to protect animal industries from any publicity campaigns which may affect them.

Despite all sorts of industry and government spin about improved conditions, public concern about **live exports** is overwhelming and continues to grow. Each year



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Australia ships over 3.5 million animals to countries with no animal welfare standards. The export of live sheep, cattle and goats for slaughter has serious welfare problems - some relate to transport conditions resulting in suffering and many deaths and others to a lack of control over what happens to animals once they reach their destination. Up to 13 out of every 1000 animals die on live transport vessels under normal circumstances, while death rates of 50% and 83% have occurred in some cases. There is also considerable evidence that practices that would not be acceptable in Australia are common in countries importing our live animals. The Australian Government can not make sure that animals are treated humanely once they have left the country.

Our current **food labelling** system is woefully inadequate when it comes to the labelling of animal derived food products. We do have a number of voluntary certification or quality assurance schemes which are helpful as far as they go but they are limited. We need uniform enforceable laws. Without mandated labelling and terms defined in law, there is no easy way of differentiating between more humanely produced products and intensive factory farmed products. In 2006 the European Commission adopted an animal welfare action plan which includes a proposal for an EU animal welfare label. This label would identify products produced under high welfare standards linked to scientific standardised indicators. As well as not having labelling requirements to identify whether animal derived food was produced humanely, Australia does not have any enforceable standards for the labelling of vegetarian or vegan products. This means that the many people who now, for environmental, ethical or health reasons, choose not to buy or eat animal products and by-products, may, and indeed often do, inadvertently end up consuming these products.

## Controlling Populations

Feral animals are estimated to cost Australia at least \$700 million in direct economic impacts—this does not take into account environmental or social impacts or long-term effects such as land degradation. About 80 introduced animal species have established significant wild populations in Australia, including rabbits, foxes, and feral cats. Native species may also pose a problem for the environment where they spread or are introduced outside of their natural range (e.g. koalas on Kangaroo Island) and/or where they become 'over-abundant' due to improved food/water supply and reduced competition/predation (e.g. kangaroos in some situations). Tens of thousands of unwanted dogs and cats are euthanized every year.

Populations which are considered problematic are often controlled in various ways such as fencing, fertility control, repellents, netting and scare devices. Culling through shooting and poisoning are common in larger operations. An increasing number of Australians are horrified by the brutality often involved in culls and the inhumane methods used to dispatch animals such as smashing the skulls of pouch young joeys with a hammer. Culling is often an expensive, hasty and ineffective response to a situation resulting from a lack of long term planning. Hunting is not a substitute for humane long term animal control policy.



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## Product Testing, research and education

Many people are not aware that so-called safety tests are conducted on live animals for a wide range of products including cosmetics and personal hygiene products (such as toothpaste and shampoos), household cleaners, pesticides, as well as medicines and vaccines. These cause horrible suffering and eventual death in many cases. Many scientists argue that the results from testing on other animals can not be reliably transferred to humans in any case.

Despite the many innovative and available alternatives to animal-based experiments and testing, millions of animals are used in research and teaching in Australia every year. Although there is a national code of practice requiring researchers to reduce their use of animals, the number of animals used in research is on the increase. Although there are difficulties in phasing out animal research, more needs to be done to ensure that animals are not used unless it is absolutely necessary and to minimise the number of animals.

## Animals in Sport and Entertainment

Circus animals are kept in cramped living conditions, are cared for by employees with little training in caring for such animals, have limited access to veterinary care, and are often subject to inhumane training processes. They have no chance to express their full range of natural behaviours or to socialize with other members of their species. There is a Code of Practice for the Welfare of Animals in Circuses but the Code of Practice does not ensure an adequate environment for these animals.

The aim of too many zoos is to attract hordes of visitors and entertain them and they do so by holding animals in unnatural conditions that prevent natural activities and behaviours. While some animals can thrive in a captive environment, others such as elephants suffer from many problems because many zoos cannot provide for the complex welfare needs of the animals or the space they require. Using nature as a yardstick to assess the quality of animals lives should be a priority rather than zoo standards which do not always offer enough in the way of animal welfare.

Rodeos cause stress and injury to animals for the sake of entertainment. The RSPCA opposes rodeos because the potential for injury or even death of animals is extremely high. Events such as calf and steer roping and bulldogging bear no relationship to existing Australian farming and may cause terror and abuse to the animal, physical distress and the strong possibility of injury without any consequent benefit to the animal. Electric or sharp prodders and flank straps use inflicts pain upon the animals, terrify them and cause them to react in a way likely to cause physical distress and injury. Jump racing of horses also place horses at considerable risk of injury and has been banned in most states and territories in Australia.



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