



Australian Government  
Department of Agriculture,  
Fisheries and Forestry

# Australian Animal Welfare Strategy: consultation summary report

August 2024



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### **Acknowledgement of Country**

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Australia and their continuing connection to land and sea, waters, environment and community. We pay our respects to the Traditional Custodians of the lands we live and work on, their culture, and their Elders past and present.

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# Introduction

## Background

The original Australian Animal Welfare Strategy lapsed in 2014. The original strategy was an overarching national framework that identified priorities, coordinated stakeholder action, and improved consistency across all animal use sectors. The then Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) Primary Industries Ministerial Council endorsed the original strategy in May 2004. Its first national implementation plan was endorsed in 2006. The original strategy was updated in 2010 after stakeholder consultation and an independent review. At its conclusion, the original strategy was in its implementation phase, supported by a range of working groups.

In the 2023–24 Budget, the Australian Government committed \$5 million over 4 years to renew the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS).

The renewed AAWS will facilitate joint leadership from the Australian, state and territory governments on animal welfare, with a view to:

- establishing a national framework, bringing together key stakeholders on issues of significance
- providing a forward direction to address industry, community and international expectations
- maintaining Australia's commitment to modern, sustainable, evidence and science-based animal welfare practice.

The renewed AAWS will include all animals. It will be released in chapters, each dedicated to one of 6 animal groups, with the final strategy expected in 2027:

- livestock and production animals
- aquatic animals (including aquatic animals in production and wildlife)
- animals in the wild (native, introduced and feral animals)
- companion animals
- animals used for work, sport and recreation
- animals used in research and teaching.

To underpin the renewal of the AAWS, all ministers agreed at the Agriculture Ministers' Meeting of 8 March 2024 to work towards the development of a National Statement on Animal Welfare during 2024.

## Purpose

This purpose of this report is to provide an overview of a first tranche of consultation designed to inform the renewal of the AAWS. The report reflects findings from stakeholder consultations commissioned by the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, including facilitated focus groups, interviews and an analysis of relevant data.

The findings expressed in this report were presented by stakeholders during the consultation period and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian and state and territory governments.

## Consultation process

The department conducted a first round of public consultation from 8 March to 8 July 2024. This included the release of a discussion paper through the department's Have Your Say (HYS) web platform, which was open for input from 8 March to 30 June 2024.

The HYS invited input through both surveys and submissions, and was open to all Australians to share views and insights on the following aspects of the renewed AAWS:

- vision for the strategy
- work streams
- challenges and opportunities for animal welfare in Australia.

Focus groups and interviews were held with a broad range of stakeholders. The department also held meetings with a broad range of stakeholders. Eleven 2-hour stakeholder focus groups and 16 interviews were conducted. The department identified stakeholders that were relevant to each animal group, including people involved in the original AAWS to discuss key learnings.

Stakeholders from across the animal welfare system provided input throughout the consultation process, including government, animal industries, animal handlers, non-government representative organisations, veterinarians, research bodies, First Nations organisations, and members of the public.

This consultation was the first step in an extensive stakeholder engagement process that will take place through the development and renewal of the AAWS.

Consultation methodology, data limitations and an overview of respondents are available in [Appendix A](#).

# Key findings

## Challenges and opportunities

Consultation found there is general consensus on the challenges and opportunities for Australia’s animal welfare system (Table 1).

This included there being a lack of national consistency with respect to the legislation and enforcement, strained stakeholder relationships, disagreement on what constitutes appropriate welfare arrangements, and a need to further invest in developing and implementing the evidence base and animal welfare workforce.

**Table 1 Key challenges and opportunities for Australia’s animal welfare system**

Challenge	Opportunity
Polarisation of views between stakeholders	Stakeholder engagement and collaboration
Inconsistency across jurisdictions	National leadership and harmonisation, including addressing legislation and policy agendas, and improving prioritisation of animal welfare and market access
Misalignment between community expectations about animals in production and other professional uses	Further alignment between expected welfare outcomes Community engagement and education
Evidence gaps and constraints on further research and implementation	Furthering the research agenda and implementation of research
Limits on measurement, reporting and enforcement	Further addressing measurement, reporting and enforcement
Resistance and barriers to change	Improved industry extension and resourcing animal users
Workforce challenges	Intentionally resourcing workforce development

## Challenges

### Polarisation of views between stakeholders

Stakeholder polarisation emerged as a priority challenge across the consultations. Findings point to a lack of common ground on animal welfare, and difficult relationships.

Polarisation and the quality of communication between stakeholders with differing views have arguably and reportedly worsened since the previous AAWS lapsed in 2014. This is partly attributed to a general increase in polarisation in the public sphere, with social media contributing to a heightened and less civil style of engagement. An increased polarisation has been more specifically attributed to the lack of a forum in which to bring together divergent views. The lapsed AAWS provided a platform to build relationships (and, if not of trust, then at least of tolerance) through face-to-face meetings and ongoing engagement as part of the working groups. Stakeholders who were involved in the lapsed AAWS reported that this enabled opposing views to be aired, and provided greater opportunities for compromise, when it was practicable.

### Inconsistency across jurisdictions

A lack of alignment between state and territory government legislation, regulation, and compliance and enforcement regimes was reported as a key issue with wide-ranging impacts for animal welfare

outcomes and administrative burden on industry. Jurisdictions, however, emphasised that there is a need to take into account their individual and unique circumstances.

### **Misalignment between community expectations about animals in production and other professional uses**

The gap between community beliefs about what constitutes acceptable husbandry practices, and use of animals in professional contexts, has emerged as a key issue. Some stakeholders expressed a desire for further alignment between expected welfare outcomes between the general public and stakeholders within animal production systems. People who own, care for and use animals outlined that they are already evolving to meet the expectations of consumers and citizens and highlighted the difficulties that come with high-pressure advocacy campaigns. It is clear that the difficult public conversation also contributes to a challenging stakeholder environment. Because of the vexed environment, people who own, care for and use animals in commercial and professional contexts (production industries in particular) tend not to share their success stories. This means that when animal welfare comes to the public's attention it may involve exceptional instances of poor welfare or is usually at times of crisis, with heightened media coverage and emotive content. The department heard a number of calls for improved education, communication and transparency to address improved social licence.

### **Evidence gaps and constraints on further research and implementation**

Stakeholders painted a mixed picture with respect to research on animal welfare, with different sectors and animal groups having very different access to research and science. Stakeholders described a need for better resourcing of research, as well as increased momentum for both developing the evidence base and implementation.

### **Limitations on measurement, reporting and enforcement**

Stakeholders reported concerns about transparency and accountability in the Australian animal welfare system, with underlying issues related to how to best measure welfare, as well as data collection and reporting.

Key challenges related to inconsistencies in data collection and reporting include a lack of benchmarks and measurable indicators of animal welfare. Limited and variable monitoring of non-compliance and enforcement of legislation, standards and guidelines were also noted as significant challenges to improving animal welfare in Australia.

### **Resistance and barriers to change**

Resistance to further change was reported as a barrier to enhancing the existing standards of animal welfare in Australia, including amongst those who care for animals, those who occupy in industry roles and, more generally in the community. Resistance can stem from various factors, including understanding of what constitutes good welfare, longstanding practices, and genuine limits to people's capacity to change (e.g. financial capacity).

Stakeholders called for community outreach and education as well as industry extension to address these issues.

## Workforce challenges

Appropriately trained and skilled personnel were seen as fundamental for ensuring an enhancement of positive animal welfare outcomes and practices. Stakeholders also noted there were training, education and workforce challenges within the current animal welfare system, with a need to address workforce retention issues to ensure the sustainability of the animal welfare sector.

## Opportunities

Opportunities to enhance Australia's existing animal welfare system that were raised by stakeholders typically reflected the need to address the challenges identified above. Additional opportunities to those outlined in Table 1 identified through the consultation process included:

- improving animal welfare through the use of technology
- finding ways to consider sentience and other conceptual models of animal welfare – such as the Five Domains model (Mellor & Reid 1994)
- integration of emerging and intersectional issues, such as climate change, natural disasters, biosecurity and human health
- improving certainty, including business certainty, for stakeholders by addressing opportunities and challenges.

## Vision

Through the HYS discussion paper, stakeholders were presented a draft vision statement for the renewed AAWS:

To establish an Australian animal welfare system that brings stakeholders together, identifies national priorities with actions and outcomes, and demonstrates to the public and international partners that Australia values the welfare of all animals.

The consultation found that the draft vision statement did not have sufficient support to warrant its continued use.

Feedback suggested opportunities to both sharpen and or expand the scope of the statement. A consistent focus was the need for the statement to articulate a clear objective. In addition, there was an interest in including reference to:

- desired animal welfare outcomes
- science and conceptual models of animal welfare
- relevant stakeholders
- national consistency and harmonisation.

## Purpose

Feedback through the consultation described a range of suggestions related to what the renewed AAWS might achieve. The purpose of the renewed AAWS was not directly asked in the HYS survey and submissions process, but submissions typically addressed the themes detailed in this section.



## **Prioritisation of animal welfare in all contexts through increased visibility and resourcing**

Stakeholders reported that an important role for a renewed AAWS is to elevate animal welfare as a key priority for policy, programs and practices related to animals. Feedback involved this ideally supporting an increased focus on resourcing, and a coordination of research and evidence translation, and for education, extension and national data collection and reporting regimes.

## **Greater national consistency**

Stakeholders reported that a renewed AAWS provides an opportunity to achieve a more unified approach to animal welfare across Australia. This includes national standard and evidence development to support best practice. There was general consensus on the need for national harmonisation. However, the complexity of achieving national cohesion was acknowledged, including differences in legislation and context across jurisdictions.

## **Greater collaboration between animal sectors with competing views**

Stakeholders reported that the renewed AAWS can play a role in bringing stakeholders together and offers an opportunity for collaboration across sectors and animal groups. Some stakeholders also noted that an important benefit of the former AAWS was that it had fostered understanding and respect between different stakeholder groups.

## **Social licence to operate and access to international markets**

Stakeholders reported that the renewed AAWS can support improved social licence for commercial and professional use of animals among the Australian community and for international markets, recognising Australia's standards and practices are designed for our unique landscapes and climate.

## **Workstreams**

The HYS discussion paper presented a series of workstreams – priority areas of work intended to support the strategy's purpose and vision:

- Leadership and coordination – establishes governance arrangements to oversee strategy implementation and coordination of activities.
- Research and development – implements a coordinated approach to animal welfare research and extension activities.
- Standards and implementation – implements an overarching framework for standards development that identifies national priorities and streamlines development and adoption by jurisdictions.
- Education and communication – promotes best-practice to industry and showcases outcomes to domestic audiences and international partners.
- Reporting and compliance – establishes systems to track outcomes and monitor compliance.
- International engagement – contributes to our sustainable trade credentials by showcasing and maturing Australia's national approach to animal welfare.

Stakeholders reported that the workstream categories are appropriate. Feedback on the workstreams in the submissions typically identified priorities within these, rather than suggesting

that the streams themselves required adjustment. However, some additional themes were also suggested. These typically reflected the [challenges and opportunities](#) and included public and animal user education, and issues relating to climate change and biosecurity.

## Chapter and strategy development process

Stakeholders generally supported the chapter structure, suggesting 2 additional opportunities:

- 1) developing sub-chapters to better recognise diversity within animal groups
- 2) a process for recognising where animal groups are addressed in multiple chapters, and where different welfare outcomes might be expected for a species depending on context.

Overall, stakeholders agreed that the proposed chapters are appropriate, as long as the renewal of the AAWS takes into account the nuances and complexities that sit underneath the chapter structure and involves close stakeholder engagement.

Stakeholders agreed that close stakeholder involvement in development will be critical to the success of the AAWS. Feedback indicated that appropriate and effective stakeholder engagement on the AAWS should:

- be inclusive of the full range of stakeholders
- encourage ownership amongst stakeholders
- use feedback loops
- reflect the science and contemporary animal welfare practice
- have strong leadership.

## Development of a National Statement on Animal Welfare

Throughout the consultation process, stakeholders' views on the utility of a national statement were mixed, with some yet to be persuaded of its value. The proposed national statement however provides an opportunity for relevant Australian Ministers to demonstrate their commitment and leadership over the renewal of the AAWS, and to communicate any intentions for the renewed AAWS.

Stakeholders emphasised a desire for stakeholder engagement and involvement in the development of the national statement to demonstrate transparency and collaboration. Further engagement of state and territory government representatives was deemed essential to ensure shared understanding, genuine commitment and responsibility for the national statement.

## Strategy implementation

Through the focus groups and interviews, stakeholders raised various considerations for implementing the renewed AAWS. The focus of current funding is for the strategy's development, with implementation a future consideration of government.

Nonetheless, this consultation revealed that stakeholders are already thinking ahead to implementation and are seeking information regarding:

- plans for strategy implementation process
- their level of involvement in implementation
- the extent of funding allocated to implementation.

Additionally, there was strong stakeholder interest in the practicalities of implementation, including:

- opportunities for collaboration
- time frames and investment, including resourcing different jurisdictions and animal sectors.

In discussing implementation, stakeholders emphasised the need to recognise the different levels of animal sector maturity and resourcing, with differing capabilities and capacities that will need to be considered and involved in the implementation of the future strategy.

## Next steps and responding to feedback

The department will continue to engage with stakeholders and work with Australian states and territories on the development of the AAWS and the national statement. Key responses to feedback for the next stage of AAWS development include:

- strengthening the evidence base through the development of an environmental scan and future trends identification, gap analysis, and international benchmarking
- developing processes that facilitate ongoing conversations between stakeholders, including culturally appropriate engagement of First Nations communities and organisations
- using the identified challenges and opportunities as a basis for renewing the AAWS
- the development of an alternative vision statement
- incorporating the proposed streams within the 6 chapters, taking account of the nuances identified in this summary
- working with key stakeholders and state and territory government stakeholders on the development of the national statement to ensure shared understanding, commitment and responsibility.

# Appendix A: Consultation methodology

Findings reflects the conduct of qualitative and quantitative methods, and written submissions.

## Qualitative methodology

The aim of the group discussions and interviews with stakeholders was to explore perspectives related to:

- a vision for the renewed AAWS
- challenges and opportunities for animal welfare in Australia and how these could be reflected in the AAWS
- the best process for developing the renewed AAWS
- the development of the national statement.

## Focus groups

Whereto Research conducted eleven 2-hour focus groups with 71 stakeholders between 28 May and 19 June 2024 (Table A1). The discussions involved between 2 and 19 attendees (an average of 7 stakeholders per group). The department undertook a comprehensive stakeholder mapping exercise to identify key stakeholders and determine allocation to groups and disseminated invitations.

**Table A1 Focus groups attendees**

Focus group	Number of attendees
Production industry – Industry representative organisations and Rural Research and Development Corporations (RDCs)	2
Production industry – National Farmers’ Federation (NFF) and members	10
Production industry – Industry representatives	19
Aquatics – Industry representative organisations and RDCs	3
Companion animals – Industry representative organisation and non-government organisations (NGOs)	7
Animals used in work, sport and recreation – Industry representative organisations and NGOs	12
Animals used in research and teaching – Industry representative organisations and NGOs	8
Animals in the wild (including native, introduced and feral animals) – Industry representative organisations and NGOs	11
Individuals involved in the lapsed Australian Animal Welfare Strategy	13
Animal welfare NGOs	5
National Primary Industries Animal Welfare Research, Development and Extension Strategy (NAWRDES) members <sup>a</sup>	10

<sup>a</sup> The NAWRDES encourages greater co-investment and collaboration on a national basis to improve the efficient use of RD&E resources in the field of livestock animal welfare. This group involves a range of industry, research, government and other members.

## Interviews

Interviews were conducted with state and territory government representatives, First Nations stakeholders, individuals involved in the lapsed AAWS and other stakeholders identified by the department. Sixteen interviews were conducted from 13 June to 8 July 2024, with between one and 6 attendees per interview (Table A2). Interviews were undertaken with a less-structured approach compared to group discussions to allow for tailored information to be obtained from selected participants and stakeholders. This was particularly useful to engage with individuals with experience in the lapsed AAWS.

**Table A2 Interview attendees**

Interview invitee group	Number of attendees
State and territory representatives (including and beyond Animal Welfare Task Group members <sup>a</sup> )	29
First Nations Australian Government representative	1
Other stakeholders (including Australian Government representatives from relevant portfolios and key stakeholders involved in lapsed AAWS)	13
Lapsed AAWS participants	3

<sup>a</sup> The Animal Welfare Task Group promotes the national consistency of farm animal welfare regulations across jurisdictions and oversees the development and review of standards and guidelines for farm animals. It resolves animal welfare policy and regulatory matters which have national and inter-jurisdictional scope and delivers on animal welfare priorities of national interest referred to it by the Agricultural Senior Officials' Committee.

## Have Your Say survey and submissions

The department developed and sought input on a discussion paper and questionnaire for the renewal of the AAWS through an [AAWS HYS survey and submission process](#), which was open to the general public from 8 March 2024 to 30 June 2024. Where to Research undertook an analysis of responses.

This opportunity was promoted via social media, media release and stakeholder outreach and networking.

### HYS survey

The HYS survey received 2,299 responses – 2,276 were able to be included in the report in line with the department's privacy requirements (Table A3). Demographic descriptors for people who responded to the survey are included. These are based on respondent self-identification from a list of possible options created by the department.

**Table A3 HYS survey sample**

Demographic category	Subcategory	Individual	Organisations
Total	–	2,184	92
Stakeholder	Academic or researcher	112	5
	Agricultural industry group	57	12
	Animal welfare group	129	27
	Companion and assistance animal group	58	10
	Exporter/export company	4	1

Demographic category	Subcategory	Individual	Organisations
	Farmer	236	12
	Government	163	3
	Interested member of the public	1472	4
	Racing organisation	10	3
	Rural Research and Development Corporation	2	2
	Veterinarian	111	4
	Wildlife organisation	70	11
	Work, recreation and display animals	8	7
	Zoo	30	1
	Other	2	0
Jurisdiction	Australian Capital Territory	52	3
	New South Wales	651	32
	Northern Territory	20	3
	Queensland	480	15
	South Australia	150	12
	Tasmania	67	1
	Victoria	475	14
	Western Australia	287	12
	Other	2	0
Location	Metropolitan	1197	45
	Large rural centres	299	17
	Small rural centres	251	12
	Other rural areas	232	11
	Remote	205	7

## HYS submissions

Stakeholders were given the option to provide a submission in addition to or instead of responding to the survey. In total, 410 submissions were analysed, with 113 submissions received from organisations and 297 from individuals (Table A4). The table includes demographic descriptors for people who provided submissions. These are based on respondent self-identification from a list of possible options created by the department.

**Table A4 HYS submissions sample**

Demographic category	Subcategory	Individual	Organisations
Total	–	297	113
Stakeholder	Academic or researcher	30	11
	Agricultural industry group	2	26
	Animal welfare group	30	46

Demographic category	Subcategory	Individual	Organisations
Total	–	297	113
	Companion and assistance animal group	2	11
	Exporter/export company	0	1
	Farmer	7	6
	Government	8	6
	Interested member of the public	235	4
	Racing organisation	1	2
	Rural Research and Development Corporation	1	2
	Veterinarian	11	7
	Wildlife organisation	9	6
	Work, recreation and display animals	0	3
	Zoo	0	1
	Other	0	1
Jurisdiction	Australian Capital Territory	9	11
	New South Wales	98	31
	Northern Territory	2	3
	Queensland	58	15
	South Australia	15	5
	Tasmania	7	5
	Victoria	60	18
	Western Australia	39	12
	Other	9	13
Location	Metropolitan	212	79
	Large rural centres	37	8
	Small rural centres	16	5
	Other rural areas	15	8
	Remote	10	6
	Other	7	7

## Analysis approach

### Focus groups and interviews

Analysis of the focus groups and interviews employed a thematic approach, beginning with transcription, familiarisation with the data and a workshop moderated by Whereto Research facilitators to identify themes and patterns.

### Have Your Say survey and submissions

HYS surveys and submissions were coded, using human and artificial intelligence methods. A thematic analysis was also used.

## Data limitations

The data has 4 main limitations:

- 1) The HYS survey and submissions and group discussions and interviews reflect a high-level discussion of the issues rather than an attempt to bring stakeholders together on difficult issues. This report represents an early first step in engagement for the department with respect to renewal of the AAWS.
- 2) Findings are not representative of consulted groups. Detail on numbers of responses and which stakeholders responded to the survey and submissions have been provided to support readers in interpreting the data.
- 3) Findings reflect a range of understandings and experiences of animal welfare, including professional expertise and personal views.
- 4) Efforts were made to identify and invite a wide range of stakeholders to participate in focus group discussions and interviews. The department acknowledges that for a number of reasons, there may have been limits in the invitation list and those who were able to attend.



# References

Mellor, DJ & Reid, CSW 1994, [Concepts of animal well-being and predicting the impact of procedures on experimental animals](#), Improving the Well-Being of Animals in the Research Environment, Wellbeing International.