



Australian Government
Department of Agriculture

Veterinary and Export Meat Group

Workforce Review

Strategic HR Solutions Team

Workforce and HR Strategy Branch | Corporate Strategy and Governance Division





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Executive Summary

Veterinary and Export Meat Group (VEMG) provides regulatory services for the export of meat and meat products and the import and export of live animals and animal genetic material. The VEMG cohort includes live animal veterinarians, biosecurity officers, food safety assessor (FSAs), food safety meat assessors (FSMAs), on-plant veterinary officers (OPVs), independent observers (IOs) as well as a range of technical, administration and managerial support staff.

The VEMG cohort faces unique and complex workforce challenges due to the diversity of the functions, its dispersed workforce and its direct interaction with industry. Ensuring stability and engagement of this cohort is critical to ensuring that VEMG and industry are able to achieve both strategic and operational goals.

The 2019-20 VEMG Operational Workforce Plan identifies a number of challenges within the workforce that are impacting on VEMG's operations:

1. Operational pressures:

- resourcing pressures
- technology

2. Workforce management:

- recruitment
- mobility and flexibility
- performance and culture
- work health and safety

3. Workforce demographics:

- demographics (multi-generational workforce)
- diversity (gender balance)

It is recognised that VEMG is already progressing significant work to address these challenges to ensure the group is appropriately resourced and high performing. This report acknowledges and complements other pieces of work that are in progress by VEMG, such as a review of the administration function and the Export Meat workforce mix, developing vet competency frameworks and learning pathways, reviewing and commencing work to improve recruitment practices, and implementing recommendations identified in the March 2019 WHS VEMS Hazardous Manual Tasks Management Report.

The Strategic HR Solutions (SHRS) Team has undertaken in-depth analysis including a workforce data review and extensive consultation with VEMG staff, managers and stakeholders.

It is important to note that the views represented in this report are not reflective of the entire VEMG workforce. Thirty nine percent of VEMG staff responded to the APSC Census and approximately 100 employees provided feedback into the HR Review through one-on-one conversations (approximately 20%). Of this, the biggest representation of staff was from Export Meat with 41% being OPV's and 21% FSMA's. The themes in this report have been developed as a consolidated view these contributions.



From the review eight key themes were identified:

1. Leadership/management capability and structure
 - The current management structure is not as effective as it could be, due to the large spans of control and complex matrix structure.
 - Inconsistent management practices in a time when staff are seeking more support from management.
 - Concerns from OPVs about vets reporting to non-technical managers.
2. Attraction and recruitment
 - Some staff believe that recruitment processes are not effective as they take too long, and there are perceptions that processes can be unfair and lack transparency.
 - Ineffective advertising channels, recruitment practices/ methodology to maximise talent pools.
 - Further initiatives are required to increase female representation in VEMG Meat Exports leadership roles, FSMAs and OPVs.
3. Workforce management
 - High utilisation of a casual workforce.
 - Staff requests for leave, training and opportunities to move into other roles (such as Area Technical Managers or Independent Observers) are often declined due to an inability to backfill.
4. Performance management
 - Common perception that performance management is a 'tick and flick' process and of limited value to staff.
 - Staff reported feeling undervalued and that the extra effort and contribution can go unnoticed by VEMG management.
5. Professional development and career planning
 - There are challenges with balancing professional development opportunities and operational requirements. Staff felt this was a result of the inability to backfill vacancies which is further compounded by the geographically dispersed workforce.
 - Vets are seeking more opportunities for professional development and networking.
 - FSMAs reported limited access to training.
 - Limited opportunities for career progression, particularly for vets and FSMAs.
6. Workplace culture
 - VEMG staff are cautious of the impacts or sceptical about achieving resolution from reporting unacceptable behaviour in the workplace.
 - Influence over a third party work environment and workforce culture is limited and challenging.
 - Staff (particularly on plant) feel isolated from their colleagues, VEMG and the Department.
7. Work environment and role
 - Difficulty accessing flexible working arrangements and maintaining work life balance.
 - FSMAs are concerned about job security and changes to the role (repetition/variety).
8. Systems and IT
 - Inefficient systems and technologies are impacting on staff ability to carry out their duties in the most effective manner.



Recommendations

Following comprehensive research into these themes (including engagement with Gartner, collaboration with other HR subject matter experts and benchmarking against other organisations) seven key recommendations, each with a number of proposed action items have been identified for the VEMG Executive to consider for implementation. Key recommendations include:

1. Build VEMG leadership and management capability (with a focus on soft skills, performance management and managing dispersed teams).
2. Continue to redesign the VEMG recruitment process including the development of a tailored marketing/attraction strategy and the development and implementation of the entry level FSMA program.
3. Review the VEMG management structure (including design and span of control for management roles).
4. Build an agile and mobile workforce with a focus on achieving the right resources and workforce mix.
5. Increase access to professional development and networking for vets (including reviewing induction programs).
6. Continue to build a supportive and flexible workplace culture (particularly through a gender and multi-generational lens).
7. Improve relationships and connections between VEMG and other departmental areas (particularly Meat Export Division and HR).



1 Purpose

This report explores the current workforce within Veterinary and Export Meat Group (VEMG) and following analysis and research, presents recommendations to the VEMG Executive to address the workforce challenges identified. Strategic HR Solutions (SHRS) in partnership with VEMG, will support the development and implementation of agreed recommendations.

2 Background

This HR review was commissioned following ongoing challenges with attracting and recruiting vets in the department and discussions about VEMG's broader workforce concerns. Over the last few years a number of other VEMG internal reviews and reports have been completed including the 2016 Workforce Planning Report, a review of the administration function and the WHS VEMS Hazardous Manual Tasks Management Report – March 2019. While some recommendations from these reports have been implemented, there are a number of issues that are yet to be resolved.

VEMG has a workforce of approximately 500 employees, which includes a sizeable cohort of casual employees (26%) on which are relied on heavily to meet operational and resourcing needs. VEMG faces unique challenges including the geographic dispersity of the workforce, having a cost recovered funding model, working on third-party premises and responding to industry requirements. The workforce has low female representation (25% for VEMG compared to 52% for the department and 59% for the APS). There is particularly low representation for EL1/2 Export Meat management (no substantive occupants), FSMAs (6%), and to a lesser extent, OPVs (34%). VEMG also has an ageing workforce with 54% of employees over 55 (64% for FSMAs) and low Indigenous representation (0.4%). The EL1/2 Export Meat management positions are being resolved through current recruitment activity. Whilst two new Directors, external to the current VEMG management structure are being appointed as part of this activities, both are male.

VEMG has faced significant change over the last 6 years. Under the previous structure (Food Services), OPV's were managed by Area Technical Managers (ATMs) who sat within the same workgroup. ATMs were EL2 equivalents who provided both expert veterinary and technical advice, as well as people management. In 2015, an organisational restructure changed the management and reporting lines within the function, ATMs moved to Meat Export Division, Food Services was renamed to the now VEMG, and the live animal operational function was moved into VEMG.

Following the restructure, OPVs now operate in a matrix style management structure, where ATMs are the point of contact for OPVs for technical advice, however their day-to-day supervision and performance management is conducted by an Assistant Director (EL1) within VEMG. The FSMAs also have a matrix style management structure where their immediate supervisor is a Staff Resources Manager (MI4 – equivalent to senior APS6), and the OPVs provide onsite pastoral care and day-to-day supervision.

In 2018, VEMG had further structural changes following the implementation of the Independent Observer (IO) Program for livestock export voyages by sea. The operating environment for IOs and the day-to-day support, management and resourcing of this cohort presents additional supervisory and leadership challenges for VEMG.



s. 47D

This HR review gives consideration to the financial challenges facing VEMG by looking for opportunities to leverage off work already being undertaken and make recommendations that have low impact on resourcing and budgets however still influence cultural change. It should be recognised that for change to occur, VEMG will need to have primary ownership and invest time and resources in driving implementation of high priority recommendations.

Throughout consultation staff exhibited scepticism about whether this review will lead to any significant change. It will be important to ensure that endorsed recommendations are implemented within reasonable timeframes, VEMG staff are continuously consulted and communicated with about progress (including using co-design methodology) and outcomes, and evaluations are undertaken to measure success. This will demonstrate commitment to addressing and improving identified concerns and build momentum and engagement for the longer term action items.

3 Scope

The original scope of this workforce review was the veterinary workforce within VEMG. Following initial analysis of data and the introduction of the new Meat Enterprise Agreement, a decision was made to broaden the scope to include the whole VEMG workforce.

It is important to note that the intent of this review was not to manage and resolve individual matters. Where individual issues were identified, they have been referred to the relevant subject matter area for further consideration if appropriate.

As the IO program has only been in place since April 2018 and is undertaking continual review as part of its implementation, this program has not been taken into consideration when making the report recommendations, other than to consider any learnings.

Although out of scope for this project the following may impact the VEMG workforce and implementation of the report recommendations:

- review of cost recovery arrangements
- Australian Export Meat Inspection Service (AEMIS) Review
- working on third-party premises and industry/company management

4 Methodology

A range of quantitative and qualitative data was examined in reviewing the workforce profile for VEMG. The review began with an initial desktop scan of available workforce data including:

- headcount, demographics, diversity
- employment type – ongoing, non-ongoing, casual
- separation and tenure
- VEMG 2018/2019 APS Employee Census data
- leave data – including unscheduled and recreational



- recruitment data
- Australian Veterinary Workforce Survey 2018 - Australian Veterinary Association
- university graduation data.

It is important to note that the APS Employee Census data only reflects 39% of the workforce. To protect privacy, results are only shown where there are over 10 respondents. Results are not available for sections that fall within this category including the IO program, Executive and the National Planning, Coordination and Management team.

Following the initial collation and analysis of the quantitative data, consultation commenced with VEMG employees and managers across all cohorts, and departmental stakeholders external to VEMG. All staff in VEMG were invited to provide their views and experiences through a range of mechanisms including focus groups, one-on-one interviews and written submissions. These views have been consolidated and have not been attributed to any individuals. Throughout the consultation approximately one hundred individuals were consulted as part of this review.

The OPV cohort was the most highly represented, providing 41% of the feedback received. The SHRS team found it more challenging to obtain feedback from FSMAs (likely due to the operational requirements of the role). While a small number of FSMAs made direct contact with the team, the majority of FSMA feedback was captured following visits to four establishments.

5 Key findings

Analysis of workforce data and consultation with staff, management and stakeholders identified eight key themes:

1. Leadership/Management Capability and Structure

Large spans of control, particularly for managers of OPVs and FSMAs, across a geographically dispersed workforce present a number of unique workplace relationship challenges for the VEMG management and leadership group. Consultation and census data reflects low satisfaction with current supervisory and management structure, engagement and communication with consistently lower scores than the department against questions relating to immediate supervisor and SES general impression questions. The data also showed declines for VEMG in effective supervisor and SES communication (11% decline since 2018). During consultation, staff who had experienced consistent/quality time with their Assistant Directors reported much more positive feedback.

Feedback from OPVs indicated that there was significant room for improvement in the empathy and support provided to the cohort and recognising their contribution. There was also concern that those with supervisory responsibility did not have technical expertise (vet qualification or on plant experience). Staff perceptions were that a lack of technical expertise and on-plant experience impacts on the ability for line managers to understand the intricacies the role and therefore be able to effectively provide assistance and support to their staff. These factors are having an impact on staff engagement, morale and their ability to effectively manage their day-to-day operations including resolving issues with industry.

It is important to note the live animal vet cohort is structured differently (fewer direct reports, less geographically dispersed, vets in management roles) and did not reflect the same leadership structure and capability concerns. This was reflected within the IO cohort, which reflects similar



management structure to that of the Live Animal with no feedback received regarding perceptions of these challenges.

2. Recruitment and Attraction

Lengthy recruitment processes were highlighted as an ongoing issue during consultation with both staff and managers. In 2019, VEMG recruitment processes to date have taken an average 74 days. This is almost double the recommended rate of 40 days and has detrimental financial, productivity and reputational impacts for VEMG. There is also a perceived lack of fairness and transparency with VEMG recruitment activities, and inconsistencies with how short and long-term vacancies are filled. Effective and efficient attraction and recruitment of vets and FSMAs into ongoing, non-ongoing and casual roles is critical to ensure VEMG meets current and future operational and regulatory requirements.

More recently, VEMG has been taking a broader approach to recruiting vets, rather than recruiting to specific streams (i.e. live animals or OPVs). The intent is to engage veterinary officers who can be flexibly deployed across the VEMG operations nationally.

VEMG has had success with their IO recruitment including introducing a rolling recruitment approach, using psychometric testing and holding information sessions prior to candidates going through the selection process. These approaches appear to be having positive outcomes for recruitment, with processes continually being reviewed and improved. This work should be leveraged across other recruitment activities in VEMG to see the impacts of these changes. Work more broadly across the Biosecurity Operations Division (BOD), particularly in relation to options to automate components of the recruitment process, should also be leveraged in considering changes and innovative approaches.

Consultation with VEMG and review of available pipeline data suggests broadening the reach and focus of our advertising would be beneficial. Investigating traditional and non-traditional methods for advertising and engagement, will assist to increase visibility of our roles and our potential pool of candidates. Particularly for the vet cohort, strengthening university connections and building on existing initiatives such as the Murdoch Program, as well as looking at alternative methods to reach vets who have practice experience will ensure the department is able to meet current and future operational requirements not only for vets employed in VEMG but across the department more broadly.

3. Workforce Management

Workforce management is a significant and complex challenge for VEMG. VEMG leadership must continue to look at the best way to manage the differing expectations and needs of the workforce cohorts and the interactions between them. Census data indicates non-permanent staff have lower levels of satisfaction with development, non-monetary employment conditions and stability and security, and only 56% of VEMG respondents as a whole felt their workgroup has the tools and resources needed to perform well. This is only slightly lower than the department's score of 58%.

Workforce demographics should continue to be a focus for VEMG particularly when considering current and future workforce planning. More than 50% of the VEMG workforce is aged over 55 and there is a significantly higher male representation (approximately 75% of VEMG). These factors impact on a range of workforce management issues, including retention, culture, succession planning and resource management.



Consultation with staff reflected views that current resource planning and management was not as effective as it could be. Staff were particularly frustrated by: the occasions where minimal notice is provided for shifts (for those not in permanent placements); lack of visibility of how scheduling and placements is determined; and limited flexibility for breaks and leave (particularly when it related to leave requests to attend to personal matters or learning and development activities).

4. Performance Management

Staff consultation and census results identified performance management as being a key area for improvement for VEMG management. A common perception of staff was that it can be seen as a 'tick and flick' exercise that they view is of limited benefit or value to them. Census results supported this feedback, with only 39% of respondents reporting that their overall experience of performance management had been useful for their development. The department's results overall were only slightly higher at 43%. Consideration to the recommendations made in this report may lead to an improvement of these indicators on employee experience.

Consultation with OPVs specifically highlighted concerns with the visibility and technical expertise of their supervisors, and many commented that the ATMs did not provide feedback into their performance reviews with regards to their technical proficiency. Staff also had concerns that the assessment is based on limited (in a number of cases once or twice per year) face-to-face and/or telephone contact.

Staff also reported feeling undervalued and that extra effort and contribution went unnoticed. Census data reflected that only 41% reported receiving recognition when they last accomplished something significant at work (24% lower than the department) and 35% felt that employees in their agency are valued for their contribution (11% lower than the department).

Consultation with VEMG Management also acknowledged the challenge with undertaking performance management, particularly due to their large spans of control and geographically dispersed teams.

5. Professional Development and Career Planning

A lack of access to professional development opportunities was a consistent theme during consultation, particularly for vets. The census results reflected that staff felt that they had limited opportunities to attend learning and development activities (50% of respondents said their supervisor provides time to attend learning programs, 28% lower than the department). Feedback from consultation was that resourcing management challenges and previous unsuccessful attempts meant that a number of staff had stopped pursuing professional development activities altogether or funded it themselves and attended in their own time.

In the 2019 census, only 47% of VEMG respondents indicated their supervisor discusses their career plans (15% lower than the department) and scores were also 22% and 20% lower than the department for being provided with capability development for their career and opportunities to work on tasks outside day-to-day work respectively.

The main barrier identified by staff during consultation, was the ability to provide cover for staff to enable them to take up development opportunities, and requests to supervisors were often rejected on these grounds. Recommendations in this report will work to address the ability to provide coverage for these purposes.



6. Workplace Culture

A range of structural, environmental and demographic factors significantly influence the VEMG culture. Feedback from staff about culture indicated issues with unacceptable workplace behaviours s 47C & s 47E(d), isolation from colleagues and the department, feeling undervalued and less opportunity and access to workplace offerings such as learning and development and flexible working arrangements. Whilst the issue of hours of work and flexibility were raised by both genders, women seemed to feel the impacts of these to a larger degree when they have childcare or other caring responsibilities, and also faced other challenges such as having appropriate facilities on third party premises.

VEMG had lower scores than the department on manager support for accessing flexible work arrangements (24% lower) and immediate supervisor commitment to supporting their health and wellbeing at work (21% lower). A number of VEMG staff commented they do not feel adequately supported in the workplace, particularly when referring to addressing unacceptable behaviour. Lack of visibility and communication with management and the department were cited as contributing factors to staff feeling isolated and ineffective in managing workplace issues.

There are many tools and support mechanisms that exist within the department in relation to the reporting and taking action against unacceptable behaviour. It is anticipated the unique environment within the VEMG makes it challenging for staff to be aware of what is available to them. Using existing communication methods to send some information out to staff may assist in raising awareness.

7. Work environment and role

VEMG working environments vary greatly across a large number of third-party premises. Staff working hours and conditions are heavily driven by industry requirements, and this poses challenges for VEMG management in providing flexibility and seeking improvements to operating environments for staff. Staff census indicated 60% of staff were satisfied with non-monetary employment conditions, 18% lower than the department rate. VEMG staff also reported 13% lower (74%) workgroup commitment to workplace safety, which raises concerns given the additional safety risks in their operating environments.

Repetitive work and long hours, combined with reduced flexibility were cited by staff as barriers to maintaining work-life balance and managing health and wellbeing. These factors were also having an impact on job satisfaction. Staff also felt the impact of having multiple influences over their workplace and role with 51% of staff indicated having too many competing priorities (14% higher than the department). It is positive, however, that VEMG staff have seen an 18% improvement over the past 3 years in staff satisfaction for stability and security in their role up to 70% in 2019.

8. Systems and IT

During consultation, staff and managers highlighted frustration with the quality and reliability of technology particularly in remote locations. Staff also commented on the administrative burden placed on setting up system access for casual/relief staff on plant each time they are deployed. VEMG recorded similar results to the department (37% compared to 33%) for satisfaction with technology within the agency, representing a broader department issue that is not solely a result of the environmental challenges faced by VEMG.



Staff also expressed frustration with system limitations and duplication and a number of staff also spoke about there being a lack of consultation and tailored training provided when new systems were rolled out.

Changes to existing technologies and leveraging new systems have been flagged by staff as ways of assisting VEMG to improve their efficiency and effectiveness in a range of functions, including workforce scheduling and management, and communication.

6 Implementation

Planning and resource management throughout development and implementation of all recommended actions is critical to enable staff to actively engage and participate without detrimental effects on VEMG operations.

As mentioned previously, although a number of action items have been identified under each of the recommendations, the expectation is not for them to all be implemented concurrently. It is recommended that VEMG progress action items marked with an arrow as initial priorities, and build on the engagement and momentum that these initial actions generate. These action items have been prioritised due to their ability to be implemented quickly and/or are low cost and/or low resource implications, their visibility to the VEMG cohort and/or the broad impact of their outcomes.

To ensure these initiatives meet VEMG goals it is important to undertake a co-design approach with staff, managers and relevant stakeholders when designing and implementing any changes. The workforce must be engaged as active participants in making and shaping change decisions to increase the probability of change success by as much as 24%.¹ A communication plan should also be developed that outlines frequency and channels for communicating to the VEMG cohort about the implementation of recommendations and continuous evaluation and improvement of activities.

7 Evaluation

Expected outcomes are outlined under each recommendation in Section 8. Overall, following implementation it is expected VEMG will see:

- increased staff engagement/morale
- increased access to professional development for vets
- reduced isolation and silos within the workforce
- quicker recruitment and higher percentage of permanent HQ staff
- improved communication/consultation
- better engagement with universities
- increased access to flexible work arrangements
- higher satisfaction with immediate supervisors
- reduced people management issues.

To monitor success of recommendations, the SHRS Team will provide an annual progress report against each of the initiatives and continue ongoing support to VEMG executive and staff.

¹ Open Source Change: Making Change Management Work, Gartner Corporate Leadership Council










A range of quantitative and qualitative data will be collected to evaluate the implementation of the recommendations from the VEMG HR Review and to measure improvements against baseline data, including:




- APS Employee Census survey data (including participation rate)
 - agency and job impressions
 - immediate supervisor impressions
 - wellbeing
 - performance management/capability development
- training attendance
- exit survey data (if available)
- separation and tenure
- unscheduled absence data
- recruitment statistics (including time to fill).

The impacts from changes being made will take time to be reflected in the data, particularly as the recommendations will be implemented at various intervals. It is suggested that progress is monitored, and a more comprehensive 12 month progress report to be provided to the VEMG Executive following the 2020 APS Census.

8 Recommendations




Recommendation 1 (links to key themes 1, 4, 5, 6)		Timeframe
Build VEMG leadership and management capability (with a focus on soft skills, performance management and managing dispersed teams).		Immediate: next 12 months
Action items	Responsibility	
 Identify individual leadership and management development needs (particularly soft skills) for managers in VEMG. Articulate the required leadership behaviours and expectations of VEMG management which can be documented and included a compulsory key performance indicator focussed on people management in work plan and learning agreements.	VEMG management supported by L&D and People Support	
 Increase use of technologies such as video Skype to communicate with remote staff on a more regular basis including the provision of webcams (approximately \$113 per unit) for those without video conferencing equipment.	VEMG management	
 Encourage VEMG managers to attend HR Talks (tips to better team management) or invite HR to appropriate meetings to continue the conversation.	VEMG Executive supported by SHRS	
Considerations for implementation		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With a new leadership team coming together, there is an opportunity to harness the diverse skills and experience of individuals to build the cohort's capability. • Supporting training for the VEMG management group will ensure it is given the priority it needs and reinforces the importance of managers developing the 'soft skills' needed to effectively undertake their roles • Training should be through a range of mechanisms, such as formal training, executive coaching, mentoring, feedback from managers etc. • Training should start at Executive/SES levels and then cascaded down to anyone with management and leadership responsibility - reflecting the "leading by example" principle, and ensuring consistency across the cohort. • Leadership training should be aligned with the APS work level standards with regard to Leadership and Accountability and access what is currently available for soft skills such as leadership, communication, negotiation, influencing, managing dispersed teams etc. Training should also focus on performance management. • There are opportunities to access existing people management skills/leadership development courses through LearnHub, APSC or online digital learning platforms. Additionally, the department's subscription with CEB Gartner provides access to research and resources such as eLearning, templates, guides and case studies to continue building management capability. The department's EAP provider, SMG Health, also provide a manager hotline as part of its contract, which provides additional support to managers. • Performance management training should provide the tools and strategies on how to set clear expectations, provide regular feedback and performance counselling, identifying the early warning signs of underperformance and how to resolve problems early (particularly when managing a dispersed workforce). • Resourcing challenges may impact VEMG management's ability to actively engage in professional development and priority will need to be established. Ongoing training should be factored into resource planning. Demonstrating active support for ongoing capability development that aligns with the work level standards communicates it is important to the department. • VEMG will need to collectively capture and report on the training that has been undertaken by management. 		
Expected Outcomes from implementation of the recommendations		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved APS employee census data on questions relating to immediate supervisor and SES, particularly around people management and communication. • Staff reporting more meaningful performance conversations and feeling more valued measured through the APS employee census. • Improved working relationships between VEMG management and staff working in geographically dispersed locations. • Staff working in remote locations feel less isolated and more connected to VEMG and the Department of Agriculture's culture. 		



Recommendation 2 (links to key themes 2, 3, 6) LEX-3764	Timeframe 15
Continue to redesign the VEMG recruitment process including developing a tailored marketing /attraction strategy and developing and implementing the FSMA entry level program	Immediate: next 12 months
Action items	Responsibility
 Invest in a temporary staff member (potentially APS 6) to establish and manage continuous vet recruitment processes that has soft closes every three months. Establish a register on the Agriculture website to capture those interested in veterinary roles and keep them up-to-date on opportunities available.	VEMG supported by WAM and SHRS
 Strengthen branding and attraction of veterinary roles available in the department to attract the best talent (including increased social media presence and advertising that is targeted to vets). Lift the VEMG profile by redesigning the website (include videos profiling staff) to promote roles and ensure applicants have an understanding of expectations and the variation of roles. Consideration may be given to conducting information sessions for potential candidates (similar to IO program).	VEMG supported by WAM and SHRS
 Following the introduction of the training entry level classification in the new Meat Inspector EA continue the work that has already commenced to develop the entry level FSMA program. This includes developing the meat inspector training program, recruiting the first cohort to gain certification.	VEMG supported by L&D and WAM
 Increase FSMA gender-balance by targeting female applicants and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation through Affirmative Measures when implementing the entry-level FSMA program.	VEMG supported by WAM and SHRS
Broaden the Murdoch University program to James Cook University and Charles Stuart University. Explore credit transfer options for those who have completed OPV training modules during their final year of studies.	VEMG supported by SHRS
Engage with career advisors in schools and other institutions in remote areas to encourage consideration of entry level positions.	VEMG supported by SHRS
Build partnerships with the Chief Veterinary Officer, Australian Veterinary Association and large private sector employers such as Greencross Vets.	VEMG/OCVO supported by WAM and SHRS
Considerations for implementation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make recruitment a priority and consider work underway in Biosecurity Operations Division/ IO program to review recruitment practices and leverage off learnings. • Potential places for advertising vet roles could include Kookaburra, Veterinary Careers, Vetlink and career hubs at the universities which are a go to for undergraduates and those looking for a career change. • Continue exploring different ways to assess candidates such as psychometric testing to assess resilience, versatility and working collaboratively and/or using video interviewing to help streamline recruitment processes (less face-to-face and people resourcing required). • s. 33(b) • Continue to have vets participate on the recruitment panel for veterinary roles to provide candidates with the opportunity to ask technical questions as well as having an individual with expertise on the job and its duties. • Consideration should be given to exploring additional incentives that could be offered through individual flexibility arrangements to recruit for hard to fill/remote locations. This may including the ability to provide options for temporary transfers as a stepping stone to other roles. 	
Expected Outcomes from implementation of the recommendations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduction in the average time to start (from job advertisement to commencement) for recruitment processes. • Improved APS census data around the workforce in my workgroup is managed well. • Improved quality of applicants and creation of a database of those interested in applying for VEMG roles. • Increased ability to staff establishments with OPVs and FSMAs, including remote locations. • Provide backfilling arrangements so staff can take leave or participate in development opportunities. • More students from universities applying for OPV roles or the Graduate Development Program vet stream. • Increased FSMA resourcing and ability to recruit high quality candidates with appropriate behavioural attributes • Improved diversity in VEMG workforce profile. 	

Recommendation 3 (links to key themes 1, 2, 3, 5, 7)	Timeframe
Review the VEMG management structure (including design and span of control for management roles).	Short term: 6 – 18 months
Action items	Responsibility
 Pilot EL1 Vets in two Meat Export Assistant Director roles as vacancies arise. An option may be to consider high potential OPVs seeking development for a 2 year rotation in the role.	VEMG management
 Initiate a working group to review the current management structure (including reviewing span of controls and design) and determine what a new model could reflect.	VEMG management supported by SHRS
 Continue to progress work to redesign MI3/4 roles to enable more engagement with staff on establishments and provide additional support and development.	VEMG management
Provide greater clarity for VEMG Meat Export roles with clear descriptions of the duties and responsibilities associated with a role and accompanying baseline requirements to effectively perform the role. For example, reasonable Assistant Director response times, frequency of establishment visits and FSMA/OPV working relationship expectations.	VEMG management
Considerations for implementation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When designing the new structure work value assessments should be undertaken on VEMG EL1/EL2 and MI3/4 roles using the APS role evaluation tool to ensure responsibilities and tasks are assigned at the right classification level and staff have an appropriate level of independence and control over their work. • Span of control review should take into consideration the APS Optimal Management Structure framework and Gartner’s span of control benchmarking tool. • Gartner’s Ignition Guides can be used help identify efficiencies (e.g. overlapping accountabilities, missing functions) and assist in redesigning the structure to be aligned with VEMG strategic priorities. • When implementing the new structure it is recommended that it be done in a staged approach to ensure the structure works. • Redesign changes impact employee performance. Unclear decision making authority, conflicting goals, reduced collaboration and poor employee job fit can result in employee performance getting worse over the next 6-12 months before it gets better (12-24 months).² Communication and consultation with staff will be vital to minimise these risks. • Any structural changes to VEMG must be aligned with desired culture.³ 	
Expected Outcomes from implementation of the recommendations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smaller/more effective spans of control for Assistant Directors and Staff Resource Managers in line with the APS Optimal Management Structure Framework. • Transparency of VEMG Export Meat roles and responsibilities. • Executive level roles aligned with the APS work level standards. • Improved OPV engagement measured via the APS employee census and improved career pathways. • Increased FSMA engagement measured via the APS employee census through more frequent communication and site visits by their direct supervisor. 	

² Lost in Transition – Maximising Employee Performance Outcomes from Organisation Redesign Initiatives, Gartner Corporate Leadership Council

³ Article Collection 2018, *The Leader’s Guide to Corporate Culture*, Harvard Business Review

Recommendation 4 (links to key themes 2, 3, 5, 6, 8)	Timeframe
Build an agile and mobile workforce with a focus on achieving the right resources and workforce mix.	Short Term: 6 - 18 months
Action items	Responsibility
 Continue to reduce reliance on casual OPV and FSMA workforce by utilising more ongoing and non-ongoing fixed term staff.	VEMG management
 Continue succession planning for critical roles – discuss career intentions with employees approaching retirement age to identify potential future vacancies and recruit early.	VEMG management supported by Workforce Planning
 Build on the zone concept (already being trialled in VEMG) as a way of staffing establishments. Rather than having staff only “anchored “to one location they may work across the “zone” they are assigned to. (See Recommendation 5 for further links to zones).	Working group supported by VEMG management and SHRS
Co-design a mobility model that provides opportunities and growth for employees while assisting VEMG to respond to capability gaps and meet surge responses. This includes creating an ‘emergency register’ of existing veterinary qualified employees outside of VEMG who are willing and able to provide short-term relief via a fly in fly out (FIFO) model.	Working group supported by VEMG management, WAM and SHRS
Continue to review the administration function and investigate more effective rostering systems.	VEMG supported by SHRS
Considerations for implementation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Buy-in from the executive group will be critical for cross divisional movement to be successful, especially for the FIFO model to release vets from business areas given potential cost implications and impacts on other areas. Participation in the ‘emergency register’ should be capped to limit impact on work area but also ensure sufficient level of relief work is provided so skills remains up-to-date. Recommend a two tier approach – first tier, those who have completed their OPV induction and can immediately respond and second tier for those who are prepared to complete the OPV induction. Longer term explore the opportunity to work with the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer to participate in suitable external secondment opportunities for vets. Rostering practices should be considered including staff having more input and rosters being available earlier. Consider how to incorporate work underway in Biosecurity Operations Division for the workload management project. Systems and tools used by other organisations that have similar rostering and workforce challenges as VEMG were investigated. Kronos is a workforce management system used by the NSW Police Force and ClassCover, an app used to connect schools with relief teachers, for example. Further information on these systems is available in Attachment A. Noting that systems and tools are only one component of managing a complex rostering and capability deployment activities, resource management capability should also be considered for it to be effective. An alternative rostering system will be costly and in context of current budget constraints may not be feasible at this point in time. 	
Expected Outcomes from implementation of the recommendations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Less reliance on a casual workforce resulting in reduced associated costs such as overtime/travel. Increased staff numbers that will ensure appropriate resourcing on each establishment/in the field. Increase in staff internal mobility. High quality well rounded staff that can be deployed to business priorities. Retain and transfer employee skills, knowledge and networks. Drive career satisfaction by offering growth opportunities measured by the APS employee census. Improved relationship with OCVV and sharing of vet resources. 	



Recommendation 5 (links to key theme 5)	Timeframe
Increase access to professional development and networking for vets (including reviewing induction programs)	Short Term: 6 - 18 months
Action items	Responsibility
 Continue to develop the induction program for Live Animals and review the OPV induction program in partnership with Meat Export Branch.	VEMG / Meat Export
 Create smaller network groups for vets within VEMG (i.e. zone concept) using a community of practice approach to share information and collaborate within the group. It is proposed that each zone has a lead (senior OPV) who provides a leadership role to zone members. It is recommended that initially 2-3 zones are piloted.	VEMG supported by SHRS
Increase opportunities for mentoring and buddying to support new and current staff as well as to help transfer knowledge from employees transitioning to retirement.	VEMG management supported by HR Strategy
Co-design approach to identify improvements to the OPV weekend and monthly teleconference (including consideration whether the OPV weekend could include Live Animal vets and rename to VEMG VET weekend).	Working group supported by VEMG management and SHRS
Increase access to professional development for new and existing vet staff in VEMG (including gauging possibility of providing each vet an allocated budget for relevant professional development).	VEMG management
Considerations for implementation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is noted that one of the biggest barriers to accessing professional development is the ability to backfill so vets can be released. It is anticipated that an increase in staffing numbers (recommendation 2/3) will assist in managing backfill issues and will enable more staff to be released for professional development. The department is currently piloting a mentoring program and if implemented, could be used as a model to provide opportunities for vets to be mentored and/or mentor vets in other regions/Canberra, VEMG, or even other departmental staff. When designing the zone lead role consideration will need to be given on how provide the OPV with benefits for taking on the additional corporate responsibility i.e. IFA or additional leadership training for example. The community of practice concept will only be successful as long as the members are interested in maintaining it and continued survival will depend on mutual engagement and trust of members.⁴ It will be important to develop principles/protocols for implementing new forums/networking groups (in consultation with staff) Consideration should be given to whether the 12 week duration of the OPV induction is still appropriate and whether prior learning/experience and type of plant the inductee will be working at can be considered when determining induction requirements. s. 33(b) Consider whether the corporate component of the Live Animal and OPV induction can be merged to build relationships across the two cohorts. 	
Expected Outcomes from implementation of the recommendations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve knowledge sharing and communication. Increase professional development by learning from the successes and challenges of others. Build better practices by collaboratively solving challenges/issues. Less isolation impacts felt by remote workers. Increased satisfaction of vet staff attending OPV weekends/monthly events. Increased mentoring and buddying partnerships in place for vet staff. Improved APS employee census around staff development and career opportunities. Efficiencies through combining crossover training at inductions and networking opportunities for new recruits. 	

⁴ Igor Pyrko, Viktor Dorler and Colin Eden *Thinking together: What makes Communities of Practice Work*, (August 25, 2016)

Recommendation 6 (links to key themes 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7)	Timeframe
Continue to build a supportive and flexible workplace culture (particularly through a gender and multi-generational lens).	Immediate: next 12 months
Action items	Responsibility
➔ Staff and management to agree on methods and frequency for maintaining regular contact in person or via appropriate technologies.	VEMG management
➔ Continue to trial and support flexible work options where possible such as job sharing and part-time and communicating and promoting success stories.	VEMG management supported by SHRS
➔ Initiate working group to identify how to best support female staff in operational work environments.	VEMG supported by Diversity and Inclusion
➔ Build on existing communication mechanisms plan for disseminating information with a focus on the formal and informal options for addressing any concerns about workplace behaviour (including engagement with industry staff) and reinforcing management/executive zero tolerance for unacceptable behaviour.	VEMG management supported by Integrity Unit, HR Conduct and People Support Teams and SHRS.
Review VEMG and industry behaviour management protocols and processes (in line with WHS codes of practice) and ensure mechanisms to provide regular feedback to industry where issues are known.	VEMG management
Considerations for implementation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research shows that engagement is significantly boosted when managers spends at least 16 minutes a week with each staff member⁵. This also impacts staff discretionary effort and organisational performance. • Ownership and responsibility for driving culture change effectively must sit with team leaders and middle management with the support of the VEMG executive⁶ and must be given priority along with other operational responsibilities. • Given the regulatory and operational interactions with industry, it will be critical to ensure that consideration and focus is given to relationship and expectation management when developing and implementing any activities that will have a direct impact on industry. • The difficulties communicating and engaging with a remote and dispersed workforce will require use of a range of methods and formats when developing and implementing actions. It will also be important to give consideration to the complexity of the professional and social relationships being concurrently managed - government and industry, regulator and colleagues and the impact on community and social engagement. 	
Expected Outcomes from implementation of the recommendations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improvement in APS census data relating to support for flexible work arrangements and health and wellbeing, immediate workgroup impressions, recognition and encouragement and workforce management. • Increased engagement of staff through increased access to and communication with team supervisor. • Improvements in gender balance. • Increased uptake of and satisfaction with access to flexible working arrangements. 	

⁵ Nielsen, C & McCullough 2018, *How People Analytics Can Help You Change Process, Culture, and Strategy*, HBR.org

⁶ Newton, Rebecca 2016, *HR Can't Change Company Culture by Itself*, Harvard Business Review

Recommendation 7 (links to key themes 5, 6, 7, 8)	Timeframe
Improve relationships and connections between VEMG and other departmental areas (particularly Meat Export Branch and HR).	Short term: 6 - 18 months
Action items	Responsibility
 Promotion of People Support as the department's single contact point for employees and managers to quickly and easily access a range of HR resources, advice and support services.	HR People Branch supported by SHRS
 Cascade regular meetings between VEMG and Meat Export Branch to the AD level (i.e. ADs (vet line managers) meeting with ATMs (technical advisers). This will assist in more effectively managing OPVs performance and will provide opportunities to share information and collaborate/problem solve.	VEMG management/Export Meat
Develop a plan for ensuring VEMG staff are appropriately consulted and have the opportunity to comment on relevant policies, work instructions and new systems.	VEMG and policy areas
Promote the use of the department's Hive, an online platform facilitating quick and easy work sharing across the department, as a way of providing VEMG employees the opportunity to broaden their experience. This will allow them to volunteer for tasks posted by other teams (preferably Meat Export and Live Animal Exports) who require additional resources or expertise.	VEMG/Export Meat
Investigate whether a role in the Canberra Meat Export Branch could be assigned as a rotational role for a VEMG vet to hold, providing an opportunity to build relationships and ensure on-plant considerations are given when developing policy/work instructions.	VEMG SES/Export Meat
Considerations for implementation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When promoting People Support and HR resources, consideration will need to be given to what communication mechanisms are used (i.e. emails, posters or word of mouth). • New Directors and Assistant Directors should leverage off regular meeting with Meat Export to establish relationships. • Consider if VEMG management be included in the Meat Leadership Conference. • Using the Hive concept requires buy-in from Meat Export/Live Animal Exports to submit small projects on the Hive and would require capacity from VEMG staff. • Where VEMG staff participate, there should be acknowledgement in their work plan and learning agreement. • For the rotational role in Meat Export, consideration would need to be given on how to attract vets to these roles, pay and relocation costs. This again would also require buy-in from Meat Export. 	
Expected Outcomes from implementation of the recommendations	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased collaboration and consultation between VEMG and other areas of the department. • Increased awareness of HR support and appropriate channels to escalate issues. • People issues are referred and managed early before they escalate. 	

9 Outline of Key Themes

As previously described there was extensive consultation with staff and information obtained during the review. This section of the report provides the details of this analysis and further detailed information that supports the rationale for the recommendations made in Section 8 and the considerations for implementation.

1. Leadership/management capability and structure

Key 2019 Census results

- Overall, 68% VEMG stated they had a good immediate supervisor, 12% lower than the department.
- VEMG Export Meat staff consistently provided low scores for responses related to their immediate supervisor and SES. Live Animals had more positive results.
- General impressions of supervisors were that 60% encourage staff to contribute ideas (21% lower than the department), 65% communicate effectively (with ratings progressively declining over the past three years by 11%) and 63% maintain composure under pressure (15% lower than the department).
- General impressions of SES were that only 34% believe their SES manager is sufficiently visible (30% lower than the department), 43% believe their SES manager communicates effectively (21% lower than the department) and 40% believe their SES manager encourages innovation and creativity (19% lower than the department).

Key observations

- The current management structure is not as effective as it could be due to the large spans of control, matrix structure and geographically dispersed workforce.
- The dispersed workforce and large numbers provides additional challenges for VEMG leadership group in terms of being visible and communicating with staff.
- OPVs expressed concerns that their immediate supervisors do not hold the same professional qualification/technical expertise or experience working within the on-plant environment to fully support them in their role. Many also provided feedback that ATMs (technical supervisors) do not have the capacity to appropriately support them from a technical viewpoint, which is a result of the matrix management model used.
- There is a need for greater understanding of the various VEMG roles and expectations on how managers and staff can effectively work together.
- There is a perception from OPVs that some VEMG managers can be authoritarian and lack empathy, compassion and respect.
- Many OPVs do not feel sufficiently supported or valued by VEMG management, indicating they only see their AD once or twice every 12 months and only hear from them if there is an issue (leading to lack of trust and respect).
- There is inconsistency from management with the application and advice on policies/work instructions (for example access to flexible work and travel entitlements).
- The gender balance in VEMG management varies with all substantive ELs in Live Animals being female and all substantive ELs in Export Meat being male.
- Live animal staff had more positive census results around their immediate supervisor and staff consultation did not raise the same issues as with Export Meat.
- The IO program has strategies in place such as setting individual mutual agreements between IOs and their supervisor so there is a mutual understanding of how often, and through what mechanism, they will communicate.

Current Management Structure

Function	Reporting Lines	Span of control ⁷	Comments
Live Animal Vets	EL1 – Senior Vet Officer (immediate supervisor) EL2 – Principle Vet Officer	SVO (EL1) Average no: 16 Range: 15-17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EL managers are vets High female representation in management roles
OPVs	EL1 – Assistant Director (immediate supervisor) ATM (EL2 vet) – Technical Adviser EL2 - Director	AD (EL1) Average no: 25.6 Range: 17-33	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Geographically dispersed workforce including very remote locations Direct supervisors are not vets No substantive females in EL management roles Matrix structure – ATM is technical adviser (in Meat Export Branch) but reports to EL1 in VEMG as immediate supervisor
FSMAs /FSAs	MI4 – Staff Resources Manager OPV – day to day supervision	Staff Resources Manager (MI4) Average no: 48.4 Range: 24-90	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SRM staff have worked as FSMAs Geographically dispersed workforce including very remote locations OPV provides day-to-day supervision but report to SRM
IOs	EL1 – Assistant Director EL2 - Director	AD (EL1) Average no: 1.4 Range: 1-10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 x Director and 4 x Assistant Directors Often geographically dispersed (or managing staff on a voyage) Good gender balance EL1 vets manage the APS6 IOs who are vets, and non-vets manage the APS5 IOs who are not vets. Pastoral care arrangements in place where the IO is at a different location from their manager.

The VEMG management structure is unique with large spans of control (particularly for Assistant Directors and Staff Resource Managers) in a geographically dispersed workforce (many in very remote locations). This makes communication more challenging and impacts on the ability to establish trust and rapport within working relationships. During focus groups, managers raised concerns about the amount of time spent managing people issues, that their role was very reactive and they had no time to focus on strategic work. It also appears that the lack of appropriate resourcing has compounded these issues and in some cases resulted in less than optimal management practices.

It is clear through consultations, with both staff and management, that the current management structure not working effectively and causes concern. One of the reasons appears to be the significant amount of direct reports that the ADs (average 25.6) and Staff Resources Managers (average 48.4) currently have. A large number of direct reports can contribute to an excessive workload, leading to less effective management practices and less support for staff resulting in them feeling disengaged and removed from both their manager and organisational objectives. Spans of control target ranges suggest 7-9 is best practice for public sector regulation and compliance roles⁸.

Another complexity is the matrix style supervisor structure for OPVs, where technical advice is provided by the ATM (who sits within a separate work area – Meat Exports Branch) and direct line

⁷ Span of control numbers have been sourced from Aurion data as of July 2019

⁸ National Commission of Audit, Australian Government 2013, *Spans of control within Commonwealth government agencies*

supervision is undertaken by an AD in VEMG. There appears to me a lack of clarity around the two roles and opportunities to strengthen how the roles work together to support the OPVs.

Leadership/Management Capability

OPVs (particularly staff in remote locations) raised concerns with the level of support they receive from their AD and ATM. OPVs also had concerns about their immediate supervisor not holding the same professional qualification or having the veterinary technical expertise to fully support them in all aspects of their role, particularly in understanding the on-plant environment. There is a perception that management can be authoritarian as well as lack empathy, compassion and respect for OPVs.

Many OPVs commented that face-to-face visits with their AD once or twice every 12 months is not sufficient and mixed feedback was received on the quality of these visits. Some OPVs were satisfied whereas others felt their AD did not make effective use of the time together, spending too much time responding to phone calls and emails. This is particularly important given the isolation already faced by many VEMG staff who work in remote locations and are in some cases, the only departmental employee working at an establishment.

Limited staff to manager interaction can have a significant impact on being able to successfully build effective working relationships. Studies of remote management⁹ identified seven best practices:

- checking in frequently and consistently
- using face-to-face or voice-to-voice contact
- demonstrating exemplary communication skills
- making expectations explicit
- being available
- demonstrating familiarity and comfort with technology
- prioritising relationships.

A study on people analytics and culture found that teams whose managers spent a minimum of 16 minutes of one-on-one time with each direct report per week had 30% more engaged staff than the average manager, who spent just 9 minutes with direct reports¹⁰.

Many OPVs reported difficulty accessing their ATM for technical advice and although many preferred the old structure (only reporting to the ATM) it is understood that one of the reasons for the restructure was that ATMs were not providing sufficient people management support.

Research by Zenger et al found that to be a highly effective leader, you need to have a balance of both task/technical skills and people skills. They found that 'only 14% of leaders who were strong in results but not people focus achieved extraordinary leadership performance, when they looked at it from the opposite angle, only 12% of people-focused leaders achieved extraordinary leadership performance. The magic happened when leaders were at 72nd percentile in both task and people focus. This led to an impressive 90th percentile score on extraordinary leadership'.¹¹ This reiterates the importance of having managers that not only technical skills, but also having strong people and leadership skills.

⁹ Grenny & Maxfield 2017, Harvard Business Review, 'A study of 1000 employees found that remote workers feel shunned and left out'

¹⁰ Nielsen, C & McCullough 2018, 'How People Analytics Can Help You Change Process, Culture, and Strategy, HBR.org'

¹¹ Zenger, Folkman & Edinger 2011, Harvard Business Review - Making Yourself Indispensable

Limited feedback was provided about the FSMA/supervisor (MI4) relationship, however it was acknowledged that the FSMAs have limited visibility of their immediate supervisor and would benefit from increased visits.

Leadership structure and capability were not raised as issues within the Live Animal vet cohort. Some of the differences in this cohort of VEMG is that the executive level staff are all vets (predominately filled by women), managers have smaller spans of control and the workforce is not as geographically dispersed.

The IO Program also operates in a complex environment, creating challenges in managing staff/supervisor relationships. For example, IOs work in isolation when they are on a voyage (sometimes without any phone/internet reception), and are often in a different location from their supervisor when not on a voyage. The IO program has put things in place to assist in managing this relationship such as ensuring all IOs have pastoral care support if they are in a different location, and having a requirement for IOs and their supervisors to have an individual mutual agreement on how they will communicate/touch base on a daily basis. These management practices should be used more broadly across VEMG to ensure staff are supported and have regular communication with their manager.

2. Attraction and recruitment

Key 2019 Census results

- Only 38% of VEMG respondents stated the workforce is managed well (e.g. filling vacancies, finding the right person for the right job), 14% lower than the department.

Key observations

- Ongoing recruitment processes are lengthy and not always effective. Many staff were dissatisfied with internal EOI processes suggesting that they are often unfair and lack transparency. There is a perception of favouritism and that often the person for the job has already been selected before the process has taken place.
- OPV and Live Animal vets observed that the department could enhance the effectiveness of advertising vet roles by using more diverse advertising mediums and focus on where vets look for jobs.
- VEMG and more broadly BOD have already commenced work to improve the recruitment process. Rolling recruitment for temporary vacancies has been beneficial in providing a pool of vets interested in participating in the Independent Observer Program and psychometric testing (and other automated type processing) has helped assess candidate fit for the role (resilience and ability to manage the impacts of isolation for example).
- Positive feedback was received on the program offered at Murdoch University whereby students have the option in their last year of veterinary studies to complete OPV training modules. This has anecdotally increased the number of students interested in coming into the department who have a more informed expectation of the OPV role. Some of the newly recruiting vets (particularly those who have not long left university) felt lifting the profile of the department and its work would improve the attraction of graduates.

Attraction

From a candidate perspective, consultation feedback is that VEMG is not advertising where vets look, recruitment processes can be confusing, selection criteria are complex and job ads contain bureaucratic language which can be off-putting to potential applicants.

VEMG management noted that it has been a challenge to attract suitable candidates, particularly for positions in remote locations. Although there are a selection of remote locality allowances available under the *Meat Inspection Enterprise Agreement 2019-22* and *Department of Agriculture and Water Resources Enterprise Agreement 2017-20* it remains a challenge. It was noted during consultation that there was more flexibility to offer incentives to go to more remote locations in the past.

The department offers many benefits that has been identified that private practice vets are looking for, there is an opportunity to leverage off this and better make these benefits known to attract vets. An article by the Vet Practice Magazine suggests that vets are seeking jobs that offer better work-life balance; proximity to urban centres; opportunities for specialist training/mentorship and career advancement; and—if larger pay checks aren't forthcoming—compensatory perks (parking spots, paid study/family leave).¹² During consultation with staff, many OPVs and Live Animals vets spoke about what attracted them to the department. This included the pay, the hours (generally not having to do outside hours/weekend work and being able to leave work at work when they went home) and not having to deal with pet owners/compassion fatigue.

¹² "Where have all the vets gone?" Vet Practice Magazine, www.vetpracticemag.com.au/where-have-all-the-vets-gone (accessed August 9, 2019)

Recruitment and Selection

Consultation with VEMG staff and managers acknowledged that it is critical we recruit staff (particularly for on-plant roles) that have the appropriate skills and behavioural characteristics to successfully undertake the role. Working on-plant (often in an isolated environment) can be challenging so it is important to recruit staff who have high levels of integrity, resilience, communication and negotiation skills to effectively manage the various stakeholders (for example company management and staff).

It will be important for VEMG to continue to trial new ways of attracting the right people and effectively assessing these essential skills and behaviours in the recruitment process, whatever form that takes. This includes ensuring there is a strong focus on what skills and behaviours are required in the initial selection documentation and using selection methods such as psychometric testing.

Consultation highlighted recruitment processes are often taking too long, are poorly managed and casuals, in particular, reported insufficient feedback loops when they were unsuccessful. Delays are attributed to required police checks, panel members being unavailable, delegation approvals and the multiple steps in e-recruit all reportedly drawing out recruitment timeframes. In 2019, the average time to start (from job advertisement to commencement) for VEMG recruitment process is 74 days, higher than the 2018 rate of 67 days and much higher than the departmental recommended rate of 40 days. FSMA recruitment process take an average of 90 days and 105 days for a veterinary position.

The consequences of a long recruitment process include:

- loss of potential candidates, particularly external applicants who will not engage with complex processes
- reputational damage to the department
- failure to get the right person because the emphasis on the process not the individual
- loss of good people who do not wait for the process to be concluded
- productivity cost in carrying the vacancy.

Internal recruitment processes, mainly as they relate to temporary vacancies advertised through expressions of interest, are often seen to be unfair and lack transparency (particularly by OPVs and live animal vets). There are perceptions of favouritism and that often the person for the job has already been selected before the process takes place. Staff reported inconsistencies in how expressions of interests are run, some are closed to a particular area (not giving others a chance to apply) while others are run across the whole department.

What is working well in recruitment

VEMG has been using innovative recruitment practices with the Independent Observer (IO) Program. A rolling recruitment approach has proved effective in providing a pool of interested candidates. Information sessions are also held so that candidates had a clear understanding of the role and the entitlements before commencing the selection process. The assessment process also uses psychometric testing to assist in shortlisting people with the necessary behavioural attributes. The IO Program team are continuously reviewing their recruitment processes (including advertising, assessment and medicals). This work and the learnings should be leveraged across other recruitment activities in VEMG.

University Partnerships and Entry Level Programs

Each year approximately 500-550 veterinary students graduate from the seven universities around Australia.¹³ The three best veterinary schools based on school size, student and graduate satisfaction with veterinary science courses and indicative graduate salaries were James Cook University, Murdoch University and Charles Sturt University.¹⁴ It is important for the department to build stronger connections with these institutions.

Consultation feedback was that the department's strong relationship with Murdoch University has been beneficial. Students who have opted to complete OPV training module during the last year of their veterinary qualification have come into the department with a better understanding of the OPV role and on-plant environment.

In 2020, the department will be offering its first vet stream in the graduate program. Selection is already underway and of the 29 applicants up to four will be offered positions. Graduates complete the program at the APS4 level however VEMG vet roles start at the APS 6 level. VEMG should consider how best to capitalise off the pool of successful applicants by looking at regional rotations and promoting VEMG opportunities to vet applicants that were not successful into the highly competitive graduate program.

The new Meat Inspector Enterprise Agreement and the introduction of the training entry level classification creates the ability to broaden the available talent pool by allowing people without meat qualifications to be employed as an FSMA. Work has already commenced to develop the entry level FSMA program. With an ageing FSMA workforce, this initiative is critical in bringing new staff (particular younger generations) into these roles.

¹³ "Where have all the vets gone?" Vet Practice Magazine, www.vetpracticemag.com.au/where-have-all-the-vets-gone (accessed August 9, 2019)

¹⁴ "Best Veterinary Schools in Australia," University Reviews, www.universityreviews.com.au/australian-rankings/best-veterinary/ (accessed August 9, 2019)

3. Workforce management

Key 2019 Census results

- Non-permanent staff reported lower levels of satisfaction with non-monetary employment conditions as well as stability and security of their job.
- A 13% decrease from 2018 results, 56% of VEMG felt their workgroup has the tools and resources needed to perform well (58% for the department). Female staff in VEMG Meat Export reported lower levels of satisfaction with the recognition they receive for doing a good job (49% for VEMG compared to 66% for the department).
- 49% of VEMG staff agreed their SES manager actively supports opportunities for women to access leadership roles (14% lower than department).

Key observations

- The ability to attract and recruit vets and FSMAs is creating difficulties in being able to sufficiently and cost-effectively staff all establishments.
- Throughout consultation, many staff indicated that their requests for leave, training and opportunities to move into other roles (such as ATM or IO) had been declined due to an inability to backfill.
- VEMG have acknowledged the impacts associated with high use of a casual workforce and have been proactively working to employ more permanent staff.
- VEMG have prioritised improving the gender balance across the workforce and this is evident in the increase of female staff being successfully placed into FSMA and OPV roles over the past three years, this focus should continue. Further initiatives to increase female representation for OPVs, FSMAs and in Export Meat leadership roles are required.
- VEMG has an ageing workforce, there is a need to balance the impact of impending retirements, particularly for FSMAs and OPVs and at the same time meet the needs of a younger generation seeking development opportunities and career paths.
- The current rostering system is inefficient noting that there cannot be more than one person on at the same time. During consultation casual/ relief staff expressed frustration over the week-to-week roster which has impacted on family life and ability to make personal plans.

Workforce management is a significant and complex challenge for VEMG. Effective and efficient attraction and recruitment of vets and FSMAs is affecting VEMG's ability to sufficiently and cost-effectively staff the 76 establishments (with an additional 6 expected to open in the next 12 months). Establishments in remote and rural locations can be difficult to fill - particularly in [s. 47G\(1\)\(a\)](#)

VEMG utilises a casual workforce or overtime provisions to fill vacant shifts at establishments. Having a casual workforce allows the department to meet its contractual arrangements with establishments that needs to be flexible and responsive, noting due to seasonal requirements less staff may be required or if an establishment closes, staff can be redeployed to other locations. [s. 47D](#)

This does not included the increased travel expenditure as staff are deployed to areas where services are required. Throughout consultation staff commented on the cost-effectiveness of having to send casuals/permanent relief pool staff to different locations and some are travelling excessive distances in one day.

There are a number of flow on effects from having a high casual workforce. Staff raised concerns about the frustrations experienced by company management when they had a high turnover of on-plant staff, resulting in a 'revolving door' of OPVs or FSMAs through their establishment. This impacts on the ability for on-plant staff to provide a consistent service and to build good working relationships with the companies.

During consultation, casual staff indicated they felt less valued because they did not receive access to learning and development opportunities or partake in the performance management process. A number of current casual staff have been unsuccessful in winning permanent positions whilst still receiving regular shifts had caused concern. Casual staff also expressed frustration over rosters often being week-to-week, leave approvals being delayed making it difficult to make personal plans and a lack of empathy for their personal circumstances. Some reported a lack of work/life balance – getting home for one night of the week before having to leave to provide cover at the next establishment.

As an alternative to employing casuals, VEMG have recruited a number of permanent OPV and FSMA staff who are not assigned to a particular establishment. These individuals are referred to as 'permanent relief pool' staff and are used to provide relief across their respective regions. Recently, VEMG have piloted an approach where 'permanent relief pool' staff are headquartered to a small region where they service a small number of establishments i.e. three or four. These individuals don't generally dictate when and where they work, like casuals, and as a result provide a reliable backfill for staff absences. As ongoing employees they are also required to participate in the department's performance management processes holding them more accountable for their work performance than their casual colleagues. This concept should be expanded and consideration given to what the career pathway looks like for these individuals. An idea might be that an individual participates in this pool for a period of time on the basis they will then be offered a permanent role in a location they want.

In order to effectively manage the workforce and shift resources to where the highest priority is, VEMG has started to look at building mobility between functions and cross-training staff. Examples of where this is already underway include recruiting for 'vets' rather than vets for a specific function, i.e. OPVs or Live Animals, and backfilling roles with vets from other functions – i.e. Live Animal vets acting in Export Meat and OPVs undertaking temporary roles as IOs. One of the biggest barriers to moving staff across the different functions is the shortage of staff and lack of ability to backfill. During consultation with staff, examples were given where opportunities to move to other roles or act at higher levels were declined due to the ability to backfill. Once VEMG has the appropriate staffing levels, including the expansion of initiatives already underway, it will be important to prioritise this work in order to build an agile and mobile workforce and provide mobility and career opportunities for staff.

Gender

Improving gender balance across the workforce has been identified as a priority in the VEMG business plan. As at 30 June 2019, 26% of the VEMG workforce was female, compared to 49% for the Department of Agriculture. When gender was explored further only 6% of FSMA's were female, 34% of OPVs and 43% of vets. BOD has set a target at >45 per cent female employees by 2020 and a 50/50 split for all commencements.

With this focus the number of females being placed into FSMA and OPV roles has increased over the past three years. This trend is consistent with increased female representation of the veterinary workforce, particularly in younger age groups.¹⁵ In the 2019 FSMA recruitment process three female officers have been placed into FSMA roles (from the 9 that had applied), this is an increase from the previous two years where one female FSMA officer has been recruited annually. 49% (n=22) of applicants for the 2019 OPV recruitment process were female. Placement data is not yet available as the process has not been finalised, results from the 2018 recruitment process show that 83% (n=10) of those successfully placed into OPV roles were female this is an increase from the 2017 process whereby 67% (n=14) were female.

¹⁵ Australian Veterinary Association, *Australian Veterinary Workforce Survey 2018* (April 2019), 3.

Although the number of female officers being recruited in FSMA and OPV roles has increased, further initiatives to increase female representation in VEMG Meat Export leadership roles is needed where there are currently no female substantive ELs (noting there is one currently on acting arrangements) or Staff Resource Managers. The gender ratio outside of VEMG Meat Export is quite good with 67% of substantive EL and SES leadership roles being occupied by female staff (100% female representation in the Live Animal Function).

Age

Data shows the VEMG workforce is ageing with 54% aged over 55 years of age and in particular 65% FSMA and 47% OPVs are aged over 55 years of age. 44% of OPVs with less than three years tenure are aged 35 or under, much higher than the 27% of VEMG staff and 13% for FSMAs. There will be a need to balance impending retirements with the needs of a younger generation as VEMG moves towards a multi-generational workforce.

Rostering

The current roosting system was highlighted as being inefficient during consultation. There cannot be more than one person on at the same time or the system crashes and non-ongoing staff expressed frustration over the week-to-week roster which has impacted on their family life and ability to make personal plans. Staff expressed interest in having the opportunity to provide more input into rosters as they feel frustrated with the current process.

The function of managing rosters is currently undertaken by the Staff Resource Managers (SRM). This is a high pressure role with the requirement to not only manage roosting for all Export Meat staff but also provide supervision to FSMAs. Consideration should be given to the expertise that is needed in this type of role. By way of comparison, BOD more broadly has recently advertised for an APS 4 workforce management planner whose key responsibilities is preparing and maintaining staff schedules based on effective forecasting, allocating resources accurately on a daily basis and liaising with operational leadership regarding scheduled changes. Recruiting these types of skills and capabilities may be of benefit to the SRM role.

It is acknowledged the BOD is currently reviewing approaches to roosting and scheduling functions as part of its Workload Management Project. It is no doubt this project will allow for VEMG specifically to leverage of planning tools and support provided as an outcome in that project. The need in VEMG is immediate and may be considered in conjunction with this project.

To complement this work, systems and tools used by other organisations that have similar roosting and workforce challenges were explored by the SHRS team. The NSW Police Force uses a system called 'Kronos'. The NSW Police Force prepare a 6 week proposed roster at least 4-6 weeks in advance of the period commencement and is made available to employees 2 weeks before the period commencement date. Similar to VEMG, constant maintenance is required to the proposed roster, often on a daily basis, to adapt coverage to meet variable demands.¹⁶ Another app that was explored was ClassCover. ClassCover connects schools with new or known relief teachers in seconds whilst connecting teachers to a wealth of new employment opportunities. With ClassCover schools can see the availability of relief staff before booking them, search for relief staff in the wider community by experience or distance and all bookings are held in the one place with the online calendar. These types of existing options used within organisations with similar geographic and sourcing obligations may be worth looking into further to provide immediate solutions.

¹⁶ New South Wales Police Force, *Standard Operating Procedures for Rostering* August 2015

4. Performance Management

Key 2019 Census results

- Only 39% VEMG stated that their experience of performance management had been useful for their development, also highlighted as an issue for the department (43%).
- General impressions of supervisors were that for 42% of respondents believe that the support supervisors provided over the past 12 months has helped to improve their performance (16% lower than the department), 47% discussed their career plans with their supervisor (15% lower) and 47% agreed that their supervisor encourages them (22% lower).
- A 14% increase from 2018 results, 58% VEMG agreed that their supervisor openly demonstrates commitment to performance management (4% lower than the department) and 76% VEMG have a clear understanding of their development needs (2% lower than the department).
- Approximately 40% of VEMG Export Meat felt their supervisor provides time for them to attend learning programs, 10% lower than the overall VEMG rate and 28% below the department.
- 41% of VEMG claimed to have received recognition when they last accomplished something significant at work (24% less than the department) and 35% felt valued for their contribution (11% lower than the department).

Key observations

- Common perception of staff was that performance management is seen as a 'tick and flick' process and that it is of limited value to them.
- OPVs are frustrated that their performance appraisals are completed by an Assistant Director who does not have the same professional qualification as them or the technical expertise and that feedback provided lacks input from their ATM.
- Management recognised the challenges providing effective performance management conversations with a large number of staff in different locations.
- Staff consultation highlighted the challenges in participating in development opportunities (limited budget or being backfilled to attend for example).
- Staff reported feeling undervalued that their extra effort and contribution goes unnoticed by VEMG management.

The value of performance management was frequently raised throughout staff consultation and was often referred to as a 'tick and flick' process. The OPVs in particular were frustrated that appraisals were undertaken by their AD who did not hold the same professional qualification or have the technical expertise, and many made comments that no feedback was provided by their ATM. Feedback from VEMG management was that while ATMs were asked to provide feedback, often they didn't.

Many staff said they didn't have career and development conversations when developing their performance agreement. Many either didn't include training in their development plan as they knew they would not be provided support to attend, or if they did, they said it would nearly always be rejected. Access to learning and development is discussed in more detail in the Professional Development and Career theme of this paper.

Performance conversations provide an opportunity to recognise the work and performance of individuals. Comments from staff consultation indicated that they feel undervalued and that the extra effort and contribution often goes unnoticed by VEMG management.

VEMG managers also discussed the challenges with undertaking performance management, particularly as they have a large number of staff all in different locations (some quite remote).

Gartner research suggests that performance for remote workers should be evaluated through multiple sources of feedback – including both internal stakeholders and external stakeholders¹⁷.

Issues were also raised around staff not always being open to feedback provided and that expectations were not clearly identified around behaviour. The Victorian Government guidelines on managing a dispersed team highlighted the importance of discussing ‘how’ work is done, not just what is achieved.¹⁸

Effective performance management has a direct impact on employee engagement and business outcomes. It is important to recognise that performance management is not only about formal performance conversations but about ongoing, regular quality feedback. Research suggests that frequent targeted feedback is essential for top performance and that ‘the most engaged employees received feedback at least once a week’.¹⁹

The IO Program has developed a number of resources and tools to assist with the performance management of IOs including, setting clear performance indicators and measures (featuring a strong focus on conduct and communication), and a draft workplan and learning agreement that IOs can tailor to their individual needs, and a Performance Management Assessment tool (used for new inductees during their first 4 weeks).

The Performance Management Assessment Tool provides VEMG with the opportunity to assess new IO inductees’ performance and behaviour over their first four weeks to determine if the inductee is the right fit for the role. The inductee is provided formal feedback after the first week and at the end of the four weeks.

The above resources and tools are in the process of being reviewed. The work that is being done in the IO program could potentially be adapted for other areas in VEMG.

¹⁷ Gartner – Guidelines for Remote Management - <https://www.cebglobal.com/member/corporate-leadership-council/assetviewer.html?filePath=/content/dam/corporate-leadership-council/us/en/General/PDF/10/01/Guidelines%2520for%2520Remote%2520Management%2520.pdf&contentType=research&searchString=&pageContentId=200779445&pageRequestId=0719b7de-e0c8-418e-af08-bdf36b4ec2a6&checksum=-901132627>

¹⁸ Victorian Public Service – Managing a Dispersed Team: https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Managing-a-Dispersed-Team_WEB-1-July-2013.pdf

¹⁹ NeuroLeadership Institute – The Neuroscience of better feedback 2016

5. Professional Development and Career Planning

Key 2019 Census results

- 43% VEMG respondents stated their supervisor provides them with opportunities to develop relevant capabilities for their career (22% lower than the department) and 50% said their supervisor provides time to attend learning programs (28% lower than the department).
- 39% VEMG respondents agreed that their supervisor provides them with opportunities to work on tasks outside of their day-to-day work (e.g. cross-team project) (20% lower than the department).
- 37% of VEMG staff agreed that their supervisor actively supports opportunities for mobility, this has also been highlighted as an area of improvement for the department (46%).
- 40% VEMG respondents were satisfied with the opportunities for career progression (a 4% increase from 2018). This was also highlighted as an area of improvement for the department (46%).

Key observations

- There are challenges with balancing professional development opportunities and operational requirements, mainly due to inability to backfill. This is further compounded by the geographically dispersed workforce.
- Vets are seeking more opportunities for professional development and networking noting that there is a requisite to undertake a required amount of continuing education to maintain their vet registration.
- The OPV weekends were recognised as valuable forums to share information and network. Some staff provided feedback that the effectiveness of the teleconference could be improved and they are seeking increased networking opportunities via smaller network groups and mentoring.
- While access to learning and development and career progression was not actively raised by FSMAs, it was acknowledged that there is limited access to training (mainly due to operational requirements).

Vets

Both OPVs and Live Animal vets raised concerns with the level of access to professional development opportunities. Throughout consultation, many staff indicated that their requests for training and/or opportunities to move into other roles (such as ATM or IO) had been declined and that some no longer consider submitting requests as they didn't think they would be approved. The biggest barrier to accessing professional development appears to be the ability to backfill so vets can be released. Due to the location where vets are working, there are also additional costs associated with attending face-to-face training and/or conferences and sending replacements to backfill.

There is a requisite for vets to undertake a certain amount of continuing education (CE) to maintain their vet registration. Many vets compared what the department offers to what private sector veterinary employers provide (additional study leave and financial support to undertake CE). For example, Greencross (Australia's largest employer of vets) provides employees 1 week study leave (in addition to 4 weeks recreation leave), pays for Veterinary Information Network and Australian Veterinary Association membership as well as paying for required CE.

To support vets with maintaining CE points, VEMG holds OPV weekend training and Live Animal workshops which enables vets to earn their required CE points. The department pays vet registration fees and AVA membership (although feedback from some staff was that they were unaware that they could have their AVA membership cost reimbursed). Many staff indicated they really enjoyed the OPV weekends and particularly valued the opportunity to network with colleagues. Some

suggested at times some of the content doesn't tackle real issues faced by vets but rather provides information VEMG management/ Meat Export wished to convey to the cohort.

VEMG also holds monthly teleconferences for the OPVs. While there is good intention in running these teleconferences, feedback from staff is that the teleconferences are rushed, there are too many people involved to have valuable discussions, and it is not an environment that encourages OPVs to ask questions. Feedback from staff is that the agenda is driven by VEMG management and when they ask questions or suggest topics, they are told it is not the appropriate forum. VEMG management acknowledged that they have tried to engage the OPVs by seeking their input into agenda items for the teleconference however often don't receive any responses. This provides some insights as to the reasons why, from the staff perspectives, they don't engage with this forum.

Many of the OPVs made comments about trying to set up a new forum for recent OPV inductees to provide a platform for them to ask questions, learn from each other and connect in a smaller more personal environment. It is understood that the support from management for this group was withdrawn. Being able to have casual discussions with colleagues and sharing experiences are important means of keeping up to date, facilitating problem solving and enabling new starters to feel connected with their colleagues.

Mentoring was also highlighted as another area of improvement by the vet cohort. The Department is currently piloting a mentoring program in which a small number of VEMG staff (OPVs) are participating in. Acknowledging that there is not a vet stream, the mentoring program, structure and principles, could potentially be adapted should the pilot be successful. It would provide an opportunity for vets to mentor or be mentored by vets outside VEMG, or other non-vet employees. Many staff during consultation were not aware of the department's mentoring program pilot or did not consider it to be relevant to them.

A number of OPVs and Live Animal vets commented on the limited career progression and opportunities for mobility. Issues identified included the limited number of roles for progression, including but not limited to the EL1 VEMG management role not being a vet-specific role, other roles being based in Canberra and often vets feel disadvantaged as they don't have connections into the Department. Another issues with promotion or mobility for vets is that it often means a pay-cut. Many of the younger vets indicated they see the vet roles (OPV in particular) as stepping stones to other opportunities.

Boosting internal mobility to cultivate a more agile and mobile workforce requires a culture shift.²⁰ A survey conducted by Gartner on comfort discussing internal mobility found that only 37% of managers encourage their direct reports to seek internal opportunities and only 35% of employees feel comfortable asking for development opportunities from their manager.²¹

FSMAs

Conversations with FSMAs did not identify that access to professional development as key issue. The main issues for FSMAs was the ability to undertake mandatory learning modules during work hours (due to operational requirements), that some of the induction and mandatory modules are not relatable to their role on-plant (they would find it more beneficial if the training was facilitated by someone who has worked as an FSMA or at least on-plant) and they would benefit from increased face-to-face training on how to use their tablet and departmental systems.

²⁰ How to Start Boosting Internal Mobility - Gartner

²¹ Gartner 2018 Shifting Skills Survey – Comfort Discussing Internal Mobility

FSMAs appeared less interested in career progression. Many were unaware of available opportunities or that they would not be interested in the Staff Resource Manager (MI4) role due to being seen as too stressful and based in an office.

In July 2019, an opportunity arose for a small number of VEMG staff to pilot new learning platforms. While research shows that digital learning is not the preferred approach, if the pilot is successful, this could provide VEMG staff with an additional mechanism to access online, curated learning. The learning platforms provided access to flexible learning on a range of topics such as leadership, communication, conflict management. 16 VEMG staff nominated to pilot the platforms, including OPVs, Live Animal vets, management and FSMAs.

Induction and onboarding

Mixed feedback was provided by both staff and managers about the length of the OPV induction program. The program is currently 12 weeks and includes components on all species. This is regardless of whether an OPV will be working with a particular animal – for example pigs, where there are only a small number of establishments so it's unlikely that many will actually work with these animals. While some employees really valued the comprehensive training and thought 12 weeks was appropriate, others (i.e. those with previous experience though it was too long. As responsibility for training development and delivery) sits within Meat Exports Branch, the ability to influence length and content may be more challenging. There is an opportunity to review the induction training and consider whether it remains fit for purpose or if there is more flexibility that could be built in (i.e. depending on the new inductee's previous experience or what type of species they will be working with).

Feedback from Live Animal staff was there was no formal induction program and the quality of onboarding and induction was dependent on who was training you. It was however noted by both staff and managers that work was progressing to introduce a Live Animal induction program.

The IO Program has different induction requirements for staff who are already in the department, compared to new starters from outside the department. External new starters are required to undertake a 4 week induction program where they learn both the technical components of the role and also undertake a corporate induction. IOs that have been recruited from within the program are only required to undertake the technical component of the program. The development and delivery of the program is managed within VEMG which makes it easier to review and adjust as necessary. The program is reviewed regularly to ensure it is effective and fit for purpose.

6. Workplace Culture

Key 2019 Census results

- 77% of VEMG respondents indicated that they had *not* been subjected to harassment or bullying in their current workplace (1% lower than the department).
- 81% VEMG respondents agreed that their supervisors act in accordance with the APS values in their everyday work (10% lower than the department) and 85% agreed that the colleagues in their immediate work group act in accordance with the APS values in their everyday work (5% lower than the department).

Key observations

- Some VEMG staff are cautious of the impacts or sceptical about achieving resolution from reporting unacceptable behaviour in the workplace.
- Influence over a third party work environment and workforce culture can be limited and is challenging.
- Visibility for supervisors of the day-to-day work environment is limited.
- Many on-plant staff feel isolated and disconnected from their colleagues, VEMG, and the Department.
- There is a silo mentality between VEMG and Canberra policy areas resulting in staff feeling frustrated with the lack of consultation and communication from Canberra.

Consultation with both staff and managers highlighted there are many challenges in managing and influencing culture and workplace behaviour particularly in remote workplaces and within a third party environment.

s 47C & s 47E(d)

The Department's zero tolerance of unlawful discrimination, harassment or bullying and the need to attract and retain OPVs warrants action to address this issue.

Further exploration of the concerns raised by staff identified that instances of unacceptable behaviour often goes unreported and staff were not comfortable having issues escalated to the relevant subject matter area. Examples of why there was a lack of reporting included a fear of the s 47C & s 47E(d), the complaint not being addressed/resolved, as well as feeling isolated from the support of management and the department. A positive example was given where an employee indicated successful resolution following prompt manager action and facilitation of the issue that was resolved in collaboration with the department's Enforcement Unit. This reinforces the importance of timely departmental support and intervention. These are similar issues experienced across the department. A focus on integrity and appropriate behaviour has seen an increase in reporting. Continued discussion and awareness information should see this trend continue.

Other workforce culture issues raised during staff consultation included instances of underperformance and poor behaviour by colleagues. Staff reported feeling devalued when it appeared that behavioural and/or performance matters were not addressed appropriately. Conversely, managers reported they spend significant time on managing people issues.

It is important to note that individual matters (such as complaints about bullying and harassment and behaviour) are not within the scope of this report and where appropriate have been referred to the right area in the Department.

A number of comments were made by staff working at establishments about the isolation associated with their roles. Not only is there often the physical aspect of remoteness but also lack of feeling connected to colleagues, VEMG and the department. Working as a government regulator within a small community was also mentioned as a challenge, particularly when managing relationships where work and home life crosses over. Suggestions were made about further education and awareness about how to manage these relationships, rather than just advice about what you cannot do.

A guide published by the Victorian Government on Managing Dispersed Teams has identified that 'workplace isolation is a real risk for employees who work in a different location from their manager and work colleagues. Without social and emotional interaction with colleagues, such employees may form a belief they lack support and feel excluded from workplace relationships'²². Managers can do the following to reduce isolation:

- check in informally to make employees feel valued
- promote social interaction among team members
- encourage staff members pairing and mentoring
- facilitate entry for new team members.

A consistent theme across all cohorts in VEMG (except for the IO program) was the relationship with Canberra. Staff spoke about their frustrations with the lack of consultation and communication from Canberra which impacts the ability to effectively and efficiently do their jobs – for example changes to policies, work instructions and IT systems. This has resulted in staff not feeling valued for their input and technical advice.

Female OPV staff raised a number of concerns specific to their experiences working in VEMG. For example:

- lack of women in leadership roles leading to lower understanding by VEMG management of female issues and feeling comfortable to raise issues up the line
- difficulties balancing work/life and accessing flexible work arrangements particularly in regards to managing childcare when staff are not working standard 9-5 hours.
- perceptions of favouritism whereby male colleagues are provided with more opportunities for permanency, preferred establishment locations or professional development
- instances of being bullied/harassed by company management or staff when they are unhappy about a decision being made
- establishment environment can be challenging for women in general by not always providing appropriate facilities/uniforms.

The issue of female uniforms was raised on a number of occasions by both male and female staff. It is understood that uniforms are now in production, however the delay in resolving this issue has frustrated staff. This highlights the importance addressing issues quickly and keeping staff up-to-date on progress.

²² https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Managing-a-Dispersed-Team_WEB-1-July-2013.pdf

7. Work environment and role

Key 2019 Census results

- General impressions of supervisors were that 56% support the use of flexible work arrangements by all staff, regardless of gender (24% less than the department).
- 60% VEMG reported satisfaction with their non-monetary employment conditions (e.g. leave, flexible work arrangements, other benefits) (18% lower than the department). This was significantly lower for Meat Export (50-53%) with Live Animals having a much higher result at 84%.
- Consistently lower scores than the department for agency communication and promotion about health and wellbeing offerings.
- 57% VEMG agreed their immediate supervisor is committed to supporting their health and wellbeing at work (21% lower than the department) and 68% believed their immediate supervisor cares about their health and wellbeing (14% lower than the department).
- 51% felt they had too many competing priorities (14% higher than the department).
- 70% were satisfied with the stability and security of their job. This is an 18% improvement over the last three years but is still 7% lower than the department.

Key observations

- On-plant operating hours can be challenging – 10 hour shifts can be difficult, particularly for staff with young families, older employees or those with injuries.
- Live animal roles require lots of flexibility due to the nature of the business – i.e last minute changes to schedules due to boats being delayed, bad weather, change of docking location etc. There is a large amount of travel and overtime.
- FSMA duties are highly repetitive and lack variety.
- FSMA raised concerns over job security.

Working hours in VEMG are often driven by industry requirements which can pose challenges around balancing staff requests for flexibility with operational requirements. Hours can be challenging with many on-plant staff working outside normal bandwidth hours (i.e. starting at 5am or finishing at 2am). On plant staff have also indicated that hours of operation are getting longer with 10 hour days often being the norm. For some, these hours are impacting on physical and mental well-being, and the ability to maintain work life balance, particularly for parents with small children, older employees and those with injuries.

Live animal vet roles require lots of flexibility due to the nature of the business and responding to industry requirements – i.e last minute changes to schedules due to boats being delayed, bad weather, change of docking location etc. There is a large amount of travel, overtime and often weekend work. While census result show much higher satisfaction with non-monetary employment conditions (e.g. leave, flexible work arrangements, other benefits, staff still raised concerns about work-life balance during consultation.

Staff also noted the challenges in accessing flexible working arrangements due to their operating environment. This has implications from workforce management, workforce satisfaction and gender balance perspectives²³. Research indicates there are a number of benefits of supporting flexibility at

²³ Gartner Corporate Leadership Council, *Improve the Employee Experience for Remote Workers*, <https://www.cebglobal.com/member/corporate-leadership-council/research/article/19/employee-experience-for-remote-workers-hrbp-2q19.html>

work including increased job satisfaction and decreased stress²⁴, particularly for parents with children at home. Trials of various flexible work structures (e.g. job sharing, part time work) would assist VEMG to determine what is able to be accommodated operationally as well as have positive outcomes VEMG and current employees and increase the potential pool of future employees.

FSMAs

The introduction of the Australian Export Meat Inspection System (AEMIS) in late 2011 means that meat establishments are now able to engage Australia Authorised Officers (AAOs) to undertake meat inspection tasks. This has reduced the number of FSMAs in the department and has created concerns about job security. The change has also meant an adjustment in the FSMA role, resulting in a lack of variety (particularly in establishments where the FSMA is at the end of the chain) and has left some FSMAs uncertain about the future of their role.

The lack of task variety and long hours impact on fatigue and job satisfaction. As the FSMAs are required to work to industry hours of operation there are set breaks (often very short particularly as the timeframes includes washing equipment and walking to the lunch room). FSMAs also indicated that at some plants (s. 47G(1)(a)) floor mats had been removed, making standing in gumboots on concrete floor very uncomfortable for 10 hours.

VEMG is already working with WHS to address concerns around job design and work environment and had a dedicated EL1 who is leading this work.

²⁴ <https://hbr.org/2018/11/helping-remote-workers-avoid-loneliness-and-burnout>

8. Systems and IT

Key 2019 Census results

- 37% of VEMG respondents were satisfied with the technology within the agency, also highlighted as an area of improvement for the department.

Key observations

- Inefficient systems and technologies are impacting on staff ability to carry out their duties in most effective manner.
- VEMG staff raised concerns over the lack of face-to-face training and consultation when new systems are rolled out.

During consultation staff highlighted some of the system and IT concerns impacting on their ability to effectively and efficiently carry out their duties. Many staff expressed frustrations about the systems they use on a daily basis such as Audit Management System and Meat Export Data Collection System in terms of having duplication and offering limited options for data categories which don't reflect reality on-plant. Concerns were also raised over the lack of consultation when designing new systems and lack appropriate training when rolled out.

A number of casuals/permanent relief pool staff also indicated that every time they went to a new establishment they had to request/re-request access to the relevant systems – creating frustration and ineffective use of time.

Staff and managers both spoke about frustrations with the quality of internet and phone connection (particularly for staff in remote locations) which impacts on the ability to communicate with each other effectively and undertake certain tasks. While out of the scope of this report, it is important to mention these issues as they are having an impact on staff morale and effective use of time.

s. 33(b)

s. 33(b)