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Regulation of Australian Agriculture  
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SUBMISSION ON  
AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION DRAFT REPORT  
"REGULATION OF AUSTRALIAN AGRICULTURE"

The Animal Welfare League of Queensland thanks the commission for the opportunity to provide input to this report. As an organisation with over 200 staff, 800 volunteers and 250 000 supporters who are concerned about animal welfare, and with particular emphasis on an ethical approach to resolving animal welfare issues, we would like to offer the following feedback on the approach to resolving issues in the report generally, and in the section on the regulation of farm animal welfare particularly:

1. There is a limited reference to ethics in making decisions concerning all the issues in the report. Ethics (the science of morality) provides universal frameworks and principles to help guide decision making. While animal welfare science provides increasing knowledge of animals' capacities and what they want, **ethics is a separate discipline** that guides **what should be done** when there are often conflicting interests. It involves the capacity to make ethical assessments of situations, preferably before issues develop. The animal welfare issues that arise are largely a result of a failure to apply an ethical assessment prior to developing new agricultural enterprises and processes. It requires understanding of moral judgment and how to apply an ethical decision making process, using universal ethical frameworks and principles. It also requires the motivation to act ethically with considerable self-knowledge and will, and the development of moral identity in both individuals and organisations despite it often being easier to pursue what seems less costly, more efficient or in one's personal interest.
2. We appreciate the Commission's acknowledgment of the need for improvement in domestic farm animal welfare, and the need for greater rigour and balance in developing standards and guidelines.
3. We support the Commission's recommendation for an independent body tasked with developing the national standards and guidelines with a science and community ethics advisory committee to provide independent and rigorous evidence on animal welfare science and community values. However we urge you to add "and to provide ethics knowledge and processes" to develop a culture of moral behaviour in both the setting up and running of this independent body and advisory committee.
4. The objective of the national standards and guidelines need to be not only clearer (p. 19) but also ethical. While animal welfare science and gathering of community values are essential, they are not sufficient to resolve conflicting interests. Only a rigorous application of ethical knowledge, skills and processes can provide this. We would suggest that the term "ethical outcomes" should be the term used, rather than "balanced outcomes" (p.18), as ethics provides guidance as to how these various

information sources should be balanced using universal principles and frameworks. Ethics helps overcome the relativity of “(soundly elicited) community values and expectations”(p.19) which can vary based on ethnicity, gender, education level, field of study, and experience with different animal types.<sup>1,2</sup> As well, scientific evidence exists within a paradigm of existing cultural beliefs and can therefore be misguided, unfair and factually wrong (e.g. Descartes’ claim that animals were like machines incapable of feeling and thought).<sup>3</sup>

5. In the Australian Government’s Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS) 2005 – 2013 which aimed “to assist in the creation of a more consistent and effective animal welfare system”, one of the 4 goals was: “People make ethical decisions regarding animal welfare, supported by knowledge and skills”. The Education and Training Cross-sectoral Working Group (of which we were a member) noted that there was a need for education and training in ethics across all sectors including community, school, university, university teaching, animal industries and vocational education and training sectors. Since AAWS was abolished, there has been no vehicle to assess progress with ethics knowledge and training nationally.

We suggest that such ethics knowledge and training is critical to providing a stable and enduring basis for improvement in farm animal welfare regulation. Ethics is also a foundation for decision making and action regarding the other areas this report seeks to address, including land use and access, environmental and water regulation, regulation of genetically modified crops, use of agricultural and veterinary chemicals, food labelling, foreign investment, not only the animal welfare issues. Although beyond the scope of this report, we suggest the national independent body for animal welfare should also be responsible for welfare regulation not only for animals used for farming, but also wild animals (native, introduced and pest animals), and animals used for companionship, recreation and research.

6. In relation to your point regarding “a risk that unnecessary regulations will be imposed on farmers based on emotive reactions, rather than evidence based policy (p.18), while science has in the past considered emotions as inappropriate for consideration in decision making, neuroscientific research is suggesting that emotions, particularly the moral emotions such as empathy, compassion, regret, remorse, and indignation, are in fact a part of our intuitive system providing rapid information on what to do,<sup>4</sup> and therefore should be considered along with more deliberate reasoning methods. Distinguished philosophers have also discussed the importance of moral emotions e.g. Rawls.<sup>5</sup>
7. In conclusion, AWLQ supports the Commission’s recommendation for the development of an independent body for animal welfare regulation, provided there is a universal ethics base for selection of personnel, information gathering and sharing, consultation, decision-making and evaluation, monitoring and enforcement.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input into the Draft Report. If you require further clarification, please contact me.

Yours sincerely

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## References

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