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Dear Sir or Madam

Review of the Animal Care and Protection Act 2001

We are a group of veterinarians. We became vets from a wish to care for animals, we practise as vets – the health, welfare and respectful treatment of animals is our key concern – and our work is evidence-based, referring to current scientific findings. Now, we campaign for climate action out of concern for all the animals that are being affected, hurt or killed by climate change.

Veterinarians for Climate Action [1] is a national, not-for-profit, registered charity that aims to advocate for and achieve climate action within and beyond our profession. Our patron is Professor Peter Doherty, veterinary surgeon, Nobel Laureate and Australian of the Year in 1997. Twenty-three former Chief Veterinary Officers also publicly work alongside us.

Some of our members remember when the Animal Care and Protection Act 2001 (from now on referred to as the Act) reached the statute books. We helped develop education and awareness for staff, producers and animal organisations, and have been involved in investigations conducted under the Act. Without doubt, the Act has led to an improvement in animal care and better conditions for animals.

We would like to discuss animal welfare in today's world, twenty years on from when the Act became law. One purpose of the Act (Section 3c) is to protect animals from unjustifiable, unnecessary or unreasonable pain. The failure by governments world-wide to conscientiously address climate change will lead to further unnecessary pain and distress of animals.

The meaning of animal welfare

The meaning of animal welfare hasn't changed. It is defined in the OIE Terrestrial Code [2]:

'Animal welfare means the physical and mental state of an animal in relation to the conditions in which it lives and dies. An animal experiences good welfare if the animal is healthy, comfortable, well nourished, safe, is not suffering from unpleasant states such as pain, fear and distress, and is able to express behaviours that are important for its physical and mental state.'

Climate change and animal health and welfare

Evidence is building on the impact of climate change on animal health and welfare.

The increase in temperature may negatively affect livestock health by causing metabolic alterations, oxidative stress and immune suppression but the impact is extremely complex involving not only environmental impacts but also ecological, social and economic changes [3].

The Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation has highlighted the significant impact that climate change will have on health [4]. Diseases will spread further south, especially those carried by vectors such as mosquitoes and ticks. In Queensland the breeding range of the notorious cattle tick will likely extend resulting in more livestock susceptible to outbreaks.

Direct effects of climate change will largely be due to increase in temperature and severe weather events. Extreme weather events in Australia in recent years have resulted in livestock and wild animals suffering pain, fear and distress. Large numbers have died. Below are some examples:

- In February 2019 an estimated 625,000 cattle were wiped out by widespread flooding in northern Queensland [5]. The rain event lasted about 10 days and as well as the severe loss of animal life had an impact on people and property in the area. The IPCC have reported that increased flood events can be expected as a consequence of climate change [6].
- An extreme heatwave in far north Queensland during 2018, when temperatures were over 42°C, killed more than 23,000 spectacled flying foxes, equating to almost one third of the species in Australia [7].
- The Great Barrier Reef has experienced several mass bleaching events caused by rising ocean temperatures driven by global warming. This brings long term risks not only to the reef itself but to the diversity of marine fauna living within the reef, including dugong and marine turtles. The Australian Government's assessment of biodiversity vulnerability recognises that climate change is the greatest long-term threat to the Barrier Reef [8].
- Nearly three billion animals – mammals, reptiles, birds, and frogs – were killed or displaced by the 2019-20 bushfires in Australia [9]. At least thirty-four people lost

their lives. Climate change increased the risk of extreme weather that made the 2019-20 bushfires more likely by at least 30% and possibly more [10].

- In the three years from January 2017 to the end of 2019, rainfall for much of Australia was greatly reduced. During this severe drought, livestock losses were inevitable. An increased frequency and severity of droughts can be expected as a consequence of climate change [6].
- An Australian rodent in the Torres Strait Islands, the Bramble Cay melomys is the first mammal to become extinct due to climate change. Rising sea levels and storm surges are thought to have resulted in loss of habitat for this animal [11].

Climate change has been caused by humans

Scientists agree that anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions are responsible for global warming. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is continuously updating the projected risks of the increasing temperature including rising sea levels, heat extremes, heavy precipitation in some regions and severe droughts in others. Climate change makes extreme weather events more severe and more frequent [6].

Climate action is a human responsibility

Acknowledging and responding to the impact of climate change on people and animals is a responsibility of all elected governments. In March 2021, the United Nations Secretary-General urged all countries to commit to net zero or carbon neutrality, with ‘clear and credible’ plans to achieve the target, starting immediately [12].

The Queensland Government and all governments in Australia must develop and implement robust plans to reduce gas emissions with a target of net zero emissions by 2050 **or earlier** and critical interim targets to make absolutely certain we save this world environment and all the animals living here.

Our recommendations:

- 1 The Act must acknowledge climate change, the scientific evidence and the impact on the health and welfare of animals.
- 2 The Act must hold the Queensland Government responsible for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by all community and business sectors within this State.
- 3 The Act must require animal owners to plan for climate change. Biosecurity Queensland can assist with the development of climate adaptation and preparation.

Our offer to help:

Veterinarians for Climate Action includes members from across the extensive veterinary spectrum. We have amassed considerable data on climate change and its reported impact on

animals, whether livestock, companion animals or wildlife. The information we share is evidence-based and reliable.

If we can be of any help, either by providing further information or through face-to-face presentations, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Further information:

- 1 Veterinarians for Climate Action <https://www.vfca.org.au/>
- 2 World Organisation for Animal Health, *Terrestrial Animal Health Code* <https://www.oie.int/en/what-we-do/standards/codes-and-manuals/terrestrial-code-online-access/>
- 3 Lacetera N (2019) *Impact of climate change on animal health and welfare*. *Animal Frontiers* 9:26–31. doi:10.1093/af/vfy030.
- 4 CSIRO, *The link between climate change and disease* <https://blog.csiro.au/link-between-climate-change-disease/#:~:text=Climate%20change%20is%20also%20predicted,per%20100%2C000%20persons%20every%20year.>
- 5 Cowan et al (2019) *Forecasting the extreme rainfall, low temperatures, and strong winds associated with the northern Queensland floods of February 2019* <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2212094719300970>
- 6 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change <https://www.ipcc.ch/>
- 7 The Lab of Animal Ecology, *The Flying-Fox Heat Stress Forecaster*
- 8 Australian Government, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment, *Australia's biodiversity and climate change - A strategic assessment of the vulnerability of Australia's biodiversity to climate change*
- 9 World Wildlife Fund, *New WWF report: 3 billion animals impacted by Australia's bushfire crisis*
- 10 van Oldenborgh et al, 2020, *Attribution of the Australian bushfire risk to anthropogenic climate change* (waiting publication by the journal NHESS)
- 11 University of Queensland, *Barrier Reef rodent is first mammal declared extinct due to climate change* <https://www.uq.edu.au/news/article/2016/06/barrier-reef-rodent-first-mammal-declared-extinct-due-climate-change>
- 12 UN News, *UN chief urges 'clear and credible' plans to achieve net zero* <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1088142>