

# Submission to the Animal Care and Protection Bill – Exposure Draft

Victorian Government  
Department of Energy, Environment and Climate  
Action (DEECA)

**25 March 2024**

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WoolProducers Australia (WoolProducers) is the peak industry body representing Australian wool growers across a vast range of issues from animal health and welfare, biosecurity, natural resource management, emergency animal disease outbreak preparedness, and industry development -including research and trade. WoolProducers Australia (WoolProducers) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the proposed *Animal Care and Protection Bill* – Exposure Draft (the Bill)

Following consultation with WoolProducers' members I am pleased to offer our full endorsement of the submission provided to you by the Victorian Farmers Federation, however I wanted to take this opportunity to raise several areas of key importance, or specificity to wool producing farming operations.

### **Consultation process**

WoolProducers shares the concerns of the Victorian Farmers Federation with regards to the consultation processes undertaken in the development of this draft Bill. While we agree that open consultation processes should be undertaken, they must be done so in balance, with specific weighting applied with regards to the representative capacity and credibility those putting forward submissions. Spokes people from the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry have recently been quoted in saying that the revision of the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS) will be primarily informed by science and evidence, WoolProducers expects that the same principles will be applied by all levels of government with regulatory responsibilities relating to animal welfare.

### **Legislative outcomes**

WoolProducers holds substantial concerns that the primary legislation is being drafted in advance of the subordinate legislation (i.e. the regulations). Many of the regulatory requirements that will impact Victorian wool growers will be contained within these regulations. While departmental briefings offered to date have stated that the requirements of the regulations will be based on existing resources, such as Codes of Practice and Standards and Guidelines, this claim is both ambiguous and concerning. Such resources prescribe measures and activities that are either mandatory or recommended. It is WoolProducers expectation that the regulations will not contain any measures above those currently prescribed as mandatory within such resources. The exception to this being where existing state legislative requirements exceed such requirements, such as the mandatory use of pain relief when mulesing sheep at any age, to which WoolProducers policy is aligned.

### **Animal Sentience**

WoolProducers acknowledges that sheep are sentient beings that can feel and perceive the world around them through both positive and negative experiences. Legislation and regulation to safeguard animal welfare must be based on peer-reviewed evidence informing the scientific understanding of sheep sentience.

In acknowledging sheep sentience, WoolProducers maintains that:

- Sheep do not have the same feelings as humans
- Sheep can be owned for legally permitted activities (farming and associated permitted husbandry procedures as prescribed by relevant legislation)

WoolProducers policy allows for animals to be managed according to best practice (in a manner that optimises lifetime animal welfare outcomes), specific to the enterprise in question. Extension of sentience beyond WoolProducers policy may compromise producers' ability to manage animals according to best practice and unintentionally reduce lifetime animal welfare outcomes for sheep.

### **Regulated activities**

As the Victorian Farmers Federation has stated routine management and husbandry procedures should not be classified under the 'restricted procedures' category. Such classification would impose unnecessary burdens on farmers, complicating everyday farming practices without contributing to practical animal welfare outcomes. Where necessary these procedures, which include mulesing, tail docking, castration and ear marking should be permitted procedures when performed in accordance with existing resources, such as the Standards and Guidelines.

### **Animal Care and Protection Fund and Animal Care and Protection Compliance Fund Prohibited Acts**

WoolProducers opposes the establishment of the two funds outlined in the draft Bill. Industry already makes substantial investment on a range of initiatives associated with animal welfare. The lack of clarity on the scope of these funds is concerning and risks politicisation of a process that must be based on science and evidence without bias, as unintentional as such bias's may be.

Again, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to lodge a submission and would welcome further consultation as the legislative development process commences.

Please do not hesitate to contact me on 0455 442 776 should you wish to discuss any issue raised in this letter.

Yours Sincerely,



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