

Submission in response to the consultation paper on the proposed Inspector-General of Animal Welfare

Note: This submission is made in a personal capacity.

Introduction

Instituting an Inspector-General for Animal Welfare gives the Commonwealth an opportunity to actively expand its remit in animal welfare. I support it.

Overall, the proposed expansion of the Inspector-General of Live Animal Exports objectives and function is a sensible mechanism to introduce the change, however it does limit the scope somewhat.

Most notably, the consultation paper appears to indicate that the Inspector-General will continue to only be empowered to conduct reviews with respect to the performance of functions or exercise of powers of 'live-stock export officials' as provided by the *Export Control Act 2020* and its subordinate legislation.

It might be reasonable to consider:

- expanding the Inspector-General's remit to include an official's performance of functions or exercise of powers under other Commonwealth legislation insofar as it relates to or impacts upon animals, or
- providing for the Minister to explicitly request reviews on behalf of another Minister that administers an Act providing functions or powers that relate to or impact upon animals.

Relevant Commonwealth legislation might include (but might not be limited to):

- the *Biosecurity Act 2015* (but without conflicting with the functions of the Inspector-General of Biosecurity)
- the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*
- the *Science and Industry Research Act 1949* (limited to activities involving the use of live animals in research and noting the intersection with relevant Codes of Practice and State legislation)

Response to guiding questions

1. Objectives - Welfare

The expanded remit might include the ability to review, or consider during a review:

- Whole-of-supply chain welfare assurance, in the context of what a 'live-stock export official' has access to (information/records) when making a decision
- Interjurisdictional functions, including the type and content of requests by the Commonwealth, and how the information is used by a 'live-stock export official' when making a decision
- Current science and/or standards both in Australia and globally.

2. Objectives – Additional Live Export

An additional objective relating to live export could be animal-centric, namely reviewing and reporting on any impacts on animals (and potentially the live export trade more generally) of performance (or non-performance) of a function or exercise (or non-exercise) of a power by an official.

3. Prioritisation

Prioritise my proposed objective relating to interjurisdictional functions, as Commonwealth officials utilise information from other jurisdictions in decision making processes.

4. Animal welfare information in reports to Parliament

Current reporting appears to be on mortality rates and summaries of actions taken by the Secretary.

More granular data may provide opportunities for deeper analysis and risk management, and evidence of the proper function of regulation.

Reports could be generated on the incidence rates of adverse welfare conditions and incidence rates of potentially adverse welfare conditions (i.e., when indicators were *close* to threshold), shown by:

- Month
- Species
- Route

The type of data and thresholds required will need to be defined (e.g., what constitutes ‘adverse welfare conditions’¹). Graphical presentation is likely to improve interpretation.

5. Animal welfare information on the department’s website

Building on the concept of more granular data, the department could publish aggregated and de-identified data from key welfare indicators¹ on voyages. Graphical presentation would ease interpretation.

This is distinct from the suggestion for reports to Parliament above, in that I am suggesting here to report directly on the indicators as opposed to the number of times (incidence rate) the indicators amounted to adverse welfare (or potentially adverse welfare) conditions.

Indicators of relevance in my opinion include:

- Stocking density
- Husbandry practices and duration of:
 - Journey prior to voyage
 - Holding prior to voyage
 - Voyage
 - Holding after voyage
 - Journey after voyage
- Climate conditions (e.g., temperature, humidity, wind, sea state)
 - On board
 - Environmental, at each stage of the journey

¹ Industry-led projects may provide guidance on indicators, for example the LiveCorp ‘Animal welfare interpretation and outcomes project’

- Equipment failures (e.g., water and/or feed supply, ventilation mechanisms)
- Noxious gas levels (e.g., CO, CO₂, NH₃, CH₄)

Further, the department's website could summarise links/references to industry or academic research, or projects aimed at measuring, mitigating risk, or enhancing welfare and any information on how the department intends to consider and/or adopt emerging knowledge.

6. *Experience, skills, and capabilities*

Acknowledging personal bias, it is my opinion that the Inspector-General (and their office, inclusive of any staff or contractors) should have the following experience, skills, and capabilities in the context of delivering the expanded remit relating to animal welfare.

- Knowledge (qualifications) in animal sciences (not necessarily veterinary science)
 - Preferably with relevant postgraduate qualifications in veterinary public health, public health, trade, economics or in another discipline relevant to functions/objectives
- Experience in livestock and/or animal industries quality assurance and/or regulatory compliance
- Skills in regulatory investigation, preferably relating to animal welfare
- Skills in stakeholder engagement
- Capability to interpret and apply legislation
- Capability to analyse, interpret and communicate data

Conclusion

I consider that it is important to reiterate that the proposed institution of an Inspector-General for Animal Welfare (by whatever means and with whatever functions) is only one element of the overall animal welfare regulatory framework in Australia.

The Inspector-General's remit must positively influence outcomes for animals, notwithstanding that the general context of an Inspector-General's work is to consider the appropriateness and sufficiency of the actions of an official. Therefore, the objectives and functions must be strategically aligned to both contemporary welfare science and regulatory practice to allow recommendations that continually improve official decision making for the benefit of animals.