

NEW ZEALAND VETERINARY ASSOCIATION INITIATIVES IN ANIMAL WELFARE  
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Introduction.

Animal welfare has become a public and emotive issue.

We entered into a contract with animals many years ago when we domesticated them to satisfy our own pleasure. We tacitly agreed to give them basic care now described as the "five freedoms" ie freedom from thirst, hunger or malnutrition, from discomfort and exposure, from injury and disease, of movement and opportunity to express most normal behaviour patterns and freedom from fear. Have we "kept" our part of the contract?

What farmers and we as veterinarians have accepted in the past as "normal and acceptable" is being called into question. In this climate of animal welfare awareness, there is now a vigorous trend to expose, question and investigate traditional values and attitudes. Justification is now being called for.

Unfortunately this public awareness is often accompanied by a lack of understanding and appreciation, particularly on the part of city-dwellers, of the inter-linking skills needed to manage a farm. Not all New Zealanders appreciate the width of the farming base that provides us with so much of this country's income. We refer to this as the rural-urban gap. This gap is widening as fewer people have contact with farms and farming practice. Achieving a balance between optimum animal welfare and earning a living isn't so easy on a farm when we consider the vagrancies of production factors, weather patterns and changing overseas market demands.

The "moral status of animals is rising in society". This now familiar quotation from Bernard Rollins Ph. D., well-known applied ethologist, of Colorado State University in the U.S., rings in the ears of the animal welfarists. He goes on to say "concern for animals has achieved the status of a major social issue during the past decade throughout the western world".

I think it would be fair to say that to some degree the animal welfare

movement initially gathered momentum with the questioning of animal experimentation by the animal rights faction. This has led to extensive public debate, public demonstrations and overseas some very destructive actions. In New Zealand our scientists and scientific establishments have been subjected to a small amount of personal harassment.

You will be aware that the majority of animal welfare legislation over the past 200 years has referred to wilful, intentional, and malicious cruelty or wanton neglect. In the new way of thinking about animals, there are legislative changes taking place throughout the world that affirm the rights of laboratory animals to be "free from pain and suffering not essential to research" and to be housed under conditions which "enhance their psychological well-being".

From the animal experimentation arena, the public has moved on to question other activities involving animals and I refer now to animals used in agriculture. The new legislation in Sweden uses "rights" language in its erosion of confinement agriculture practices in granting cattle the "right to graze". Legislative restrictions on confinement agriculture have been put in place elsewhere in Scandinavia, as well as in Germany, Holland and Switzerland. The EC and the Council of Europe have moved towards the abolition of battery cages. In addition, the movement against "mutilation" is gathering momentum. Hence signs of movement against tail docking in dogs and cattle, dehorning in deer, and mulesing and pizzle dropping in sheep.

In New Zealand, our Animals Protection Act 1960 is being redrafted to be called the Animal Welfare Act. An extensive repertoire of Codes of Recommendations and Minimum Standards is being prepared by the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee to the Minister of Agriculture. It is interesting to note that most people are not concerned about taking animal life; they are, however, very concerned about how that animal lives.

To complete a picture of the animal welfare scene we should look at companion animals. Society is being alerted to the fact that in New Zealand some 25,000 surplus cats and dogs are being euthanased [now referred to as "convenience killed"] each year. In the US, this figure is closer to 13 million annually. There will need to be some extended and no doubt emotive debate on our attitudes to death and sexuality before we achieve comprehensive responsible pet ownership and a curb in the pet population explosion.

Animal welfare and non tariff trade barriers.

I have purposely left this issue aside until now.

We have yet to see an embargo on our New Zealand produce based on farming practices in this country. However we do know that following the "Como Express" incident there was some consumer resistance to our dairy products in Europe.

We are also aware that consumer buying mentality is moving through a phasing scenario that started with price, moved on to quality, and has now arrived at purchase based on conscience as well. Sainsbury's in the UK offer a standard product and a "Tenderlean" range of lamb. Each pack of "Tenderlean" carries a detailed description of the product that refers to animal welfare issues, drugs used only under veterinary supervision and "natural rearing". In New Zealand, I am not aware of any substantial preparedness to pay premium prices for this type of product even if it was available.

Veterinarians have a pivotal role to play in assisting this country to avoid the placement of non tariff trade barriers against its primary produce. It is essential that New Zealand should not over- or under-react to the threat of non-tariff trade barriers. Our contribution to the lack of establishment of such barriers should follow as a result of a commitment to our guardianship of animal welfare.

New Zealand is considered by Europe to engage in several practices which are labelled as "at risk". These include "easy care" lambing, live sheep shipments, transport of bobby calves, develvetting, induction and the tail docking of cows.

Veterinarians and animal welfare.

To quote Bernard Rollin again, he says "in my view, it is the mutual ethical responsibility of veterinarians to lead in putting animal welfare into practice".

The veterinary profession has both a professional and an ethical obligation to relieve pain, distress and suffering in animals.

The Guide to Professional Conduct for all registered veterinary surgeons in New Zealand alerts us to our "special responsibility for animal welfare"

and states that "veterinarians must consider the welfare implications of any requirement involving animals and, as appropriate, should act or advise to minimise suffering." Furthermore, "by their own example, veterinarians should encourage people to handle animals as gently, quietly and safely as circumstances allow."

In both the U. S. and the U. K., at graduation, veterinarians take an oath [not unlike the medical Hippocratic Oath] to uphold the principles of veterinary ethics. In the US, a strong commitment is made by the veterinarian that he/she will ensure the welfare of animals and the relief of animal suffering. In my opinion, the taking of a similar oath by New Zealand graduates would reinforce our personal commitment to animal welfare [as well as to a code of ethical conduct and our continuing education].

NZVA initiatives.

As a member of NZVA Council in 1991, I was given the animal welfare brief by the President of the day, Dr Bob Duckworth. At this stage I was NZVA's representative on the National Animal Ethics Advisory Committee and Waikato University's Animal Ethics Committee and believed that I had a reasonably pragmatic approach to animal welfare.

I set myself the task of coming to grips with all aspects of the subject, helping the profession to do the same and then raising the profile of the New Zealand Veterinary Association in animal welfare.

At this point I would like to acknowledge the encouragement and continued support of Dr David Bayvel, MAF's National Advisor for Animal Welfare. He has continued to supply me with a vast array of literature on the subject. He has facilitated NZVA's public presence at appropriate opportunities.

By the end of 1992, I felt ready to draft an action plan and a budget for NZVA's Animal Welfare programme for 1993.

The rest of this address will be devoted to the activities in that plan. In all areas there is always room for additional effort !

1. Existing NZVA policy statements have been collated, added to and revised where appropriate.
2. All Special Interest Branch executives have been met and given the opportunity to comment on the action plan. Several have included animal

welfare on their annual seminar programmes this year. They have reviewed their species-specific policy statements and given me much needed technical information as background material to these statements.

3. A regular article now appears in Vetscript each month called "Animal Welfare and Ethics". This is meant to keep the profession informed on some of the current issues. I hope to address the subject of ethics and encourage some ethical debate in future articles.

4. Press releases on animal welfare issues are made when appropriate. NZVA is also being requested to speak at gatherings of farmers on this topic.

5. NZVA has 42 veterinary nominees on the Animal Ethics Committees of the teaching and research institutions in this country. These nominees receive quarterly mailings of ANZCCART News and other relevant material to assist them with their often time-consuming and controversial deliberations.

There is established in the NZVA office, a system for the actioning of nominations following the gazetting of a Code of Ethical Conduct by the Minister of Agriculture [and one should a code be revoked].

6. A regular consultative process has been set up between the MAF Animal Welfare Services team and NZVA. Two NZVA Council members meet with a representative of this team quarterly and I am invited to meet with the whole team twice yearly. We are working through areas of mutual concern eg lay castration of horses, deVelvetting without analgesia, disbudding, and transport of animals. We discuss and try to resolve areas of conflict between the two organisations. The Special Interest Branches know this channel of communication is open to them for species-specific problems.

7. A similar consultative process has been set up with the RNZSPCA. We meet more informally and because the President of this organisation has representation on many of the same committees as NZVA there is ample opportunity for dialogue and we would probably be in contact at least fortnightly.

8. The controversial area of Urban Animal Management has demanded increasing effort particularly in the Auckland area. 18 months on Hamilton City Council's Working Party on dog control convinced me that we have some major attitudinal barriers to overcome before there can be any improvement in the situation. We have waited nearly 2 years for the

Select Committee on Dog Control to come out with its recommendations. April Vetscript carried a perspective article on this issue which I hope all veterinarians can use as a basis for any action in this area. At the recent Animal Welfare Forum in the US, the veterinary profession was labeled as "reprehensible" for its actions in allowing the pet population crisis to escalate. This is by no means the whole story and I have alluded to this earlier in this paper. "Pet problems are people problems".

The Select Committee report on Dog Control has now been released [1/7/93] and it is heartening to note that all the recommendations made by the Companion Animal Society of the NZVA have been included. The Report recognises the concept of reward for responsible pet ownership.

9. The New Zealand Veterinary Association supports the establishment of a Chair in Animal Welfare Science at the Veterinary School and has made a small financial contribution of members funds to this end. A representative of the NZVA has been invited to sit on the selection panel during the appointment process.

10. In order to establish some system of preparedness within our profession for a civil disaster, we have established dialogue with the Ministry of Civil Defence. Dr Mark Howell has collated information from some 30 practitioners who were involved in the Edgecumbe earthquake and the Southland floods. [At the same time he has taken the opportunity to gather some data from those who coped with the South Island snow storms [not labeled a civil disaster]. Dr Karen Bailey at the Lincoln Animal Health Laboratory has some collated data to add to this].

11. NZVA is represented on 4 national animal welfare orientated committees.

[a] NAEAC - the National Animal Ethics Advisory Committee. We have two personal ministerial appointments on this committee along with representatives of the medical profession, the Royal Society, the MAF, the Ministry of Education, the RNZSPCA, and the public. This Committee is responsible for advising the Minister of Agriculture on all aspects of animal manipulation for the purposes of teaching and research [some 250,000 animals per year] in New Zealand. It approves [or disapproves] the Codes of Ethical Conduct submitted by each institution for gazetting, amongst several other duties.

[b] AWAC - the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee. We have one nominee on this Committee and several others on code writing sub-committees [see above]. Members of the main committee include representatives of the farming community, the legal profession, the MAF, NAEAC, RNZSPCA, and an animal behaviourist, Dr Lindsay Matthews. The Codes while having no

legal status as such are an extremely important tool to use in determining evidence for possible sub-optimal animal welfare.

[c] ABWRC - The Animal Behaviour and Welfare Research Centre. We have a place on the Consultative Committee to this leading institution. Research into the development of improved animal care and handling systems takes place at the Centre. Decisions to change farming management systems must be based on sound scientific reasoning. NZVA has the opportunity to make suggestions about future research projects and to be kept informed of progress in on-going research. The opportunity to exchange information with the numerous producer board representatives on this Committee makes each meeting very worthwhile.

[d] ANZCCART- The Australia and New Zealand Council for the Care of Animals in Research and Teaching. This independent Committee, formed several years ago in Australia, has the opportunity to work now on both sides of the Tasman. Its primary objective is to promote high welfare standards for animals used in science while at the same time providing a forum for discussion of related issues by all interested parties. Issues include such topics as the use of animals in schools, adjuvants, alternatives, environmental enrichment and ethical cost scoring. Sponsor members invited to belong include the Royal Society, CRIs, Universities and the Health Research Council. Non-sponsor members include NZVA, NZSTA, ASTA, AgCARM, the Association of Polytechnics, RZNSPCA, DOC, MSRT, and the Animal Welfare and Behaviour Research Centre at Ruakura. The NZVA representative has been elected by the non-sponsor members to take a place on the ANZCCART [ NZ ] Board and enjoys observer status on the ANZCCART [ Australia ] Board.

[e] SCAW-This Australian based committee of the Australian and New Zealand Agricultural Council was established to promote harmonisation of animal health and welfare policies and practices which serve the mutual interests of both countries. AVA enjoys observer status on this Committee and it has been suggested that NZVA should attend as well.

## 12. Animals in Schools Education Trust

This charitable trust convened by NZVA comprises several national organisations that share a commitment to humane education. It believes that humane education has a positive effect on peoples' care for animals and for each other. The Trust endeavours to attract funding from interested organisations and individuals to establish an adequate provision of resources designed by teachers for teachers to use in teaching about animals at all levels of the science and social studies curricula.

## Conclusion.

It would seem that in some instances at least, the judiciary have not yet had their animal welfare consciousness raised thus jeopardising the hope of a substantial number of successful prosecutions in New Zealand. Increased penalties allowable under recent amendments to the Animals Protection Act 1960 and proposed changes for the new Animal Welfare Bill may begin to alter this attitude.

While I believe it is imperative that the New Zealand Veterinary Association has a high public profile in the animal welfare arena, as in most walks of life, our profession's image will very likely be based on the actions of individual veterinarians as they go about their daily activities.