Ms Heather Neil
Chief Executive Officer
RSPCA Australia
PO Box 265
DEAKIN WEST ACT 2600

Dear Ms Neil

I am aware that the RSPCA Australia has established a campaign regarding the 2016 federal election.

I assure you that the Australian Government understands and shares the concerns of the community about the welfare of animals.

The government’s primary role in animal welfare is at the international level. Australia has been and will continue to be, a strong supporter of the work of the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE). The OIE plays an important role to improve international animal health, welfare and trade. Australia provided leadership to the OIE through the Improved Animal Welfare Program (IAWP). The Australian funding through this program allowed the OIE to deliver train-the-trainer courses in countries importing livestock for slaughter from Australia. For more information on the project please see: http://animalwelfarestandards.org/

Australia has a good international reputation for regulating live animal exports. We are the only country among over 100 livestock exporting nations to ensure international animal welfare standards are met throughout the entire supply chain. The government will continue to seek improvements in animal welfare internationally, which in time will lead to a more secure livestock trade for Australia. This trade is essential for Australian farmers and I am committed to ensuring its ongoing viability. The industry employs around 10 000 people, contributes significantly to the country’s economy, supports many rural and regional communities, and underpins better economic returns at the farmgate.

The government also provides funding to industry Research and Development Corporations. The research undertaken improves industry best practice through knowledge sharing, on-farm efficiencies and good animal husbandry.
The states and territories have responsibility for domestic animal welfare. Along with industry they are the driving force on animal welfare standards and reforms. The government is confident that the animal welfare arrangements and laws put in place by state and territory governments will continue to achieve positive animal welfare outcomes.

I note your concern about the sale of cosmetics in Australia that have been tested on animals. The National Industrial Chemicals Notification and Assessment Scheme (NICNAS) is committed to reducing the use of animals for testing the safety of chemicals used in cosmetics. NICNAS continues to monitor the development of alternatives to animal testing and adopts new testing methods as full replacements for animal tests once they have been validated for regulatory purposes.

As part of the 2015-16 Budget, the Australian Government committed to a range of reforms to NICNAS which will further reduce the need for the provision of data from animal testing. These reforms will allow the greater acceptance of data from similar chemicals and non-animal test methods and increase acceptance of international risk assessments materials from trusted overseas regulators.

Implementation of the reforms to NICNAS is ongoing and a third consultation paper on the reforms is due to be released in May 2016. Information on how to become engaged is available via the NICNAS website: www.nicnas.gov.au/about-nicnas/nicnas-reforms/become-involved-in-the-reform.

This letter will be made available on the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources’ website at www.agriculture.gov.au. The Australian Government will not respond directly to campaign correspondence arising from RSPCA Australia or affiliated websites.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

Keith Pitt MP

29 APR 2016