Australian Government

Australian Animal Welfare Strategy: consultation summary 2026

Overarching introduction and animal group chapter consultation

October 2026



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We acknowledge the continuous connection of First Nations Traditional Owners and Custodians to the lands, seas and waters of Australia. We recognise their care for and cultivation of Country. We pay respect to Elders past and present, and recognise their knowledge and contribution to the productivity, innovation and sustainability of Australia's agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries.

Credits
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Introduction

Background

The Australian Government is strengthening a national approach to animal welfare by investing $5 million over 4 years (2023-2027) to renew the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS). The renewed AAWS will provide a principles-based framework for a national approach to animal welfare and bring key stakeholders together on animal welfare issues of national significance.

The Australian, state and territory governments are developing the strategy under a joint leadership approach. States and territories have played an integral role in providing input via the Animal Welfare Task Group (AWTG). The Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has also consulted with stakeholders across government and through our governance processes, with animal industries, animal handlers, non-government representative organisations, veterinarians, research bodies and the public over multiple years. This consultation has helped capture a broad range of perspectives from those involved in animal care across different sectors and activities.

Australia's National Statement on Animal Welfare underpins the AAWS development. It reflects the strategy's vision, priority areas and other key considerations already agreed by all agriculture ministers. The national statement was informed by stakeholder consultation undertaken between March and July 2024, including our first public Have Your Say between March and June 2024. The consultation process and outcomes are summarised in the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy: consultation summary 2024.

We held an in-person stakeholder roundtable in 2025, with state and territory governments and key stakeholders for the livestock and production animals and aquatic animals chapters. Participants provided feedback on potential system-level actions that may be included in the strategy. We also conducted a Have Your Say survey in 2025, which informed animal group chapter opportunities. Further detail can be found in the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy: consultation summary 2025.

Throughout 2026, we progressively released 6 draft animal group chapters and a draft overarching introduction to targeted stakeholders for feedback, in preparation for a third and final Have Your Say consultation. The strategy's overarching introduction outlines the vision and overall direction for the AAWS, strategy principles, roles and responsibilities, priority workstreams and goals. It sits above the 6 animal group chapters. The overarching introduction and chapters are now part of a single, consolidated document. The finalised strategy is planned for release in 2027.

The 6 animal group chapters are:

- animals in the wild
- animals involved in research and teaching
- animals involved in work, sport and recreation
- aquatic animals

- companion animals
- livestock and production animals.

Purpose

This report provides an overview of the targeted consultation undertaken on the strategy's draft overarching introduction and animal group chapters, to inform the renewal of the AAWS. Consultation activities occurred from December 2025 to August 2026.

The report reflects the feedback we received from multiple stakeholder onboarding sessions, chapter-specific meetings and draft content review.

The report captures insights shared by the stakeholders engaged and does not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian and state and territory governments.

Consultation process

We adopted a standard consultation process that is in line with the APS Charter of Partnerships and Engagement following stakeholder feedback at workshops in 2025. We provided targeted stakeholders with draft material for review and invited their feedback for consideration.

The draft strategy overarching introduction and chapter material provided to stakeholders was developed using desk-top based environmental scanning in consultation with subject matter experts and the published Animal Welfare in Australia 2025 – Environmental Scan.

Note on terminology in the report

Terminology used in each stage of consultation represents a point in time and may not reflect the terms used in the final strategy. Our consultation process was iterative in nature and the feedback received has informed the suitability of the terms used in this report.

Consultation methodology

Governance review

The following governance groups were utilised, where appropriate, in reviewing the strategy's draft overarching introduction and the 6 animal group chapters before their release for targeted stakeholder consultation:

- AWTG – comprised of state and territory officials from departments responsible for animal welfare
- the Environment and Invasives Committee – comprised of state and territory officials from environment departments
- the Australian Government cross-portfolio Sponsor Group – comprised of officials from the:
  - Australian Government Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water
  - Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

- the Strategy Advisory Group – comprised of independent experts in animal welfare, veterinary science
- policy subject matter experts from the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.

We incorporated feedback from the governance groups into the draft material distributed to targeted stakeholders.

Targeted stakeholder review

A representative selection of key stakeholders for each animal group chapter attended online onboarding sessions and were provided an overview of the AAWS development process, a progress update, and the chapter scope. Participants were also given the opportunity to ask questions about the strategy and the chapter review process.

We provided stakeholders with the relevant working draft chapter and guidance on how to provide feedback following these sessions. Consultation commenced in late 2025 on the draft livestock and production animals chapter and continued in 2026 on all draft chapters.

A similar process was adopted for obtaining stakeholder feedback on the strategy's draft overarching introduction. However, process and progress information was provided by email.

Participating stakeholders

We selected national-level organisations and peak industry bodies to participate based on their previous engagement in AAWS stakeholder focus groups and workshops, and their relevance to the scope of draft animal group chapters.

Stakeholders with interests across multiple animal groups who had already attended an onboarding session were given the option to receive later draft chapters without attending additional sessions. We provided each animal group cohort with the relevant draft chapter after completing onboarding.

The draft strategy's overarching introduction was provided to stakeholders based on their previous engagement with the AAWS development process and their engagement with the draft animal group chapters.

Participating stakeholders represented a broad cross-section of the animal welfare system, including government, animal industries, animal handlers, non-government representative organisations, veterinarians and research bodies.

We acknowledge that there is broad community interest in the AAWS and whilst it has not been possible to include all interested parties in the targeted stakeholder reviews, it has provided opportunity for broader engagement through its Have Your Say process.

What we heard

Stakeholders provided comprehensive and constructive feedback across a broad range of topics on the strategy's draft overarching introduction and animal group chapters, including:

- chapter scope and structure
- strategic direction
- animal welfare challenges and opportunities
- governance arrangements
- the role of research, innovation and continuous improvement.

While feedback varied across animal groups, several common themes emerged throughout the consultation process and are explored in the next section.

Key feedback themes

Clarity of scope

Stakeholders sought further clarity of the animals, activities and context captured by each chapter scope. In some cases, stakeholders sought additional stand-alone animal chapters for specific animal groups or activities. Feedback included requests to:

- list individual species inclusions and exclusions and all encompassed activities
- clearly distinguish between related terms and concepts
- specify all the circumstances in which each scope would apply.

Strategy framing

Stakeholders raised concerns during draft chapter consultation that, without the overarching introduction, they could not easily contextualise the chapter within the broader strategy.

Animal welfare stakeholders sought clearer long-term objectives, greater consideration of emerging issues and opportunities, and stronger articulation of how proposed actions would lead to specific animal welfare outcomes.

Peak bodies across all animal groups sought greater acknowledgment of the strength of existing animal welfare approaches and their proactive efforts towards continuous improvement.

We also received considerable feedback for specific objectives and action-orientated outcomes, including calls for policy reform and activities that are beyond the scope of the strategy.

Inclusion of all parties

Stakeholders sought greater recognition of relevant parties within the animal group chapters, including:

- balanced framing of the range of stakeholders (individuals, groups and organisations) that contribute to animal welfare
- contributions made by animal owners, producers and carers
- industry's role in animal welfare, including:
  - leadership in research
  - assurance systems
  - accreditation programs
  - education and training
  - monitoring
  - emergency response
  - continuous improvement.

Animal welfare groups sought greater emphasis on the role of public expectations and animal welfare advocacy.

Stakeholders also called for the refinement of references to First Nations peoples and the application of Indigenous Knowledges.

Evidence, science and data

Stakeholders sought a stronger focus on science- and evidence-based approaches to animal welfare. They noted that some examples used in the chapters could be more clearly linked to animal welfare outcomes or replaced with more relevant ones.

Stakeholders also requested that data used in the strategy should be updated to the most current information and in some cases called for additional data and evidence to be included.

Governance, standards and regulatory frameworks

Stakeholders provided extensive feedback on the governance arrangements of different animal group chapters. There were requests for greater focus on the complexity of related policies, implementation and enforcement.

Stakeholders sought greater clarity in descriptions of governance and regulatory frameworks and the respective roles of governments, industry, institutions and other stakeholders in supporting animal welfare outcomes.

Chapter specific feedback

Animals in the wild

Stakeholders sought clarity on the inclusion of specific activities including:

- native animal population management
- differentiation between individual and population level welfare
- the role of national plans, standard operating procedures and codes of practice.

Stakeholders sought clarification that the chapter does not include naturally occurring behaviours, such as predation, between animals in the wild.

Stakeholders also requested the use of clearer language around regulatory arrangements for the interaction of First Nations peoples with wild animals.

Animals involved in research and teaching

Stakeholders requested stronger discussion on emerging trends and innovations, particularly:

- non-animal methodologies
- artificial intelligence
- international developments
- greater recognition of the importance of the 3Rs (replacement, reduction and refinement)
- efforts to minimise animal use and impacts.

Feedback further emphasised the importance stakeholders place on transparency, including improved data collection, reporting and availability of national datasets.

Animals involved in work, sport and recreation

Stakeholders suggested including further commentary about activities and considerations for whole-of-life welfare approaches, including:

- breeding
- training
- retirement and rehoming pathways.

We received feedback seeking stronger recognition that animal welfare outcomes can be influenced by environmental conditions, preparedness, traceability and innovation and technology.

Stakeholders also requested additional sector-specific examples relating to regulatory arrangements and accreditation programs.

Aquatic animals

Stakeholders sought greater recognition of the distinct regulatory, operational and welfare contexts across different aquatic sectors, requesting that the chapter content and opportunities highlight these differences.
Stakeholders also requested:

- inclusion of industry-led technological advancements and continuous improvement activities
- inclusion of additional sector-specific guidance and codes of practice
- clarity around the voluntary nature of some standards and schemes.

Companion animals

Feedback suggested the initial draft chapter focused heavily on dogs and cats, with little coverage of small mammals and non-traditional pets.

Stakeholders called for:

- more balanced framing of welfare issues associated with traditional and non-traditional pets
- elaboration of the socio-economic barriers that can affect pet ownership
- further emphasis on the importance of including companion animals in emergency preparedness plans
- further acknowledgement of the contributions of shelters and rescue organisations
- reframing technology-use as a tool to support positive animal welfare outcomes when used appropriately.

Livestock and production animals

Stakeholders sought stronger recognition of continuous improvement across the sector, including acknowledgement of existing efforts to respond to evolving community expectations and improve animal welfare outcomes. They also asked for:

- greater emphasis on partnerships, research coordination and addressing information and reporting across the supply chain
- balanced representation of Australia's livestock industries, including both its strengths and opportunities for improvement.

Feedback on the overarching introduction

Animal welfare groups sought clearer definitions of key welfare concepts and stronger recognition of animal sentience and positive welfare experiences. Many stakeholders also called for stronger links between animal welfare, animal health, biosecurity and food security, including greater recognition of One Health and One Welfare principles.

We received feedback and suggestions to:

- include greater focus on emergency preparedness in our changing climate
- refine the framing throughout the strategy and use more outcome-focused language
- recognise preventative approaches
- clearly articulate Australia’s animal welfare aspirations and achievements.

Many stakeholders also sought changes to improve:

- factual accuracy
- balance and evidence provided in the representation of animals’ roles in society
- cultural references and references to national identity and Australia’s international engagement.

Stakeholder feedback on the priority areas, goals and objectives sought stronger governance, oversight and evidence-based decision-making arrangements and greater emphasis on measurable animal welfare outcomes, monitoring and continuous improvement.

Feedback also highlighted the importance of national consistency, while recognising jurisdictional differences and existing systems.

Responding to feedback

Stakeholders provided comprehensive and constructive feedback throughout the targeted consultation on the strategy's draft overarching introduction and animal group chapters. We analysed and considered this feedback alongside evidence gathered through environmental scans and previous consultation activities.

We have used all stakeholder feedback to refine the draft overarching introduction and each animal group chapter to ensure the strategy reflects diverse perspectives and current animal welfare challenges and opportunities. While we may not have incorporated every suggestion directly, we considered all submissions when developing subsequent iterations of the draft strategy content.

Stakeholder feedback, including from the 2026 Have Your Say process, will continue to inform development of the strategy.

A final draft strategy will be reviewed through our established governance processes before finalisation in 2027.