



Australian Government

Australian Animal Welfare Strategy: First Nations consultation summary

May 2026



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Acknowledgement of Country

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.

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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 to 2027) to renew the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS). The previous strategy lapsed in 2014.

The development of the renewed AAWS is being jointly led by Australian and state and territory governments. It is being built on a principles-based framework and informed by engagement and feedback received through stakeholder consultation. A renewed AAWS will provide a framework for a national approach to animal welfare and bring key stakeholders together on animal welfare issues of national significance.

First Nations voices were included as a part of the consultation process to ensure their perspectives are meaningfully reflected in the AAWS. This approach recognises the deep cultural, spiritual and practical relationships First Nations peoples have with animals and Country. Their knowledge and experiences play a role in ensuring a renewed AAWS is culturally appropriate and relevant to all people with a connection to animals.

Outputs of this consultation period will inform the development of the strategy and its animal group chapters and will help build a more inclusive and representative strategy and inform future decision-making.

The renewed AAWS will be released in chapters, each dedicated to one of 6 animal groups, with the strategy expected to be finalised in 2027.

The animal group chapters include:

- Livestock and production
 - animals in production systems, including livestock such as terrestrial mammals, poultry and crocodiles.
- Aquatic animals
 - aquatic animals commercially farmed or harvested in their own environment
 - aquatic animals caught or used in recreation activities (recreational fishing, the ornamental/aquarium industry).
- Animals in the wild
 - native animals, including marine fauna
 - introduced and feral animals, including feral animals harvested in the wild
 - native animal management, including animals that are harvested in their own environment
 - marine animal management, excluding animals that are harvested in their own environment
 - native wildlife parks and rescues
 - the conservation and scientific study of native animals in captivity.

- Companion animals
 - all animals that are kept as pets, including dogs, cats, rabbits, fish, birds, amphibians, reptiles, ferrets and rodents
 - breeding and behavioural training of companion animals
 - horses, donkeys and mules, poultry and other animals typically used in production systems kept on hobby farms or as pets.
- Animals used in research and teaching
 - all animals used in research and teaching.
- Animals used for work, sport and recreation
 - animals used for work (e.g. service animals, support animals of any species, muster dogs)
 - animals used in sport (e.g. horse racing, greyhound racing, equestrian events)
 - animals used in recreation (e.g. circuses, magicians, rodeos, zoos, dog events)
 - animals involved in recreational hunting.

Australia's first [National Statement on Animal Welfare](#) (national statement), endorsed by all Australian, state and territory agriculture ministers, was published in December 2024 – a key step in progressing the renewal of the AAWS. It was informed by consultations detailed in the August 2024 [Australian Animal Welfare Strategy: consultation summary report](#).

The national statement continues to underpin the AAWS development. The strategy's vision, priority areas and other key considerations have been agreed by all ministers and are reflected in the national statement. This includes context setting and acknowledgement of the need to build trusted relationships. It also explicitly acknowledges the spiritual connection that First Nations people have with animals and the importance of partnering with First Nations people to incorporate their teachings and perspectives on protecting and caring for all living beings.

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of a program of community consultation undertaken to inform the renewal of the AAWS. The report reflects key themes identified through consultation with First Nations organisations and community members.

Some insights captured during community consultation were outside the scope of the AAWS. These have been included as they may inform other work underway by stakeholders, or future work, where relevant.

The insights captured in this report reflect the views shared by stakeholders and do not necessarily reflect the views of Australian and state and territory governments.

Consultation process

The department is committed to meaningful engagement with First Nations peoples and communities in renewing the AAWS.

To support the development of animal group chapters, a program of community consultation was undertaken between May and July 2025. This included 8 workshops – 3 of which were held

on Country in Katherine, Gungardie/Cooktown and the Torres Strait, alongside additional consultation activities, such as presentations and meetings. Collectively, these engagements involved representatives from more than 40 First Nations stakeholder groups and organisations and were led by a First Nations stakeholder engagement specialist to support culturally appropriate and effective consultation.

Dates and locations of workshops held during this period are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 Dates and locations of First Nations consultation workshops

Date	Location	Number of participants in attendance ^a
3 June 2025	On-Country – Katherine, NT	13
4 June 2025	Virtual	3
5 June 2025	Virtual	3
10 June 2025	On-Country – Gungardie/Cooktown, Qld	11
16 June 2025	Virtual	9
18 June 2025	On-Country – Masig/Yorke Island, Torres Strait, Qld	15
19 June 2025	Virtual	5
11 July 2025	Virtual	12

^a Attendance figures are estimates only and may not reflect actual attendance due to data capture limitations.

In committing to meaningful engagement with First Nations peoples and representative organisations, the AAWS consultation process is adhering to the principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC). Following consultation, minutes were confirmed with participants for accuracy and where not agreed to, information has not been used to inform this report. Prior to the finalisation of this report, the department has sought to obtain formal consent from consulted stakeholders.

Stakeholders were invited to share perspectives on matters they considered important, across all animal group chapters. As a result, some animal group chapters received more detailed input than others, with most key themes relevant across all animal groups and at a cross-sectoral systems level. While some insights were outside the scope of the AAWS, they were still considered important to capture.

The consultation process was designed to ensure respectful, inclusive and accurate engagement with First Nations organisations and community members involved in animal welfare and animal management. The steps taken for this consultation were as follows:

- 1) **Stakeholder identification** – Relevant First Nations organisations and individuals with expertise or involvement in animal welfare and animal management were identified through existing networks, sector knowledge and community referrals.
- 2) **Initial engagement** – Identified stakeholders were contacted and invited to participate in discussions about the AAWS.
- 3) **Workshops and meetings** – A series of in-person and virtual workshops were held to gather insights, experiences and recommendations. These sessions provided a culturally safe space for

stakeholders to share their perspectives. Presentations were also given to share information on the AAWS where relevant.

- 4) **Validation of meeting records** – Following each engagement, a summary of the discussion was sent to participants for review. This step ensured that the information captured was accurate and reflected the views expressed and that FPIC was upheld.
- 5) **Thematic analysis** – Once approved meeting minutes were received, the validated content was reviewed and analysed to identify recurring themes, priorities and opportunities across all consultations to inform the development of this consultation summary.
- 6) **Validation of key themes in this consultation summary** – Relevant drafted sections of this consultation summary were provided to participants for review. This step ensured that key themes identified continued to accurately reflect the views expressed and that FPIC was upheld.

Note on terminology in the report

The terms used during consultation reflect the language at that time and may change in the final strategy. This is because the AAWS process is iterative and ongoing.

Summary of findings

A summary of findings from consultations with First Nations stakeholders and representative organisations are outlined in Table 2 and expanded on in subsequent sections. These findings span multiple animal group chapters, highlighting common priorities, challenges and opportunities across sectors.

Table 2 Identified challenges and related opportunities

Challenges	Related opportunities
<p>Access to veterinary services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irregular and infrequent services • Limited scope of care • Animal welfare impacts on human welfare • Regulatory barriers 	<p>Service access and delivery reform</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand predictable access to veterinary and preventative care through mobile clinics, regular rotations and community clinics. • Build local capability through community-based animal care workers supported by professional veterinary oversight. • Use telehealth and remote veterinary support to extend care into regions without resident veterinarians. • Clarify legislation to support community-based roles, rehoming programs and prevention-focused models. <p>Community-led animal management and capacity building</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen responsible ownership education and community campaigns. • Improve preventative care access and clarify council expectations. • Pursue legislative reforms to support fair and appropriate management. <p>System-wide enablers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure long-term funding for monitoring, ranger roles and prevention services. • Strengthen cross-sector collaboration for coordinated service delivery. • Invest in public education to support welfare-positive behaviours.
<p>Barriers to traceability and data analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate data systems and infrastructure • Limited capacity for long-term data analysis • Lack of recognition of Indigenous Knowledge creating barriers to monitoring and traceability 	<p>Data, traceability and information infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modernise data systems to reduce manual burden and improve reliability for monitoring animal populations. • Formalise data sharing between councils, rangers, NGOs and governments for coordinated planning. • Fund analysis of long-term datasets so monitoring translates into action. • Extend traceability systems to feral species to support sustainable management. <p>System-wide enablers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure long-term funding for monitoring, ranger roles and prevention services.

Challenges	Related opportunities
<p>Environmental impacts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate pressures • Habitat degradation, biodiversity risks • Invasive species • Water pollution • Light pollution 	<p>Strengthen cross-sector collaboration for coordinated service delivery.</p> <hr/> <p>Integrated environmental and animal management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase transparency around environmental impact and water quality assessments. • Invest in habitat restoration, adaptive management and climate resilience. • Embed Indigenous land management practices into environmental management frameworks. • Adopt light-management practices to minimise wildlife disturbance. <p>System-wide enablers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure long-term funding for monitoring, ranger roles and prevention services. • Strengthen cross-sector collaboration for coordinated service delivery. • Invest in public education to support welfare-positive behaviours.
<p>Cultural awareness and Indigenous Knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited recognition of culturally significant and totem animals • Integration of Indigenous Knowledge into Animal Welfare policy 	<p>Cultural governance and Indigenous Knowledge integration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed cultural values, including totemic species, in animal and land management policies. • Improve public understanding of cultural connections to animals. • Co-design ethics and governance frameworks with First Nations people. • Scale Indigenous-led ranger and species programs as national exemplars. <p>System-wide enablers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure long-term funding for monitoring, ranger roles and prevention services. • Streamline ethics and regulatory processes to reduce delays
<p>Animal management in communities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systemic challenges in community-level animal management • Pet ownership and public safety concerns • Disease risks • Resource constraints • Community-led approaches and legislative barriers 	<p>Service access and delivery reform</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expand predictable access to veterinary and preventative care through mobile clinics, regular rotations and community clinics. • Build local capability through community-based animal care workers supported by professional veterinary oversight. • Use telehealth and remote veterinary support to extend care into regions without resident veterinarians. • Clarify legislation to support community-based roles, rehoming programs and prevention-focused models. <p>Data, traceability and information infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modernise data systems to reduce manual burden and improve reliability for monitoring animal populations. • Formalise data sharing between councils, rangers, NGOs and governments for coordinated planning. • Fund analysis of long-term datasets so monitoring translates into action. • Extend traceability systems to feral species to support sustainable management.

Challenges	Related opportunities
<p>Feral animal management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population and coordination challenges • Environmental pressures • Decline in commercial operations • Need for cultural considerations 	<p>Community led animal management and capacity building</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen responsible ownership education and community campaigns. • Improve preventative care access and clarify council expectations. • Integrate animal health into community planning, including housing and infrastructure. • Pursue legislative reforms to support fair and appropriate management. <p>System-wide enablers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure long-term funding for monitoring, ranger roles and prevention services. • Strengthen cross-sector collaboration for coordinated service delivery. • Streamline ethics and regulatory processes to reduce delays. • Invest in public education to support welfare-positive behaviours. <hr/> <p>Data, traceability and information infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modernise data systems to reduce manual burden and improve reliability for monitoring animal populations. • Formalise data sharing between councils, rangers, NGOs and governments for coordinated planning. • Fund analysis of long-term datasets so monitoring translates into action. • Extend traceability systems to feral species to support sustainable management. <p>Sustainable feral animal management pathways</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrate feral animal control with environmental, cultural and economic needs. • Support sustainable commercial pathways (e.g. pet food, dairy) to support humane population control. • Build local workforce capacity for monitoring, mustering and humane control. • Respect cultural reliance on feral species when designing management strategies. <p>System-wide enablers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure long-term funding for monitoring, ranger roles and prevention services. • Strengthen cross-sector collaboration for coordinated service delivery. • Streamline ethics and regulatory processes to reduce delays. • Invest in public education to support welfare-positive behaviours.

Priority challenges

Priority challenges were identified by stakeholders throughout consultation and are summarised in this section. Opportunities to address these challenges were also discussed (see [Suggested opportunities](#)). Discussions during consultation were broad in scope and crossed multiple or all 6 animal groups covered in the AAWS. There were issues raised outside the scope of the strategy. This should be considered when interpreting the outcomes of the consultation.

Challenge 1 – Access to veterinary services

Consultation highlighted significant challenges in accessing appropriate veterinary care in remote and Indigenous communities.

Stakeholders reported that veterinary services are often irregular and infrequent. Some communities receive only short visits a few times a year – sometimes only twice annually – and that seasonal conditions such as the wet season further restrict access and workforce recruitment. Participants also noted that the scope of available care is limited, with veterinary services typically focused on companion animals and basic preventative treatments. We heard that livestock can be left without access to routine or emergency care, while preventative measures such as tick control remain costly, require importation, are not always delivered quickly and may not be safe for the environment in which they're administered. Stakeholders further explained that restricted access to preventative care and timely veterinary intervention contributes to animal welfare concerns and increases zoonotic disease risks, including tick bites on children and challenges securing necessary antibiotics.

Stakeholders also raised issues relating to regulatory barriers that limit alternative veterinary service models. Noting that while telehealth could help address some service gaps, its use is constrained by requirements for pre-existing veterinarian–client–patient relationships, reducing flexibility and practicality in remote contexts.

Challenge 2 – Barriers to traceability and data analysis

Stakeholders reported a barrier to the success of animal census', animal management programs and mechanisms for tracking animal registrations (such as those run by non-government organisations and local councils). They highlighted the need for improved data management. This included issues with the reliability of existing IT infrastructure, which makes data entry time consuming and impacts the ability to manage companion animals in communities.

An additional challenge reported by stakeholders and experienced by communities and researchers was access to resources for data analysis to support reporting on at-risk animal populations (such as turtles). We heard that such programs face additional challenges because they often span decades and rely on ongoing funding for consistent data collection; without which the potential utilisation of data to inform animal management and improve welfare outcomes is reduced. For example, a stakeholder reported that although decades of turtle behavioural data have been collected, funding gaps have limited analysis of long-term trends, leaving questions about population health unresolved.

Uncertainty about when Indigenous ranger groups require animal ethics approval for routine data collection and traceability activities related to animal management can undermine animal welfare by discouraging timely monitoring and early intervention. Stakeholders explained that current ethics frameworks are geared primarily toward research and education rather than land-management contexts. This results in confusion for Indigenous ranger groups, unsure whether standard practices – such as tracking and verifying animals, monitoring population health, or collecting species data – trigger ethics requirements. This ambiguity creates a grey area in which land-management activities may overlap with scientific research, potentially necessitating approvals that are not clearly signposted. In response, some ranger groups avoid certain monitoring or data-collection tasks, which reduces traceability, delays detection of emerging welfare concerns and limits the ability to act promptly to protect animal wellbeing.

Challenge 3 – Environmental impacts

Stakeholders identified significant environmental and ecosystem challenges to animal welfare linked to climate change. This includes habitat alterations, disruptions to species reproduction cycles and risks to biodiversity and ecosystem stability.

Climate change was highlighted as a major factor influencing animal population management, particularly for at-risk species. For example, we heard that increasing sand temperatures in the Torres Strait impacts the sex ratio of turtle hatchlings. This contributes to factors affecting population sustainability and impacting biodiversity and animal welfare across the ecosystem. Environmental extremes such as prolonged wet seasons and extreme heat also hinder access to veterinary care and data collection in remote areas, limiting population monitoring.

We heard that, in addition to the overall impact of drought on the welfare of animals in the environment, there is an increased risk for invasive grass incursions as fodder is transported across the country at an increased rate (e.g. Gamba Grass and African Lovegrass). Stakeholders explained that this resulted in poor animal welfare outcomes by increasing fire risk and intensifying competition with other plants, contributing to habitat loss, tree canopy reduction and displacement of native plant seeds resulting in disruption of food sources for wildlife.

Stakeholders reported that because of the need to control these invasive grasses, resulting in the increased use of herbicides, the risk of these chemicals impacting ecosystems such as waterways and poor welfare outcomes of the animals inhabiting them, is increased if not managed appropriately. We heard that Traditional Owners face barriers in accessing water safety information and funding for independent water quality monitoring. This makes managing water pollution risks and its impact on animals and humans that utilise these water sources challenging. Stakeholders noted this being particularly applicable to water sources of cultural significance and those affected by nearby environmental disturbances.

Light pollution was also reported as a key challenge, disrupting animal behaviours such as nesting and mating and their welfare as a result.

Challenge 4 – Cultural awareness and Indigenous Knowledge

Through consultation we heard that there is limited awareness, both in Australia and internationally, of the importance of culturally significant animals, such as Totem animals, and their management. We heard from stakeholders that current animal welfare policies do not consistently recognise or address cultural values that are tied to and impacted by the way we manage animals and their welfare. Therefore, when culturally significant animals are managed in a way that conflicts with cultural values as a result of this policy gap, human and animal welfare is at greater risk of being compromised.

Stakeholders shared an example illustrating how current animal welfare policies do not recognise cultural expertise. We heard that existing animal ethics frameworks do not incorporate Indigenous Knowledge systems. This means First Nations participants in projects requiring ethics approval must meet the same formal training and declaration requirements as other researchers. Stakeholders noted that this approach can overlook the cultural and ecological expertise held by First Nations people, limiting Indigenous governance and self-determination in caring for and managing Country. They emphasised that when Indigenous Knowledge is not fully recognised within governance and ethics processes, opportunities to support culturally grounded, place-based approaches to animal welfare may be diminished.

Challenge 5 – Animal management in communities

Through consultation, stakeholders highlighted ongoing challenges in animal management driven by unclear responsibilities, variable and hard to understand legislation and limited infrastructure. Participants described how these factors contribute to wildlife overpopulation, uncontrolled roaming animals (e.g. dogs, cats and horses) as well as changes to wildlife behaviour (e.g. increased presence of crocodiles) in areas of human habitation. Together, these pressures heighten risks to human and animal health and welfare.

Challenges related to pet ownership and animal management were consistently raised during consultation, particularly in remote communities. Stakeholders noted concerns about aggressive dogs and roaming animals, posing risks to community safety and signal knowledge gaps relating to responsible ownership. They pointed to unclear animal ownership arrangements, inadequate containment, particularly in government-provided housing with limited fencing, and limited funding for kennels and animal control services as contributing factors.

Another example stakeholders provided, of unclear responsibilities and knowledge gaps impacting welfare, is where crocodiles have increased exponentially in areas of human recreation. A lack of regulatory clarity, resulting in populations continuing to grow, is impacting the health and welfare and management of crocodiles as they compete for resources. In both cases, this combination of factors was reported to contribute to overpopulation and poor animal health, increasing the potential for disease transmission to humans, human-animal conflict and negative welfare outcomes. Some stakeholders shared there are growing expectations that councils or government services provide veterinary care. This contributes to increased uncertainty regarding roles and responsibilities and for expectations not to be met where this care cannot be provided due to logistical and funding constraints.

Additional concerns included that roaming dogs were at risk of consuming sick migratory birds in local wetlands, which may carry diseases such as avian influenza or parasites that can spread through close contact. The high cost of pet food and supplies in remote communities was highlighted as a contributor to overall poor health of animals. Poor health among populations of feral cats and dogs was also highlighted as contributing to ongoing welfare and safety challenges in these communities.

Communities expressed strong interest in leading culturally appropriate, locally informed and driven animal management initiatives to improve welfare outcomes. However, they noted barriers include insufficient funding, inadequate infrastructure (such as animal holding areas and veterinary services) and a lack of legislative clarity preventing people from feeling like they legally can, or should, take appropriate animal management action. Stakeholders also raised that the absence of dedicated companion animal legislation in some jurisdictions, and reliance on general welfare laws and council by-laws, results in inconsistent enforcement and impacts welfare and safety, particularly in remote communities.

Some stakeholders identified an emerging trend of community members keeping wild animals as pets. They identified this practice as a risk to public health, safety and animal welfare. They cited concerns about animals becoming dependent on humans, increased physical risks as animals mature, increased zoonotic disease transmission potential and a more complicated animal management environment.

Challenge 6 – Feral animal management

Stakeholders identified feral animal management as a significant challenge with implications for animal welfare, public safety, biosecurity, environmental sustainability and cultural heritage. Key concerns included growing populations of feral animals, limited monitoring and compliance systems, unclear regulatory arrangements and fragmented management approaches that increase costs and limit successful coordinated action.

Stakeholders also highlighted the environmental pressures caused by hooved animals, noting their impact on ecosystems and the constraints facing economic control measures, including high operational costs and reduced processing capacity.

Stakeholders noted that the cessation of commercial activities linked to feral animal management, such as cattle mustering, buffalo harvesting and dairy goat operations, has had significant implications for animal welfare. They explained that limited ongoing support has led these ventures to cease in some regions, resulting in unmanaged feral populations with increased risks to animal wellbeing. Stakeholders also reported that loss of these activities reduced community income and removed potential economic pathways that previously supported more active and humane management of feral animal populations.

Finally, we heard that community reliance on feral animals as a food source (e.g. buffalo) adds complexity to feral animal management decisions such as culling. Stakeholders outlined how this complexity highlights the need for feral animal management approaches that consider cultural practices and ensure that management strategies are community supported to maintain feasibility.

Suggested opportunities

Throughout consultation, stakeholders were overwhelmingly solutions focused. We heard a range of suggested opportunities that could address the identified challenges relating to animal welfare. Suggestions are summarised by key themes.

1 Service access and delivery reform

Stakeholders highlighted that improving early access to veterinary treatment would help prevent avoidable suffering and reduce the number of animals dying from conditions that could have been managed if identified sooner. They emphasised that reliable access to preventative care strengthens overall animal health and welfare and lowers disease pressures within communities. Stakeholders also noted that community-based animal-care roles play a critical part in supporting positive welfare outcomes by enabling timely follow-up and ongoing monitoring, ensuring injuries and illnesses are addressed promptly and reduce the risk of prolonged distress.

Key opportunities include:

- expanding predictable access to veterinary and preventative care through mobile clinics, regular rotations and community clinics
- building local capability through community-based animal care workers supported by professional veterinary oversight
- using telehealth and remote veterinary support to extend care into regions without resident veterinarians
- clarifying legislation to support community-based roles, rehoming programs and prevention-focused models.

Related challenges

- **Challenge 1** – Access to veterinary services
- **Challenge 5** – Animal management in communities.

2 Data, traceability and information infrastructure

Stakeholders emphasised that improved access to accurate, shared data would enable earlier identification of welfare risks, supporting faster and more effective interventions before harm becomes prolonged. They also noted that stronger traceability systems help prevent unmanaged population growth, reducing the suffering associated with resource competition and lack of care. Participants further highlighted that clear and practical ethics rules allow ranger groups to respond promptly to emerging issues by removing unnecessary administrative delays.

Key opportunities include:

- modernising data systems to reduce manual burden and improve reliability for monitoring animal populations
- formalising data sharing between councils, rangers, NGOs and governments for coordinated planning
- funding analysis of long-term datasets so monitoring translates into action
- extending traceability systems to feral species to support sustainable management.

Related challenges

- **Challenge 2** – Barriers to traceability and data analysis.

3 Integrated environmental and animal management

Participants reported that healthier ecosystems contribute significantly to animal welfare by reducing stress, starvation and habitat-related injuries, ensuring wildlife can access sufficient food, shelter and safe environmental conditions. They also highlighted the importance of clean and reliable water sources in preventing illness and supporting species that rely on aquatic environments. Minimising artificial light disruption was identified as another key opportunity, as it helps maintain natural breeding cycles and prevents disorientation that can otherwise cause harm or reduce reproductive success.

Key opportunities include:

- increasing transparency around environmental impact and water quality assessments
- investing in habitat restoration, adaptive management and climate resilience
- embedding Indigenous land management practices into environmental management frameworks
- adopting light-management practices to minimise wildlife disturbance.

Related challenges

- **Challenge 3** – Environmental impacts.

4 Cultural governance and Indigenous Knowledge integration

Stakeholders outlined that stronger cultural awareness could enhance animal welfare through practices carried out on Country that are respected, sustained and community led. They noted that formal recognition of culturally significant species could ensure management approaches reflect their importance. Participants also emphasised that codesigned systems developed with First Nations communities help minimise conflict and promote humane, culturally-aligned care practices that lead to more enduring welfare outcomes.

Key opportunities include:

- embedding cultural values, including totemic species, in animal and land management policies
- improving public understanding of cultural connections to animals
- co-designing ethics and governance frameworks with First Nations people
- scaling Indigenous-led ranger and species programs as national exemplars.

Related challenges

- **Challenge 4** – Cultural awareness and Indigenous Knowledge.

5 Community-led animal management and capacity building

Stakeholders highlighted that improving and promoting responsible animal ownership is essential to improving welfare outcomes by reducing roaming, aggressive behaviour and untreated illness.

Good community planning was also identified as an important opportunity, helping prevent predictable harms, such as heat stress, waste ingestion or exposure to unsafe environments, through the design of spaces that support both animal and human wellbeing. Stakeholders further noted that clear legislation provides a foundation for early and humane intervention, reducing the likelihood of neglect and ensuring animals receive timely support.

Key opportunities include:

- strengthening responsible ownership, education and community campaigns
- improving preventative care access and clarifying council expectations
- integrating animal health into community planning, including housing and infrastructure
- pursuing legislative reforms to support fair and appropriate management.

Related challenges

- **Challenge 1** – Access to veterinary services
- **Challenge 5** – Animal management in communities.

6 Sustainable feral animal management pathways

Stakeholders identified sustainable and humane feral animal management as critical to reducing suffering caused by starvation, disease and injury in unmanaged populations. They emphasised the need to build strong local capacity so welfare issues can be identified and addressed quickly, preventing prolonged harm to the ecosystem and the animal. Participants also highlighted that culturally aligned and community-supported approaches reduce conflict and promote consistent, humane practices that can be maintained over time, improving welfare outcomes across entire populations.

Key opportunities include:

- integrating feral animal control with environmental, cultural and economic needs
- supporting sustainable commercial pathways (e.g. pet food, dairy) to support humane population control
- building local workforce capacity for monitoring, mustering and humane control
- respecting cultural reliance on feral species when designing management strategies.

Related challenges

- **Challenge 6** – Feral animal management.

7 System-wide enablers

Stakeholders noted that stable, long-term funding is essential for preventing service gaps that may contribute to avoidable suffering, ensuring animals continue to receive timely care. They also highlighted that stronger coordination between agencies and communities helps minimise delays in responding to welfare incidents, allowing emerging issues to be addressed before they escalate. Education was frequently raised as a key enabler. Stakeholders emphasised its role in shifting community behaviour towards more humane and responsible practices, leading to sustained improvements in everyday animal care and wellbeing.

Key opportunities include:

- securing long-term funding for monitoring, ranger roles and prevention services
- strengthening cross-sector collaboration for coordinated service delivery
- streamlining ethics and regulatory processes to reduce delays
- investing in public education to support welfare-positive behaviours.

Related challenges

- All challenges

Next steps

Insights from this report will inform the development of the renewed AAWS. This consultation process has aimed to ensure First Nations voices are reflected in the strategy and that the final framework reflects shared values, priorities and knowledge alongside the voices of other stakeholders involved in consultation.

The department's consultation process will continue in line with the [APS Principles for Partnership and Engagement](#). Finalisation of the AAWS is expected in 2027 with consultation ongoing through the development process.

For information about the AAWS, email AAWS@aff.gov.au.