

# Agriculture Senior Officials' Committee

## Animal Welfare Task Group terms of reference

### Context

While animal welfare regulation within Australia is generally a state and territory responsibility, there is a collaborative approach to managing animal welfare, with the three tiers of government each having animal welfare responsibilities. The Australian Government's responsibility is limited to international trade—including export of livestock and meat products and partner requirements in negotiation of trade deals.

State and territory governments are responsible for preparing and enforcing animal welfare legislation, providing suitable institutional and legislative frameworks, developing appropriate policies and programs, and promoting and making these readily accessible to the public.

Local governments have responsibility for some areas of domestic animal control and public health that have a significant impact on animal welfare. This includes providing feedback to state and territory governments on animal welfare legislation and for the promotion and maintenance of responsible animal ownership.

Since the 1980s, the welfare of farm animals in Australia has been supported by a series of Model Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Animals (MCOP), which were adopted voluntarily by animal industry sectors.

A review of MCOP in 2005 recommended that the codes be converted into Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines, with the standards to be adopted as minimum legal standards by Australian states and territories, and the guidelines for recommended practice to be adopted voluntarily by industry.

The introduction of animal welfare standards and guidelines aimed to improve welfare regulation in Australia through a greater focus on improved welfare outcomes, practical implementation for industry, and consistency across all Australian jurisdictions. The development of Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines is overseen by the Animal Welfare Task Group (AWTG), a committee comprised of officials from the Australian, state, territory and New Zealand (in an observer capacity) governments.

The development of national animal welfare standards and guidelines through the collaborative mechanism of the AWTG is intended to provide clarity and consistency and facilitate the understanding of animal welfare requirements across industry, the community and trading partners.

### Purpose

The AWTG promotes the national consistency of farm animal\* welfare regulations across jurisdictions and oversees the development and review of standards and guidelines for farm animals. It resolves animal welfare policy and regulatory matters which have national and inter-jurisdictional scope and delivers on animal welfare priorities of national interest referred to it by the Agriculture

Senior Officials' Committee (AGSOC). The purpose of these terms of reference is to articulate the scope of work for the AWTG and how members should work together in pursuit of shared goals.

\* Farm animal means any animal kept in an agricultural setting for, or used in the production of, animals or animal by-products. AWTG retains the ability to include or exclude animal species based on the group's workplan, and/or priorities set by AGSOC.

## Deliverables

The AWTG will:

- deliver on animal welfare priorities of national interest, including the provision of strategic advice, referred to it by the AGSOC or identified in its annual workplan.
- consider emerging animal welfare concerns of national interest and respond proactively.
- oversee the development and review of nationally consistent standards and guidelines for farm animal welfare, including the review of Model Codes of Practice for the Welfare of Animals and conversion to the Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines. An annual workplan will be developed that prioritises the deliverables for the calendar year.

## Membership

### Sponsor

The Secretary of the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is the AGSOC sponsor for the committee.

### Committee Members

Membership is tied to positions, not an individual, and each member is assigned one vote. Members should have the appropriate delegation within their agency to make financial decisions and have appropriate knowledge of animal welfare matters in their jurisdiction. Positions may include Chief Veterinary Officer or Director/Manager of an agencies' animal welfare program.

Current members are listed on the AWTG website: <https://www.agriculture.gov.au/agriculture-land/animal/welfare/awtg/members>

## Meetings

### Meeting frequency

The AWTG holds 4-6 formal meetings a year, approximately every 2 months, or as needed. Meetings will be virtual unless a face-to-face meeting has been requested by the Chair and agreed by members. Members must attend meetings or nominate a proxy. Meetings will run with a minimum of 6 members or proxies.

### Proxies

Proxies must have sufficient professional or technical expertise and delegated authority to speak, act and make decisions on behalf of those they represent.

## **Support staff**

Support staff of members must be identified by members through written notification to the Secretariat and the Chair and must not exceed two persons per member. Support staff can act as proxies in the absence of their member in meetings for decision-making purposes.

## **Observers**

Guests will be co-opted on a temporary basis for a specific purpose relating to the AWTG workplan or general work of the group, for example presenting an agenda item at a meeting, and will be by agreement of the Chair. The AWTG, with agreement from the Chair, may grant observer status to other organisations or individuals, for example a guest presenter. An observer will not have voting rights and will be involved for the purpose of information sharing/provision of feedback for example on particular papers or items.

## **Agenda and papers**

The agenda for each meeting will be prepared by the Secretariat in consultation with the Chair and members. Agenda papers will be prepared by the member responsible for the relevant agenda item and provided to the Secretariat for distribution with the agenda approximately 2 weeks prior to a meeting.

## **Governance**

While the AWTG reports to AGSOC, it develops its own workplan and determines priorities in consultation with stakeholders and AGSOC. Work can also be referred to the AWTG by AGSOC.

## **Decision making**

Where deemed appropriate, the group may progress decisions out-of-session. AWTG will work towards unanimous consensus. Where this cannot be achieved matters may be escalated to AGSOC at the discretion of the Chair.

## **Workplan**

A 12-month forward workplan will be submitted to AGSOC for approval as soon as practicable at the beginning of the calendar year. To ensure ongoing accountability the workplan will include clear timeframes for the development of Standards and Guidelines as well as any other deliverables.

The AWTG will coordinate investment, resource allocation and decision making, in accordance with the annual work plan.

## **Financial expenditure**

This forum will use a cost-sharing arrangement divided between jurisdictions. Generally, this will be based on the current formula whereby the Commonwealth and states/territories split costs on a 1:1 ratio. The states/territories portion will then be divided between the states and territories based on the proportion of the specific animal industry within each of the states and territories. Funding arrangements will be agreed by members for each project.

For other models, including those involving industry, cost-sharing including industry contribution if applicable will be agreed on a project-by-project basis.

## Reporting

An annual report will be provided to AGSOC by the nominated due date in the appropriate template as directed by the AGSOC Secretariat.

The AWTG will publish a version of the annual report on the AWTG page of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry website. This will include an update on the status of deliverables for the past year.

## Communiques

Following a meeting the Secretariat, in consultation with project leads, will draft a communique providing an update of the AWTG's work. Following the Chair's approval, the communique will be published on the AWTG page of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry website.

Communiques should also be issued when key decisions or outcomes have been achieved.

## Media inquiries and correspondence

Media inquiries relating to AWTG will be handled by the lead jurisdiction in consultation with the Chair, the Secretariat and others as needed. General correspondence will be predominantly handled by the Secretariat and forwarded to the relevant member as needed.

## Working groups

The AWTG may establish and direct working groups to work on specific projects or tasks. The working groups will report their progress to the AWTG.

## Review of terms of reference

The TOR will be reviewed every 12 months or as required. This review should also encompass consideration of the relevancy and effectiveness of the AWTG.

The initial TOR, as well as any subsequent updates to the TOR during the review process will require AGSOC approval.

## Sunset clause

The work of the AWTG will be ongoing until directed to cease by AGSOC.

## Secretariat support

Ongoing Secretariat support for the AWTG will be provided by the Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry via its Animal Welfare Branch.

## Other information

For further guidance on operations refer to the AWTG Operating Guidelines.