

26th March 2020

The Prime Minister of Australia - The Hon. Scott Morrison MP

Ensuring animal welfare remains essential

Dear Prime Minister,

Animal Care Australia (ACA) is a national incorporated association established to lobby for real animal welfare by those who keep, breed and care for animals. Our goal is to promote and encourage high standards in all interactions with the animals in our care.

Immediately following the your first announcements of closures and use of the term ‘essential’ we have seen a dramatic increase in panic and confusion over whether attending a veterinary service or even travelling to nearby properties to feed livestock and other animals is considered ‘essential’.

As you may not be aware many animal shelters are already recording higher than usual intakes of abandoned pets as well as a large spike in the number of pets being presented to be euthanised due to fear of transmission of Covid-19 to or from animals.

At this point there has been no confirmation or reference to the care of animals and veterinary services being considered as essential. It is vital that these services and activities won’t be shut down in the coming weeks or months. ACA would like to see a commitment from the Federal Government that the following are deemed essential:

1. Veterinarians, veterinary nurses, farriers and equine dentists. Each should have the individual option to only offer emergency services or more (farriers in particular). We ask that you review state and national veterinary Acts and veterinary pharmaceutical regulations to ensure remote/telemedicine treatment options are available. A veterinarian could be provided with the authority to issue legally recognised ‘prescriptions’ for a trade or skill for a non-essential person (as listed/not listed on a government COVID-19 response) to attend to an animal where housing, fodder or water source is deemed a priority.
2. Animal boarding services with social distancing measures as a mandatory requirement. There are pets in facilities Australia wide with owners still overseas and these services need to be available for people needing to be hospitalised or too ill at home to care for them . It should be noted the already overwhelmed shelters will be inundated if this is not considered as people will have no other choice when family members are quarantined.
3. Pet food and stock feed suppliers. These can easily be restricted to delivery only.
4. People should be able to maintain their animals located on properties outside of their residential address (animals in open paddock, in agistment, etc) with social distancing measures as a mandatory requirement. Often, there is no resident landowner who lives on-site, or who has the necessary skills, while some horse studs and stables may have staff. We ask that owners be allowed to carry out the ongoing care of animals so that they meet their obligations under state animal welfare laws.
One possible solution is to recognise the carrying of a Property Identification Code (PIC) card to act as a form of evidence for the trip to visit animals for care.
5. Temporary caregivers should be given the same rights to tend to stock and companion animals for owners who are unable to return home, are hospitalised or unwell/disabled/disadvantaged at home. (ie not restricted to only the owner of the animal)

The Government is urged to make a public statement providing a commitment to these measures to ensure a clear and concise understanding within the community and for the purposes of enforcing a lock down. The last thing anyone needs to see is a person being arrested for feeding their animal due to confusion on a policy.

It would also be beneficial if the government would consider including guidelines and direction for authorities where temporary accommodations are made available to ensure anyone hospitalised or quarantined does not come home to find their animals seized or facing charges of neglect. In addition many rescue groups are still providing daily care for injured animals following the bushfires and these carers need to be assured they can continue to provide this service, again with social-distancing measures as a mandatory requirement.

Ensuring animal welfare is identified as essential is vital for the health and wellbeing of all animals in this country which in turn will provide peace of mind and comfort to our society.

ACA welcomes the opportunity to liaise with you on this matter so please do not hesitate to contact us.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M Donnelly". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping 'M' and a long, sweeping underline.

Michael Donnelly
President
Animal Care Australia
0400 323 843

cc: The Hon Michael MacCormack MP
cc: The Hon David Littleproud MP
cc: the Hon Ben Morton MP