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Disabled volunteer voted in Top 30 Game changers for Pet Industry

Sydney, NSW, (7th June 2022) - Recognising the pet industry's main players, pioneers, and influencers, ACA President, Michael Donnelly, named in Pet Industry's 30 Game Changers.

Born with no arms Michael Donnelly now leads a team of volunteers fighting back against the animal rights movement and advocating for pet keepers across Australia.

An interview with Michael:

What led you to a career in the pet industry?

I wouldn't say this is a career in the traditional sense that I am earning a wage or looking to strive up a ladder of success. I have kept and bred animals all of my life and so back in 2017 when the NSW Department of Primary Industries tried to limit our capacity to continue keeping pets I saw the need to fight back but also to try and pull the pet keeping community together. So, I changed my focus and dropped everything and devoted every free moment into taking action and rallying the troops. I set up a Facebook-based lobbying group 'Pet Owners R Not Pet Shops' and started collaborating with the bird and reptile associations.

There is power in numbers, and politicians listen to that. If you get the politicians on side, then you can stop the government department pushing it's agenda through. What most people don't realise is the proposed changes would have every pet owner needing to have a set up greater than a pet store and closer to the biosecurity measures expected of a zoo. From our understanding the Minister at the time would have signed off on those changes. The proposal was actually on his desk. No one would have been keeping pets.

What annoys me is the complacency held by so many of those pet owners we tried to rally around. "Oh it'll never happen"

I would love a dollar for every time I heard that, Yet it was going to happen.

That whole scenario opened the door to where I am today. A founder and President of Animal Care Australia.

What is your proudest achievement so far in your career?

I'd have to say it is the national recognition of Animal Care Australia. When I became President the organisation was relatively unknown and now some two and half years later we are participating in animal welfare and other relevant legislative reviews around the country. The proudest aspect of that is it's being achieved by a wonderful group of volunteers. I could not have achieved that without them and we're achieving so much more every day.

Animal Care Australia has been involved in changes to animal welfare acts, pets in strata laws, impounded livestock acts, the National Horse Traceability register, appearing as witnesses at multiple Parliamentary Inquiries, challenging local councils and their ridiculous restrictions on pet keeping and all of that being driven by an overzealous and radically ideological agenda from the animal rights movement, predominantly publicly dominated by the Animal Justice Party but clearly influenced by PETA. The Federal Election has required us to look at all the Party's animal welfare policies – it's an eye opener to say the least. I couldn't begin to tell you how much influence the AR movement have on our governments at all levels – but they need to be stopped and that is what Animal Care Australia is here to do. That is what drives me.

"Animal Welfare by the experts – those who keep, care for and breed animals"

Do you have any goals or plans you would like to achieve in the coming year?

This next year will be important for pet owners and keepers – we will see more influences on government and that will trickle down to the rest of us. I want to grow Animal Care Australia. I hope we will have the opportunity to establish a stronger in person presence in each state and territory, and I want to lead that push and continue to encourage the committee. I want to continue to hold other organisations accountable for their ideologies and their actions.

What impact do you hope to leave on the pet industry?

Animal welfare is not animal rights and I want that message relayed around this country. I would love to see that complacency I mentioned earlier diminished and replaced with an understanding that we all must fight to keep our pets – to keep our Australian way of life – to ensure our children and their children know what it's like to keep a guinea pig, bearded dragon, parrot, goldfish, pony or a cat and dog. Also, if something happened tomorrow that meant I couldn't continue this role, I want people to have been inspired to keep fighting. To stand up for themselves, their children and their animal family members. Politicians only listen to the loud voices and to those that make their point known. The radicalism in today's society must be overwhelmed and placed back into its ideological boxes where it belongs.

How does it feel to be nominated in Pet Industry News' Industry Game Changers list?

The nomination is actually a bit of a shock. I truly would never have thought what I am doing is or would ever be acknowledged in such a way as this. It's also an honour – one which I cannot describe. It makes all of the long hours, stress, that complacency, and even ridicule feel more worth it. It puts all of that into perspective.

I want to thank those who nominated me, and C & I Media (Pet Industry News) for providing this opportunity.

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About Animal Care Australia

Animal Care Australia (ACA) is a national incorporated association lobbying for and advocating for higher welfare outcomes for animals by educating hobbyists and keepers and lobbying governments.

ACA was founded in early 2018 to establish an organisation run solely by volunteers to lobby for real animal welfare. With extreme animal rights and animal liberationist ideologies influencing government legislation, regulation and policy at our expense and to the detriment of our animals and pets, it has become necessary to provide government with a balancing voice.

By uniting the broad spectrum of animal groups, collectively we offer an experienced, sensible approach to animal welfare. We estimate our foundation ACA clubs currently represent well over 150,000 members and that is just in NSW alone!

By educating our members and the general public about the importance of treating animals with kindness and respect for their needs, and promoting the humane treatment of animals to improve animal welfare outcomes, Animal Care Australia is in the unique position of lobbying and advocating for all animals within our care.

Animal Care Australia provides priority to the following:

- lobbying government for stronger welfare outcomes
- lobbying government to increase education of the public in animal welfare and best care techniques
- educate the public on handling their animals with kindness & respect and the importance of their needs
- educate the public in the differences between animal welfare and animal rights