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Media contact	Michael Donnelly 0400 323 843 aca@animalcareaustralia.org.au

NSW animal welfare bill falls short on independence and accountability

Animal Care Australia supports stronger oversight of approved charitable organisations — but says the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Amendment (Office of Animal Welfare) Bill 2026 does not provide the powers, safeguards or broad representation needed to deliver meaningful reform.

Animal Care Australia has called for stronger oversight of approved charitable organisations (ACOs) since 2019 and has advocated for an Animal Welfare Commission since 2023. The organisation says the Bill is a missed opportunity to establish a genuinely independent, statewide body for animal welfare.

“Animal Care Australia supports greater oversight, accountability and transparency. But an office that can investigate complaints and make recommendations—without a clear power to require corrective action or impose consequences—does not deliver the accountability the community expects,” said Michael Donnelly, President of Animal Care Australia.

Animal Care Australia questions whether the proposed structure can be considered independent, noting that the Office would report to the Minister and that some functions would require ministerial approval.

The organisation is urging Parliament to strengthen the Bill before it is passed, including by:

- allowing the Office to issue directions to ACOs and provide meaningful consequences for failure to comply with directions and lawful information requests;
- requiring the Office to ensure, rather than simply promote, best-practice compliance and enforcement by ACOs; and
- defining stakeholder representation more broadly to reflect the full range of animals and people affected by animal welfare policy

Animal Care Australia also objects to proposed consultation wording that it says is too narrow. The organisation argues that animal welfare policy affects more than livestock and companion animals, and should recognise stakeholders across animal industries, animals kept in captivity and other affected groups—including wildlife carers and people who rely on assistance animals.

“Animal welfare policy must be informed by the people and organisations with expertise and practical experience. Consultation should not be limited by an undefined test of who is ‘relevant’,” Mr Donnelly said.

Animal Care Australia says it was not consulted on this particular Bill before it was introduced, despite its longstanding advocacy on oversight reform and its previously shared proposal for an Animal Welfare Commission.

The organisation is clear about one important point. While the Bill does not establish an Office of Animal Welfare that is structured how most of us would expect, the NSW Parliament must amend the Bill so that the proposed Office has meaningful independence, clear accountability mechanisms, enforceable powers and inclusive stakeholder engagement.

— ENDS —

ABOUT ANIMAL CARE AUSTRALIA

Animal Care Australia (ACA) is a national animal welfare organisation and Australian registered charity for pet and companion animals. Its primary purpose is preventing or relieving the suffering of animals through education and advocacy. Animal Care Australia unites and represents the Australian pet and companion animal keeping community, promotes responsible pet ownership, and advocates for evidence-based policies and practices that improve animal welfare outcomes. Our goal is to promote and encourage high standards in all interactions with the animals in our care.

Animal Care Australia encourages continued development of animal welfare standards and Codes of Practice for animal husbandry, breeding, training, sale, and sporting exhibitions for a wide range of animal species, including pets, companion animals, animals used for educational or entertainment purposes or kept for conservation.

MEDIA ENQUIRIES

Contact	<i>Michael Donnelly - President</i>
Phone	0400 323 843
Email	aca@animalcareaustralia.org.au
Website	animalcareaustralia.org.au
Photograph	Michael Donnelly – President. MichaelDonnelly.jpg
Resources Link	Animal Care Australia’s proposal for an Animal Welfare Commission https://www.animalcareaustralia.org.au/animal-welfare-commission/
