



New Zealand's inclusive science-based system for setting animal welfare standards

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Abstract

Inclusiveness and science were, and are, essential contributors to the development and operation of New Zealand's current system for managing animal welfare at a national level. The involvement of individuals and groups with diverse interests, having aligned, complementary or opposing views, is considered to be a most important part of this process. Participants include animal behaviour, production, welfare and wildlife scientists, animal welfare advocates, educators, ethicists, veterinarians, primary industry stakeholders, regulators, lay people and others. The outcome, after 25 years of activity, has been an integrated and comprehensive animal welfare management infrastructure. Legislative and regulatory initiatives established a national advisory committee and related animal ethics committee system for managing the scientific use of animals, as well as a similar national advisory committee for dealing with welfare matters relevant to all other animal uses in New Zealand. The responsible use of animals in science is critically evaluated by a cooperative Australian and New Zealand council, and, within New Zealand, two animal welfare consultative and liaison groups with diverse membership, one including politicians, have enhanced communication about wider animal-related matters. Building on substantial prior experience in animal-based sciences, marked increases in research, scholarly and educational activities in animal behaviour, health and welfare sciences were fostered through the establishment of dedicated research groups and centres, leadership positions and tertiary-level courses, supported by institutional, governmental, industry-related and other funding. The quality, depth and breadth of the research and scholarship so generated, and extensive mutually beneficial interactions internationally have provided, and provide a

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secure foundation for formulating animal welfare policies and framing credible animal welfare standards that are applied nationally.

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1. Introduction

Inclusiveness and science have been, and remain, essential features underpinning the development and operation of New Zealand's current system for managing animal welfare at a national level (Mellor and Bayvel, 2004). These have been supported by the adoption of a credible practical strategy for progressing positive animal welfare developments, namely, a demonstrable commitment to incremental improvement towards defined and reachable higher standards. This strategy allows some immediate progress, the scheduling of further improvements in the future, sustained stakeholder involvement in the process and time for more complex issues to be analysed and resolved (Mellor and Stafford, 2001). The contrasting approach, often advocated by more extreme animal rights groups, of demanding immediate compliance with what at the time are unreachably high standards has the opposite effects (Mellor and Stafford, 2001). Our New Zealand experience of the management of incremental animal welfare change during the last 25 years is therefore used here to highlight the key roles played by inclusive participation and science in New Zealand's system for setting national animal welfare standards.

2. Regulatory, institutional and other major animal welfare developments

These developments, summarised in Table 1, occurred mainly during the last 25 years. They were instigated by a number of forward-looking individuals who recognised the value of having animal welfare well managed and regulated at a national level and who displayed the resolve to see that vision realised. Encouraging the participation of individuals and groups with diverse interests, who had aligned complementary or opposing views, was considered to be a most important part of the process.

The current animal welfare regulatory system in New Zealand has its roots in the Animals Protection Act 1960, which took a traditionally reactive and punitive approach of focusing primarily on neglect, ill-treatment and cruelty. Subsequent developments reflected major changes in our knowledge about animals, largely due to scientific investigation and marked changes in our views about what are acceptable and unacceptable ways of using animals for human purposes (Table 2; Mellor et al., 1998; Fraser, 2003; Mellor and Bayvel, 2004). By the early 1990s, our duty to care for animals proactively, and not merely to avoid neglect, ill-treatment and cruelty, was being emphasised strongly and became an important feature of the Animal Welfare Act 1999.

Primary regulatory responsibility for animal welfare in New Zealand rests with one Ministry, the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), and one government minister, the Minister of Agriculture, who is advised by two independent advisory committees and Ministry officials. The National Animal Ethics Advisory Committee (NAEAC) deals with the scientific use of animals and the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC) deals with welfare-related matters relevant to all other animal uses in New Zealand.

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