

Legislative Council

Thursday 18 September 2025

Bills

Animal Welfare Amendment (Chief Animal Protection Officer) Bill 2025

Introduction and first reading

Bill introduced, on motion by **Hon Amanda Dorn**, and read a first time.

Second reading speech

Hon Amanda Dorn (10:13 am): I move:

That the bill be now read a second time.

I am honoured to introduce this bill to the Legislative Council, which seeks to establish the statutory role of the Chief Animal Protection Officer and, by doing so, create an independent Office of Animal Protection. This reform represents a significant step forward to ensure that animal welfare in Western Australia is administered, enforced and reviewed independently, transparently and in line with contemporary scientific knowledge and community expectations.

WA is home to untold millions of animals whose lives intersect with humans on a daily basis. These include companion animals, native wildlife and animals used in research, entertainment or farming to name a few. Yet despite their number and the diversity of their roles in our society, the systems designed to protect their welfare remain fragmented, outdated and vulnerable to conflicts of interest. Currently, responsibility for animal welfare is spread across multiple departments and agencies, many of which have competing priorities, and this can lead to a lack of interagency coordination and leadership. There are also inherent risks in having a department responsible for developing animal welfare policies, procedures and standards when it is simultaneously responsible for the economic success of the industries using these animals. This can create pressure to keep standards and enforcement at a bare minimum.

This bill responds to growing public concern and expert consensus that animal welfare oversight must be independent of industry interests. It builds on the findings of several key reviews and inquiries both in WA and nationally. These include the *Animal Welfare Act Review 2020* the 2015 *Animal Welfare Review* (Easton review) and the 2016 Select Committee into the operations of The Royal Society for The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Western Australia. All the inquiries identified structural weaknesses in

governance, enforcement and accountability at a national level. The 2016 *Regulation of Australian Agriculture: Productivity Commission Inquiry Report* recommended the establishment of an independent statutory body to develop national standards for animal welfare utilising science and community ethics advisory committees. Together, these reviews provide a clear and consistent message that animal welfare governance must be independent, transparent and aligned with community expectations.

It has now been more than four years since the 2020 review of the Animal Welfare Act delivered 52 recommendations to modernise this framework, and even though the recommendations were supported by this very government, none have yet been enacted. This is proof that animal welfare has not been given priority by the government, despite overwhelming community expectations for stronger, independent and transparent protections for animals. Even the popular Dog Amendment (Stop Puppy Farming) Bill, which was heralded as a much-needed reform, remains ineffective while it waits for the introduction of key measures to make it work.

Despite the scale and complexity of animal welfare issues in WA, our current governance arrangements remain structurally flawed. Most concerning is the conflict of interest embedded in the system; for example, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, known as DPIRD, is tasked with promoting agriculture productivity while also overseeing the welfare of farmed animals. This dual mandate creates an inherent tension, one that risks sidelining animal welfare in favour of economic outcomes. As highlighted by the Australian Alliance for Animals, economic interests too often take precedence over the wellbeing of animals when setting standards. The consequences of this conflict are not simply theoretical. Legal yet harmful practices such as live lamb cutting without pain relief, confinement in sow stalls and the use of battery cages have persisted despite the availability of humane alternatives. It took immense public pressure to start the ball rolling in phasing out sow stalls and battery cages, but these practices were and still are permitted under legal frameworks that prioritise industry convenience over animal welfare. Moreover, as I have spoken about previously, enforcement of animal welfare remains heavily reliant on underfunded charitable organisations and local governments, many of which lack the resources or mandate to carry out their responsibilities effectively. There is no mechanism to ensure consistency, accountability or strategic planning across sectors.

While I applaud the efforts of animal enforcement agencies and the many passionate, caring people within them, when it comes to preventing and responding to animal cruelty consistently, the system itself is insufficient. These organisations are often criticised for not doing enough when, in fact, they are hampered by inadequate financial and legislative support. The 2020 review of the Animal Welfare Act confirmed this, finding that the RSPCA bears significant prosecuting and enforcement costs beyond its government grant, and that it is inappropriate for a private charity to have to rely on donations to fulfil its responsibilities.

The panel concluded that a regulator of this kind of state legislation should not have to depend on public fundraising to meet community expectations. This bill seeks to address these major issues by establishing a Chief Animal Protection Officer—a

legislative role with independence from industry and government departments who will provide centralised oversight, coordination and leadership on all matters relating to animal welfare. The position will be appointed by the Governor on the recommendation of the Attorney General, after consultation with the newly established Animal Protection Advisory Committee. The chief officer will not be part of the public service and will operate independently of departmental influence, ensuring impartiality in the administration and enforcement of animal welfare laws. This model is consistent with other independent statutory officers in Western Australia, such as the Ombudsman and the Auditor General, ensuring impartiality and freedom from departmental influence.

This bill will amend the *Animal Welfare Act 2002* to implement key recommendations of the 2020 review, particularly to strengthen independence and inspector oversight. Notably, recommendation 2 of the review acknowledged that animals "are living beings, able to perceive, feel, and have positive and negative experiences"—a recognition that underscores our moral responsibility to protect their wellbeing.

The Chief Animal Protection Officer's functions will be broad and strategic. They include overseeing the administration of the *Animal Welfare Act 2002* and related legislation; conducting inquiries; commissioning research; and preparing reports on animal welfare laws, policies and enforcement, and on the treatment of animals across industries and sectors, including agriculture, racing and scientific research; developing policies, guidelines and a statewide animal welfare strategy that provides a framework for identifying and prioritising animal welfare issues; coordinating stakeholder action and improving consistency across all industries and sectors involving animals; liaising with national bodies and contributing to the harmonisation of standards across jurisdictions; and collecting and disseminating information to improve public awareness and understanding of animal welfare issues.

To support this role, the bill will establish the independent Office of Animal Protection, composed of the chief officer and supporting staff. This office will serve as a central point of coordination, policy development and strategic leadership. Many of these functions already exist, but they are currently scattered across departments and charities. This reform will restructure those functions into a single coherent framework with proper oversight and accountability. To assist the office in its duties, the bill also creates an Animal Protection Advisory Committee, a multidisciplinary body appointed by the Attorney General. The committee will include experts in animal science, veterinary medicine, bioethics, wildlife conservation, public policy and community education. Its role will be to advise the Chief Animal Protection Officer on relevant legislation, policy standards, education programs and research.

Importantly, the bill will introduce robust reporting and accountability mechanisms. The new office will be required to prepare annual reports and may produce additional reports on inquiries or emerging issues. These reports must be tabled in Parliament and published, ensuring transparency and public scrutiny. The minister may issue directions on general policy but will not be able to interfere in specific matters, preserving the independence of the office.

Finally, the bill will make consequential amendments to the *Cat Act 2011*, the *Dog Act 1976* and other relevant legislation to ensure consistency and integration across the broader animal welfare framework. The establishment of this new office is not only a matter of good governance; it is a reform that enjoys widespread support across the animal welfare sector and the broader community. Organisations such as Animal Liberation, Animals Australia, Voiceless, the Australian Alliance for Animals and the Animal Justice Party have long advocated for independent oversight of animal welfare. Their work, including the Fair Go for Animals campaign, and the excellent *Building a fairer Australia for animals* report, has highlighted the urgent need for a system that places animal welfare at the centre of decision-making, free from industry influence and political compromise.

The bill's proposed framework takes inspiration from the recommendations of these organisations, alongside the numerous inquiries and consultation processes I mentioned earlier in this speech. Public sentiment in Western Australia and across the country strongly supports reform in animal welfare governance. The *2023 Australian Animal Welfare Survey*, commissioned by the Australian Alliance for Animals and conducted by Monash University's BehaviourWorks Australia, found that nine out of 10 Australians believe animal welfare should be protected by government legislation, and that seven out of 10 support the creation of an independent and impartial authority to oversee policy decisions. Australians consistently view companion and farmed animals as sentient beings and believe that policy decisions should prioritise animal wellbeing, incorporate scientific evidence and reflect community values. These findings confirm that the public expects a governance model that is transparent, independent and accountable.

These are principles that underpin the framework proposed in this bill. Establishing a Chief Animal Protection Officer will provide a mechanism for evidence-based policy, transparent enforcement and coordinated action across government and non-government sectors. It will ensure that animal welfare is no longer treated as an afterthought, but as a core responsibility of public administration. This bill represents a principled and practical step forward in the governance of animal welfare in WA. It will create a framework that is responsive to both scientific evidence and community values.

I would like to thank the many individuals and organisations who have contributed to the development of this bill, including those in the animal welfare and advocacy sectors who have long advocated for independent oversight.

Pursuant to standing order 126(1), I advise that this bill is not a uniform legislation bill. It does not ratify or give effect to a bilateral or multilateral intergovernmental agreement to which the government of the state is a party; nor does this bill, by reason of its subject matter, introduce a uniform scheme or uniform laws throughout the Commonwealth.

Colleagues, this is a reform whose time has come. I commend the bill to the house and table the explanatory memorandum.

(See paper [597](#).)

Legislative Council—Thursday 18 September 2025

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.