

NSW Department of Primary Industries' responses to questions taken on notice - Inquiry into Veterinary Workforce Shortage in New South Wales

The CHAIR: When you talk about partnerships, are we talking about a fee-for-hire service? Is it something that you contract out, or is it a volunteer partnership? Can you describe the relationship in more detail? When you say "partnership", are you essentially contracting this work out or is it pro bono?

SCOTT HANSEN: A bit of all of the above. Sometimes when I use the word "partnership", I'm talking about the fact that we'll sit around a table and talk about where risks lie, what things need to be addressed and how we address those risks. When we rely on our private veterinarians to provide us with boots on the ground to assist us with activities—say, for example, in an emergency response—they get given cost codes in which they charge us like they would charge any client. That's redeemable; that's payable under those emergency responses.

The CHAIR: So would the white spot closure and the work that was done in that space have been essentially contracted out because it was a boots-on-the-ground response?

SCOTT HANSEN: I'd have to take it on notice to check, but there may have been elements in which we paid.

ANSWER:

There were no specific acts of veterinary science required to be performed in the white spot response. NSW Department of Primary Industries and Local Land Services were used at both a local and state level.

The expert group members, that contained two independent veterinarians, were volunteers. The infected premises also had their own veterinary advisors/staff.

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The Hon. EMMA HURST: If we talk about the floods that occurred not that long ago, how many vets did you fully pay to be part of that emergency response team?

SCOTT HANSEN: That's a question I can take on notice and see if we can get the number for.

ANSWER PROVIDED AT THE END OF THE SESSION:

SCOTT HANSEN: Sorry, Chair, can I close off one question that I had left unanswered, which was about the number of vets we had engaged in the North Coast floods? We had 20 vet clinics and businesses that invoiced DPI for our services during those floods. That's not the number of vets because in each clinic they might have had one vet or they might have deployed 10 vets, and it was actually the clinic that billed us for the services of those vets.

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The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Mr Hansen, how many prosecutions did your department commence in the last 12 months under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act?

SCOTT HANSEN: That would be a question I would have to take on notice and a good one for us to prepare in advance of estimates coming up. Thank you.

ANSWER:

NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) did not commence prosecutions under *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979* (POCTA). RSPCA, Animal Welfare League and NSW Police prosecute under POCTA.

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The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Well, the DPI and the Office of Local Government are listed as authorities that can commence prosecutions. If you're going to take that on notice then can you provide me with the figures for how many prosecutions were commenced by either of your departments in the last five years and how many were completed?

BRETT WHITWORTH: I can answer that, sorry. It's been zero, for the reasons that I've given you before.

SCOTT HANSEN: And I'm happy to take that on notice.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: What I wanted to know that information for is because of an issue that came up in evidence yesterday, where we heard evidence particularly from Dr Isaac Graham—I think it's on page 14 through to 15 of the transcript—who raised an issue where there are laypeople competing with vets. Dr Erica Kennedy also spoke about this in a more general sense, with people getting advice from Bunnings on how to treat an animal and on what insecticide to use, or whatever outlet people buy goods from. But the particular issue from Dr Isaac Graham was he said that people are using sedation on horses to do dental work, and they are advertising their services. I'm just wondering who would prosecute that? Would one of your two departments take that on as an issue?

SCOTT HANSEN: I'm sorry, I'd have to take that on notice.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: Take it on notice. Have a look at the transcript.

SCOTT HANSEN: Yes. Whether it's under the Veterinary Practice Act or whether it's under the use of veterinary chemicals compliance areas, I will take that on notice and come back to you on that.

The Hon. CAMERON MURPHY: One of the issues that I wanted you to comment on as well, if you can do that today, is whether there's a prosecution gap here where, between the police, charitable authorities and departments, no-one's taking responsibility for prosecuting people where there's animal cruelty or there are people administering poisons who aren't entitled to and so on.

SCOTT HANSEN: That last one about the administration of therapeutics or chemicals that they shouldn't, again, I'd have to take that one on notice and look into it. But the issue around prosecutions—I think every year we provide data about the number of prosecutions commenced or the number of penalty infringement notices issued across the charitable organisations. I know we table their annual reports, and that also lists those out. There is evidence of those activities occurring. Whether there are ones that are falling between the gap, that's probably a question that we can talk to our partners in either the police, the Animal Welfare League or the RSPCA about whether they feel as though there are any gaps in that space.

ANSWER:

Performing acts of veterinary science, such as using sedation for dental work, falls under the *Veterinary Practitioners Act 2003*. Offences under this Act are dealt with by an Authorised Officer, of the Veterinary Practitioners Board or NSW Police, issuing a penalty notice or via the Local Court.

If the person injured the horse or caused unnecessary pain or suffering when doing the procedure, it would fall under the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979* (POCTA). RSPCA, Animal Welfare League and NSW Police prosecute under POCTA.

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The Hon. SARAH MITCHELL: I have a very quick question, which you can take on notice if you don't want to answer it now because I realise it's 4.45 p.m. Recommendation 7 from the Australian Veterinary Association talks about potentially funding a think tank to develop an after-hours model of care for the vet industry. I wondered whether each of your agencies would have a view on that. Obviously, a potential disease outbreak might happen on a Sunday morning. You might get a stray cat on a Thursday night that needs treatment. I think both government agencies and the private sector have a bit of input into what an after-hours model of care could look like as best practice in the State. Any thoughts about either a think tank or what that could look like would be useful for the Committee, but I am happy for you to come back to us given the time.

ANSWER:

The Emergency Animal Disease Hotline is a national toll-free telephone number that connects callers to the relevant State or Territory animal health authority to report concerns about potential emergency animal diseases. In NSW this is staffed by NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI). The EAD Hotline is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

In terms of consideration of the development of an after-hours model, NSW DPI is open to discussion; and consults regularly with other jurisdictions and key stakeholders such as the NSW Veterinary Practitioners Board, and the Australian Veterinary Association.