

Inquiry into the veterinary workforce shortage

Sarah Pollard Williams; Opening Statement

The veterinary workforce shortage is a global problem. The veterinary profession is run as private enterprise and aims for a public good in the treatment of owned animals.

Government posts such as those with the DPI and LLS monitor animal diseases and maintain biossecurity. In addition there are veterinarians employed in teaching, research and laboratory enterprises.

Stressors frequently cited by veterinarians in practice include poor remuneration, long hours, threatening clients and the ongoing problem of clients who cannot afford to treat their pets.

The State Government is not in a position to resolve the many issues in a profession with a historically very low profitability. They are, however, able to channel and fund certain services within the animal care and welfare sectors to relieve the pressure on private business.

These areas include the provision of local pounds and I ask the committee to cross-reference to the many submissions to the pound inquiry. Local government animal services need to be properly funded and staffed to remove the pressure on private veterinary practice to take in and treat stray or injured animals and wildlife. Similarly, the subsidy of desexing costs for low-income pet owners will do wonders to reduce backyard breeding and strengthen the pet-owner bond.

Clinics in small towns are often the first point of contact for injured or unowned animals. There is often no pound or ranger in these areas and payments to these clinics for handling these animals should be considered. This will improve clinic cash flow and reduce the emotional and financial stress on vets.

Many of the submissions to this workforce shortage inquiry cite the need for more graduates, or more resilience in those selected in to study veterinary science. There is in fact a need to ensure that graduates stay in the profession. While some submissions have criticised the spread of the corporate practice model, corporations are far more likely to accommodate part-time employees such as working mothers. The profession is now feminised, with females making up the bulk of student numbers and younger veterinarians. There is also the indisputable fact that feminisation in any work sector tends to drive wages down, and this is not based on an increased proportion of part-time workers.

Partial waiving of HECS repayments to those graduates willing to work regionally and adequate funding to the DPI, LLS and local animal management services will go a long way to significantly aiding the profession.