

**Submission
No 81**

**INQUIRY INTO VETERINARY WORKFORCE SHORTAGE
IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

Name: Mrs Jane Bindloss

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Submission regarding Shortage of Veterinary Professionals in Australia

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Having been an active member of the veterinary sector for my entire career of fifty years, I have two comments to add to the inquiry into the shortage of veterinary professionals in Australia.

1. The Need for Registration of Veterinary Paraprofessionals (Veterinary Nurses and Technicians).

Registration of veterinary nurses and technicians would release veterinarians from the requirement to perform unnecessary tasks for which they are overqualified. There are many tasks currently performed by veterinarians that can readily be performed by qualified nursing staff. Veterinarians whose employment excludes those technical and practical tasks more fitting for a nurse, find themselves with a reduced workload. Work time can be meaningfully employed at a higher, more cognitive level in preparing scientific, surgical, diagnostic, clinical and treatment strategies for their patients. Working at this level is rewarding and inspiring.

On May 3rd 2004, the Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Food endorsed the Review of rural veterinary services : report/reviewer: Peter T. Frawley¹. Recommendations from that report and pertinent to this submission are:

"The need for more effective utilisation of the skills of qualified paraprofessionals [P3, Recommendation 7 (d)]" and

"The formal recognition of the professional qualifications of veterinary nurses and the range of veterinary tasks that can be appropriately delegated (as in WA, UK and USA) [P4, Recommendation 9 (d)]"

Twenty years ago, when the Frawley report was submitted, there were sufficient veterinarians and veterinary nurses working in the well-populated areas of Australia. The Report was commissioned to examine an identified shortage of veterinary staff specifically in rural areas. Today, Australia is experiencing a similar shortage, this time nation-wide. Various elements have contributed to this, including:

- the plethora of pets purchased during the Covid-19 pandemic,
- a greater awareness of work-related mental health pressures placed on veterinary team members and
- a reduction in the number of international graduates available to take up positions in Australian veterinary practices.

In 2004, Frawley identified that better utilisation of veterinary nurses and technicians would ease the veterinarian shortage. He also recommended that tasks that can be performed by nurses should be formally recognised. Frawley saw how important it was for trained and qualified paraprofessionals to develop as active and useful members of the veterinary team serving the public.

Unfortunately, despite the efforts of a number of dedicated veterinary nurses, veterinarians and others to formalise the registration of veterinary nurses in the intervening years, there is still much

¹¹ Frawley, Peter T. & Australia. Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. & Australia. Department of Education, Science and Training. 2003, *Review of rural veterinary services : report / reviewer: Peter T. Frawley* Dept. of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry & Department of Education, Science and Training] [Canberra]

work to be done to ensure veterinary nurses and technicians can be registered. The exception to this situation is in WA, where nurses are registered and included in the Veterinary Practice Act 2021.

It has recently become clear that politicizing the need for veterinary paraprofessional registration is the way forward, using similar methods to those that have been used successfully in the registration of “human” para-professions.

2. Support and Encouragement for Veterinary Practice Work Experience for High School Students.

School students employed in veterinary practices as a precursor to applying to university for a veterinary science degree, have a good understanding of the day-to-day workings of a veterinary practice. They see the variety of patients, conditions and owners, they observe how team members must interact and they witness the emotional highs and lows of being a veterinary professional. This is where a personal decision should be made about pursuing veterinary science as a career pathway, not when the student has graduated and is in the first contracted years of their employment.

Veterinary students do attend practices for short periods and their experience is often restricted. I have been told of a practice where veterinary students were kept from seeing euthanasia procedures and complex surgeries by the employers. This was an effort to “protect” the student from witnessing the trauma that can be part of the role and an attempt to encourage the student to continue their career pathway. Veterinary employers have been active in recent years in their attempts to ensure that their employees have a satisfying and wholesome career.

Veterinary practice has in recent years been the subject of several television productions. The role of the veterinary professionals is frequently edited to show only the positive emotional aspects. The public do not see the pain, trauma, stress, grieving, anger and exhaustion, leading to a false perception of the role. Young people want to emulate those “stars” that work in an environment surrounded by young healthy pets, plentiful resources and compliant animal owners.

I appreciate that this comment may seem simplistic. Yet as I look back over generations of graduating veterinary students, I’m increasingly concerned for the health of those who seem to emerge from their education with little or no understanding of what awaits them in the real world. This can be so easily resolved by exposing all aspects of veterinary practice (the good the bad and the ugly) to potential, young student who are considering a lifetime veterinary career.

Biography:

Jane Bindloss RVN(UK), DipBusMgt.

1979. Began veterinary nursing in Christchurch, NZ

1979-82. Plymouth Veterinary Hospital, UK.

1982. Qualified as Veterinary Nurse with the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons and Registered. Received the BSAVA’s “Veterinary Nursing Award”.

1991. Lifelong commitment to raising the standards, professionalism and self-esteem of Australian veterinary nurses when elected to Veterinary Nurses Council of Australia (VNCA).

1994 to 2010. President and office bearer positions, national Executive of the VNCA. Life Member.

1996-2004. National Industry Advisory Group for Veterinary Nursing and Federal government’s Australian Animal Welfare Strategy.

1997. Finalist in the Telstra Business Women's Awards.

1997. Australian Veterinary Association's (AVA) Meritorious Service Award.

1999. Established 'Pets at the Vets' Veterinary Hospital.

2012. Diploma of Management (VECCI).

2008-2015. President and office bearer positions of the Australian Veterinary Business Association (now a Special Interest Group of the AVA). Life Member.

2009-present. Jane and business partner Sally Boyle consult to veterinary practices all around Australia on every aspect of veterinary practice management and leadership through their company "SANE Practice Management Mentoring".