

Submission
No 92

INQUIRY INTO VETERINARY WORKFORCE SHORTAGE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

Organisation: Vets Beyond Borders

Date Received: 17 July 2023

Submission to the Inquiry into the veterinary workforce shortage in NSW

Summary

Vets Beyond Borders (VBB) is an Australian-registered charity that provides veterinary volunteers to carefully selected animal welfare projects in need of assistance, in Australia and overseas. It also deploys veterinarians and veterinary nurses in response to natural disasters or animal disease outbreaks in Australia.

The shortage of veterinarians has the potential to compromise these activities. An important strategy to maximise these services would be the payment of veterinarians who respond to such emergencies. Payment should include a deployment fee plus a daily rate. This would be expected to increase retention of veterinarians in the profession, whilst also improving animal welfare.

About Vets Beyond Borders

VBB deploys volunteers to provide veterinary services in areas of great need. Our *VetMatch* program places vets and vet nurses in volunteer positions to achieve dog population control and other animal welfare and public health improvements in Australia, Asia and the Pacific. This includes One Health training and anti-rabies vaccination where relevant. We have 17 active international Partner Organisations.

A second program is *AVERT* comprising a 'veterinary reserve' for deployment to treat affected wildlife in Australian emergencies, arising from floods, bushfires and outbreaks of exotic disease. VBB has recently acquired a mobile clinic to assist with this work and holds stocks of material required for emergency veterinary work. VBB has links to government authorities, professional bodies, such as the Australian Veterinary Association, and major animal welfare groups and has the support of a number of veterinary corporate sponsors who provide assistance by donation of clinical equipment and other veterinary supplies..

Therefore, VBB has a strong interest in a veterinary workforce that is available to volunteer. A continuing shortage of vets would make the filling of volunteer positions increasingly challenging. As a result, the needs for services offered by *VetMatch* and *AVERT* volunteers may go unmet.

The following points are of relevance:

VetMatch

- The *VetMatch* volunteer database contains details of 413 veterinary personnel including 242 vets; 49 of whom are located in NSW.
- This cohort is generally female and in the 20 to 40 year old age group,
- To date, in 2023 we have placed 40 volunteers in Australia and 55 overseas.
- There are currently 18 vacancies for further deployments.
- Interest in *VetMatch* has risen significantly of late, due to increased recognition of the threats that street dogs pose to human populations, through attacks and by disease transmission to humans.
- VBB works with DFAT and Australian Volunteers Program to assist with logistics in some of its projects.

AVERT

- VBB has 2447 personnel, including 981 vets, registered on its *AVERT* database; 302 of whom are based in NSW.
- Experience suggests that NSW will be a critical deployment hub in future crises, due to the amount of fire-prone bushland and the positioning of NSW between similar landscapes in the neighbouring states of Victoria and Queensland.
- In recognition of the need for veterinary services, VBB sought and was awarded funding to provide wildlife medicine training to 88 vets and 74 vet nurses. In addition, we are equipping 20 vets with dart guns for wildlife capture and provide fireground training.
- We are working with government authorities, professional bodies and animal rescue groups to establish a coordinated emergency response plan.

Volunteering for veterinary work is popular because it provides a change from the usual work routine and provides vets with novel training and experiences.

As a result of its large database and capacity to deploy veterinary personnel as and when required, VBB is a major provider and coordinator of volunteer veterinary services in Australia, Asia and the Pacific.

VBB anticipates that it will need an expanded volunteer base to meet future demands. A continuing shortage of veterinarians will mean that VBB will find filling volunteer positions increasingly challenging and that the needs for services offered by *VetMatch* and *AVERT* volunteers may be unmet.

The provision of payment, especially for emergency work, would be of great assistance in enabling VBB to continue to provide such services. It would also allow more veterinarians to gain new skills and enrich their working life. We believe that, in turn, this would improve retention rates within the profession.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Ian H Douglas BVM&S, MRCVS, MACVSc Director & Chair
Vets Beyond Borders

14th July 2023