

Submission
No 126

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

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

The shortage in veterinarians is a complex and multi factorial issue. I do not think the industry has a supply issue, that is there are enough vets graduating, the problem is a retention issue and a distribution issue, ie rural and regional practices are struggling to attract staff. Veterinarians leave the private practice/clinical side of the profession for a variety of reasons, some of which need to be addressed by the profession and it's voluntary profession bodies.

Part of the retention issue is related to poor remuneration (compared with other professions) and difficult working conditions. These conditions are in part contributed to by Veterinary Board regulations. Other factors for what individual employer expectations, expectations and demand of the public, are outside the scope of this committee.

Remuneration is a difficult issue to address. The award is grossly inadequate. Most practices pay above award wage, but individual remuneration is determined at a business level. However, HELP debt forgiveness is an aspect that can be legislated. Forgiving the debt of graduates who choose to practice in rural and regional practices would make these practices more attractive. The amount of debt reduction may be related to time spent in the area or the remoteness of an area. Graduates may stay on beyond their "forgiveness time" if they develop ties to the local community, which generates a longer term benefit.

After hours service is a problem and discussion within the profession indicate it is a major reason for not working in regional areas. As far as I am aware, the VPB, currently requires veterinary hospitals to provide an after hours service for their clients. In metropolitan areas, this role is filled by dedicated 24 hour facilities. In rural and regional areas, practices must provide this service themselves. There is the option to share with neighbouring practices in some instances, but there are many areas where there is only 1 practice, who is most likely understaffed. It is totally unacceptable that this practice be expected to provide an in person afterhours service.

Occupational health and safety requirements prevent other industries from working full day shifts, then being on call, then following up with another full day shift, however this appears to be a requirement of the VPB. Phone triage and Telehealth services have started to take some pressure off, but an in person service is still expected.

In previous conversations with the VPB regarding Afterhours, there was no answer to the occupational safety regarding long hours, nor safety for workers being isolated and on their own in afterhours situations. I have personally been on farms with no mobile service, on my own at 2am as this was a board expectation of the service I needed to provide to clients. On asking if this was a reasonable situation, the board has no answers. This needs to change. Reasonable needs a definition as it relates to hours worked. A reasonable sharing arrangement for afterhours also need to be set eg, if your closest neighbouring practice is 2 hours away, is it reasonable to make an arrangement with them should your clients need after hours assistance. Definition and certainty offer protection. As it stands currently, I could be reported to the VPB for not providing service, even though I may have worked a 10 hour shift, attended multiple call outs and be fatigued beyond my ability to work or drive safely.

There are now at least 2 universities offering Veterinary Technician degrees. These graduates are now in the work force. Their role need to be legislated and protections offered (to the vet technician and the employing practices). These professionals are able to do some tasks that have previously been restricted to veterinary practitioners. Allowing and legislating for this will help to lift some of the work load. HELP debt forgiveness for the veterinary technicians working in remote and regional areas will also encourage them to accept employment away from the metropolitan areas.