

Submission  
No 190

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

**Organisation:** Name suppressed

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Partially  
Confidential

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**Submission to the  
NSW Upper House  
Legislative Council**

**Investigating the  
Veterinary Workforce Shortage**

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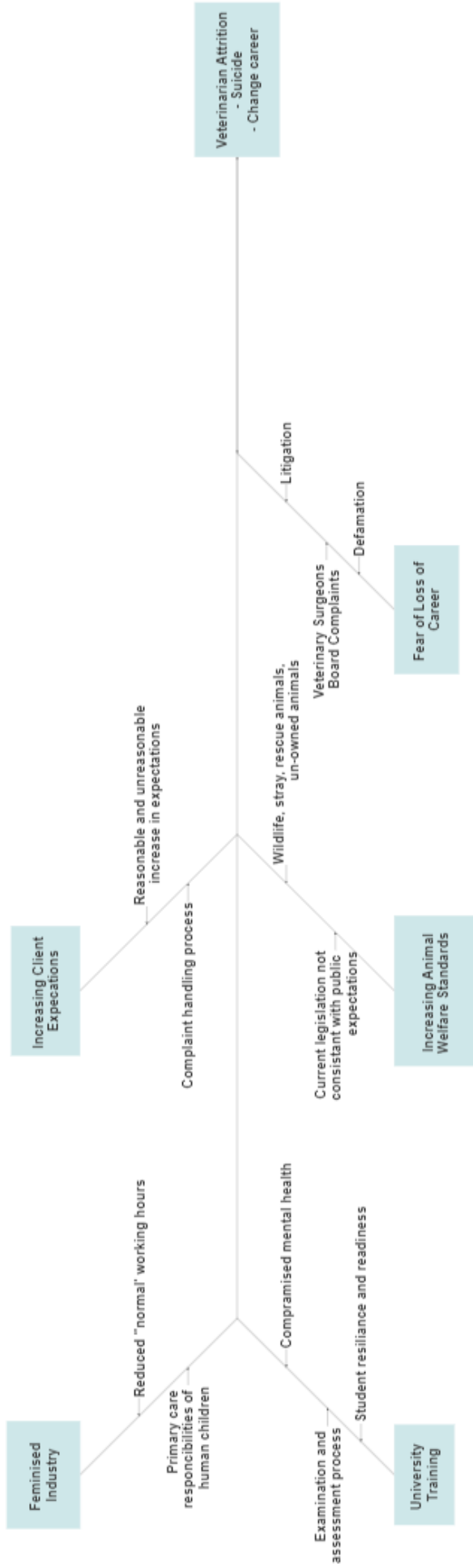
## Introduction

Our veterinary profession is currently at breaking point. We are an industry that is currently over 2000 veterinarians short nationwide and this number is growing by up to 100 veterinarians each month. There are currently 1170 general practice jobs advertisements in Australia, 196 in NSW alone. There are 52 locums available nationwide. This is not taking into consideration the practices who have given up advertising for veterinarians altogether or who have closed their doors.

It is crucial that we address this issue urgently, as the shortage of veterinary professionals not only affects the health and wellbeing of animals but also has a significant impact on the livelihoods of farmers and other stakeholders in the industry. The lack of available veterinary services can cause delays in animal treatment, which can lead to the spread of disease and infection, resulting in losses for farmers and owners of livestock and pets.

The shortage of veterinary professionals in NSW is a complex issue that requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach to resolve. In addressing this shortage, we must consider the underlying factors that contribute to the shortage of veterinary professionals, such as the lack of veterinary training opportunities, inadequate financial incentives, and the challenges of attracting and retaining professionals to rural and regional areas.

This issue requires immediate action to address the veterinary shortage in NSW. This could include immediate overhaul of the Veterinary Practice Act and NSW Veterinary Practitioners Board, increasing funding for veterinary education and training programs, providing financial incentives to encourage veterinary professionals to work in rural and regional areas, and working with industry stakeholders to develop long-term strategies to address the shortage of veterinary services.



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## Current Situation

- The pet industry saw in excess of 30% growth during the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- Veterinary Shortage in excess of 2000 veterinarians nationwide.
- The past 10 years has seen the feminisation of the veterinary industry.
- There has been an industry shift in the expectations around animal welfare and access to veterinary services
- Massive shift in the role of pets in the community and family unit
- Pets are now perceived as part of the family, especially with the growing LGBTIQ and families with fertility issues.
- Shift in the veterinary industry from veterinarian being a pet's vet to now their fur babies doctor.
- Changes in client expectations
- Growing awareness of mental health and neurodiversity in medical professions
- Veterinarians have 400% suicide rate of other careers
- Veterinarians are as a cohort high achievers, are a high population of people pleasers, and often have ADHD, anxiety, depression and Autism spectrum disorders
- New graduate wages of \$52,800 with and working average of 50 hours per week
  - There is no provision for penalty rates on Saturday or Sundays
- Veterinary Burnout
- The impact of overzealous regulatory boards on veterinary mental health and veterinary attrition

## Where have the vets gone?

The past 10 years has seen a significant shift in the gender balance within our industry. Previously the industry was male-dominated but is now female-dominated. Previously male veterinarians, who also were not historically primary caregivers to children, worked long and excessive hours running general practices. The past 5 to 10 years saw many of these veterinarians retire. As the older male-dominated veterinary population has retired the younger female pool of veterinarians is replacing them. The current workplace expectations and regulations do not encourage working excessive hours or overtime nor should they.

Gender Changes in Veterinary Industry	
Male-Dominated Industry	Female Dominated Industry
Past 1970-2010 Male Dominated > 90% Male Working hours 40-80 hours per week Work day shift and on call Minimal parental responsibilities	Current 2010-2023 Female dominated > 90% Female Working hours 18-38 hours per week No on call Primary and secondary parenting roles
1 Old vet = 3 young vets (Actually 4-5 vets as many take time off for maternity leave) → Not factoring in attrition - Suicide, change of career path, maternity leave	

## Client Expectations

With the evolving industry there is now an ever-increasing expectation from clients. Particularly around service availability and options.

Client Expectations
Pet be treated as if they were human Expect access to veterinary services 24 hours per day Clients want decision-making power in treatment options They expect advanced treatment options and diagnostic modalities Clients expect access to referral services Expect that there is government support for unowned/homeless animals such as stray domestic animals and wildlife Expect that unowned animals will be treated and have equivalent access to veterinary services Expect that veterinarians are paid for work provided by unowned animals

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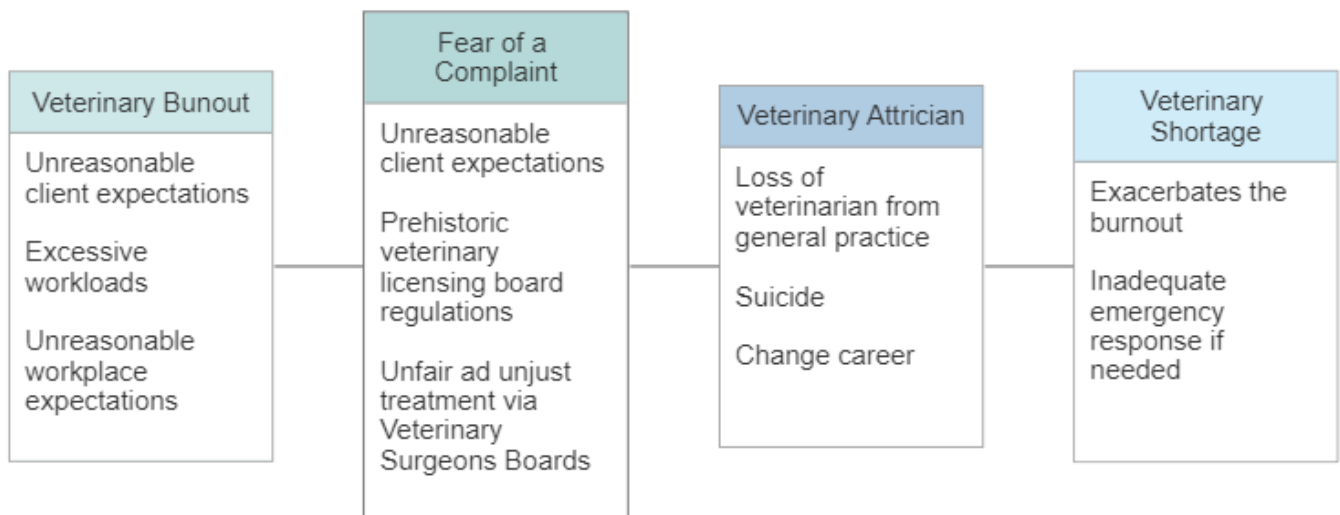
## Veterinary Mental Health

Just when we were looking for some respite, we were hit with the 2020 Bushfires. We assisted with the evacuation and medical treatment of hundreds of pets in the Tumbarumba, Adelong and Tumut regions as well as provided care for patients at the evacuation centres with no government funding or financial support. Then where we truly thought we would get some reprieve, the COVID-19 Pandemic hit.

The average career for veterinarians is not even 2 years in practice. New graduate wages of \$52,800 with a working average of 50 hours per week. Veterinarians and veterinary staff have one of the highest suicide rates and extreme levels of mental health issues. In the last 12 months, veterinary drugs were used in at least 293 suicides in Australia alone.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic the majority of practices were curbside consulting. Veterinary practices have been balancing staff safety with client wants, needs and demands when it comes to hospital visits, consultations and end of life decisions. The impact on veterinary teams physical and mental health has been enormous and at the detriment of their families.

Although there have been many investigations into veterinary burnout the root cause is not routinely discussed. That is that veterinarians are burnt out due to overwhelming demand for their services, increasing expectation from clients and fear of complaints. The reason behind these burnout rates and veterinary attrition is the fear of a complaint. Fear of a complaint is by far the biggest impact on veterinary mental health, burnout, suicide and change of career. Veterinarians are high achievers and have high expectations of themselves. The fear of a complaint not only is gut wrenching for them but also has the ability to end their veterinary career.





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# The Challenges

The suite of challenges faced by our industry at the moment are overwhelming.

- Recruitment
- Staff retention
- Difficult to provide appropriate standards of care when vets are rushed and understaffed
- Welfare standards challenging to meet
- Vet board investigation
- Increasing litigation
- Increased pet population via 30% covid boom
- Increased client expectations

## Veterinarian Recruitment

### Domestic Recruitment

Regarding domestic veterinary recruitment there seems to be inadequate graduates or at least inadequate graduates wanting to work in general practice. Our practice has been recruiting actively since July 2014. We have had anything from one to 8 full-time equivalent vet (FTVE) positions available at any one time. We currently have four FTVE positions available. Over the past 9 years we have had 287 applications for our advertised roles which sounds positive. Of the 287 applications only six have actually been located in Australia and eligible for Australian Veterinary registration all we have employed.

### International Recruitment and VISAs

There is currently a massive flaw in the concept of importing international veterinarians to address the skills shortage using VISA such as VISA 482 and similar. To be eligible for the Skills Shortage VISA the veterinarian has to be registered with the NSW Veterinary Surgeons board.

<b>Skill Shortage VISA Issues</b>
Veterinary Practice owners do not understand the process or steps involved <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Business becoming a sponsors</li><li>- The position advertisement process and the position becoming a sponsored position</li><li>- The applicant needs to meet the sponsorship eligibility</li></ul> Excessive time and wait periods at each step of the process. Most international veterinarians don't meet the VISA eligibility as they can't register directly in Australia.



With the current veterinary registration requirements the majority of international veterinarians do not meet the registration process. This means they need to relocate to Australia, find employment in a veterinary practice in a non-veterinary capacity and work through the registration process. This process takes approximately 3 years all going well.

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### International Veterinary Registration Process

Steps	Issues
Relocate to Australia	Many veterinarians don't meet the VISA requirements
Find employment in veterinary practice	Difficult as they are not trained as nurses and can't work as veterinarians. Difficult for small businesses to justify this type of employment with skill deficits. Additionally, many temporary VISAs place the international veterinarian in a position of being unable to work.
Pass English Examinations	The current level of English for Veterinary Surgeons in Australia is higher than for many other health professionals. International English Language Testing System (IELTS) for veterinary surgeons is 7.0
Once passed the English examinations then sit the first licencing examination	These are only run annually
Find a veteran surgeon to be their supervisor	
Apply for limited registration	This can take 1-3 months depending on board meetings
Sit more examinations	These are only run annually
Work in practice gaining skills	There are not many VISA types that allow for long term paid work.
Full registrations	The entire process takes 2-5 years realistically.

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## Veterinary Licencing and Complaint Handling

The NSW Veterinary Practitioners Board (VPB) is completely out of touch with where the veterinary industry is at, especially in the past 3 years. The NSW VPB is bound by the NSW Veterinary Practice Act which also needs significant amendment but even then the lack of current industry knowledge in general practice is appalling.

Our veterinary legislation, licensing and regulatory process currently presumes that one patient is treated by one veterinarian and that any unsatisfactory outcome either clinically or through communication is the fault of a single veterinarian surgeon.

At present 100% of complaints made to the NSW VPB are investigated yet over 80% are due to communication and financial disagreements, not actual veterinary professional misconduct or malpractice. The bulk of complaints are eventually dismissed but only after unnecessary scrutiny and investigation.

The other significant issue is that with the modernisation of our industry there is a whole team of veterinary practitioners often across practices that treat patients. It is rare for one patient to be treated by one veterinarian and one veterinarian practice. If there is a disagreement with a client regarding the clinical outcome of a patient the client must specify one veterinarian and one practice to make the complaint against. This is often the last veterinarian to have seen the case or the one the client has a personal dislike for.

Clients these days use the threat of veterinary surgeon board action as a way to insult veterinarians and veterinary practice staff as well as a threatening way to receive discounted services.

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### Comparison of Complaint Handling

<b>Veterinary Surgeon Complaints</b>	<b>Human Surgeon Complaints</b>
Veterinarian is presumed to be guilty until proven otherwise	Surgeon is presumed innocent until proven otherwise
Presumes one veterinarian and one veterinarian practice is at fault	It is presumed that the patient has had a team of doctors and multiple facilities involved
Frivolous and vexatious complaints are investigated	Frivolous and vexatious complaints are not investigated
There is no systems based approach to complaint handling (seeks to blame an individual)	If there is a complaint there is a systems approach to the investigation as to what system, process or procedure has failed the patient (not whose fault it is)
If there is a complaint there is no support for the surgeon	If there is a complaint the first priority is to support the surgeon
If there is a technical issue then the veterinary must be disciplined	If there is a technical issue the emphasis is on training the surgeon in to meet correct standard
There is no standard guidelines on treatment for a veterinary hospital to follow	There are standard guidelines and treatment protocols hospitals can follow

### Vexatious complaints

The NSW VPB needs to dismiss frivolous and vexatious complaints. Currently all complaints are investigated. The majority of VPB complaints do end up being dismissed but only after tedious and time consuming investigation. Average complaint investigation is 6 months through to 18 months. Each complaint generally has a 4 week written response. This response can happen twice either way before being reviewed by the complaints committee and if needed forwarded to the board. This process is distressing for the veterinary practitioner and the practice staff. If approximately 80-90% of complaints end up being dismissed after a tedious investigation, maybe the board or complaints committee could save the veterinary practitioners the occupational distress and trauma of the complaints process and dismiss more complaints prior to notification or investigation.

### Support for Veterinary Surgeons

There is no support for veterinary surgeons up against the NSW VPB. They report on their website "support" through the Doctors' Health Advisory Service but this is merely counselling support. There is no tangible program or access available for board complaints or legal representation. The NSW VPB is not

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there to “support” veterinary surgeons, it is there to regulate the industry upholding standards to protect the consumer.

This is challenging as the licensing body is not there to support our veterinary professionals yet there is no body to provide this support. The Australian Veterinary Association provides no support for board-related matters and lawyers and legal aid are only available once matters escalate above the NSW VPB to a court matter.

Regardless, going through a NSW VPB matter without any legal, emotional support is appalling and can understand why veterinarians are walking away from our profession in droves.

## Medical Records and Note Writing

The Veterinary Practitioners Board expects detailed notes to be written for all cases including cases that are not paying us. If a client has not paid their veterinary bill but wants to take their patient to a different practice the unpaid veterinary practitioner then has to write detailed medical records of the treatment to date and interpret any diagnostics before transferring the medical record to the new veterinarian.

The NSW VPB needs to understand that if a veterinarian or veterinary practice is not getting paid for a job then they cannot sink more resources into a case. The significant veterinary shortage has also meant that veterinarians do not have the same amount of time to write detailed notes as in the past. There needs to be some consideration for the level of service understaffing within the veterinary industry.

## Complaints processing

The current complaints handling process in NSW by the Veterinary Practitioners Board is inhumane in the way veterinary practitioners are treated. It is questionable as to whether the treatment of veterinary practitioners is appropriate or in accordance with the Human Rights Act. The unrealistic expectations the NSW VPB has for veterinary surgeons are unattainable and excessive. The NSW Code of Veterinary Professional Conduct is a loose three page document that provides no clear expectations of veterinary surgeons. The vague expectations set out are considerably outdated and have significant gaps for interpretation. If veterinary surgeons are going to be disciplined based on such a code it needs to be clear for the general audience to follow.

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## Veterinary Practitioners Code of Professional Conduct

<b>Current Issues with the Veterinary Practitioners Code of Professional Conduct</b>	
<b>Section</b>	<b>Common Issues</b>
<p>6. Professional conduct A veterinary practitioner must not mislead, deceive or behave in such a way as to have an adverse effect on the standing of any veterinary practitioner or the veterinary profession.</p>	<p>There are veterinary practitioners actively slandering and defaming other veterinary practitioners however the VPB doesn't seem to be interested in following up these reports. General bullying and harassment between practices and practitioners is common.</p>
<p>9. Referrals and second opinions A veterinary practitioner must not refuse a request by a person responsible for the care of an animal for a referral or second opinion</p>	<p>This section details that a veterinary practitioner must forward medical records to another veterinary practitioner regardless if they have been paid for the veterinary treatment provided. This option is upheld by the VPB. If a service has not been paid for why should a practitioner provide or continue to provide the service. The medical record and interpretation in the veterinary practitioners' intellectual property and should either be paid for or not provided and yet the code enforces veterinary practitioners to provide these details.</p>
<p>15. Records (1) A veterinary practitioner must ensure that a detailed record of any consultation, procedure or treatment is made as soon as possible. (2) The record: (a) must be legible and in sufficient detail to enable another veterinary practitioner to continue the treatment of the animal, and (b) must include the results of any diagnostic tests, analysis and treatments. (3) If a record is altered, the alteration must be clearly identified in the record as such. (4) A veterinary practitioner must ensure that all records of any consultation, procedure or treatment are retained for at least 3 years after they are made.</p>	<p>The NSW VPB critique veterinary practitioners records under this section of the code regularly and find veterinary surgeons guilty of inadequate record keeping. This section of the code does not specify what details are required to be kept by a veterinary surgeon.</p> <p>There is significant variation in record keeping across the industry and no guidelines or standards however this is a common finding in unsatisfactory professional conduct and professional misconduct.</p> <p>There also needs to be consideration that medical record notes will depend on the length of consultation requested and paid for by a client. If a client would like a detailed consultation and detailed notes then this service can be provided. If a client can only afford a brief appointment the VPB cannot expect detailed notes to be documented. The same applies to welfare cases that are unpaid.</p>

## Veterinary Practice Act 2003

<b>Issues with the NSW Veterinary Surgeons Board and the Veterinary Practice Act 2023</b>	
<b>Section</b>	<b>Issues or Discrepancies</b>
<p>34D Conditions or limitations of deemed registration (1) If a person's registration as a veterinary practitioner in another jurisdiction is subject to a condition or a limitation, the person's deemed registration in New South Wales is taken to be subject to the same condition or limitation. (2) The Board may— (a) on application by the person, waive or vary a condition of a person's deemed registration if it thinks it is appropriate in the circumstances, or (b) on its own initiative by notice in writing given to the person, vary or impose a condition on the person's deemed registration.</p>	<p>The VPB does not set any time limits for the imposition of such conditions nor what conditions are deemed appropriate.</p>
<p>unsatisfactory professional conduct means any of the following—            (a) providing information relating to the veterinary practitioner's qualifications for registration knowing the information to be false or misleading in a material particular,            (b) contravening Order 1998/1 made under section 46 of the Stock Medicines Act 1989 and published in Gazette No 108 on 17 July 1998 at pages 5496–5498 (or any Order amending or replacing that Order),            (c) engaging in conduct in the veterinary practitioner's professional capacity that, if repeated or            Veterinary Practice Act 2003 No 87 [NSW]            Current version for 13 January 2023 to date (accessed 21 July 2023 at 20:03) Page 25 of 67 continued, is likely to do any of the following—            (i) cause unnecessary suffering to an animal,            (ii) cause the inappropriate death of an animal,            (iii) adversely affect the safety or health of any person,            (iv) damage the international reputation of Australia in relation to animal exports, animal welfare, animal produce or sporting events,</p>	<p>VPB findings against veterinary practitioners that do not meet the criteria.</p>
<p>37 Veterinary practitioners code of professional conduct</p>	<p>The VPB needs to make recommendations to the Minister with respect to the code being</p>

<p>(1) The regulations may establish a veterinary practitioners code of professional conduct setting out the rules of conduct that should be observed by a veterinary practitioner in carrying on the practice of veterinary science.</p> <p>(2) The Board may make recommendations to the Minister with respect to the code.</p>	<p>inconsistently adhered to and out of date, not consistent with current clinical practice.</p>
<p>40 Form of complaint</p> <p>(1) A complaint must be in writing, must identify the complainant and must contain particulars of the allegations on which it is founded.</p> <p>(2) The Board may require the complainant to provide further particulars of a complaint.</p> <p>(3) The Board may require the complaint and any further particulars provided to be verified by statutory declaration.</p> <p>(4) The Board may refuse to investigate a complaint if the complainant does not comply with a requirement of the Board under this section.</p>	<p>The VPB currently investigates all complaints including anonymous complaints. Frivolous, vexatious and defamatory complaints should not be investigated.</p>
<p>40A Protection of complainants and other persons</p>	<p>There are protections in place for the complainant but not the veterinary practitioner.</p>
<p>41 Board to notify person against whom complaint is made</p> <p>(1) Written notice of the making of a complaint, the nature of the complaint, the type of unsatisfactory professional conduct or professional misconduct that the Board considers may be indicated by the complaint and the identity of the complainant is to be given by the Board to the veterinary practitioner against whom the complaint is made, as soon as practicable after the a complaint is made.</p> <p>(2) Any such notice must invite the veterinary practitioner to make, within such period (being at least 7 days) as the Board specifies in the notice, such representations in writing to the Board with respect to the complaint as the veterinary practitioner thinks fit.</p> <p>(3) The Board need not give notice or may exclude from the notice any information required to be included under subsection (1) if, in the opinion of the Board, the giving of the notice or the inclusion of the information will or is likely to—</p>	<p>The VPB has failed to ensure the health and safety of persons whom the complaint is against. There are numerous reports of veterinary practitioner suicides and attempted suicides following VPB complaint notification. The complaint process is damaging to all mental health as well as stress induced physical health of veterinary practitioners.</p>



<p>(a) prejudice the investigation of the complaint, or  (b) place the health or safety of a person at risk, or  (c) place the complainant or another person at risk of intimidation or harassment.</p>	
<p>42 Board to investigate complaints (1) The Board must, subject to this Part, conduct an investigation into each complaint made under this Part. (2) The Board may deal with one or more complaints about a veterinary practitioner in an investigation. (3) If during an investigation of any one or more complaints it appears to the Board that there is a matter in respect of which another complaint could have been made against the veterinary practitioner concerned, the Board may deal with the matter in its investigation as if a complaint had been made about the matter.</p>	<p>This section allows the board the ability not only to investigate the primary complaint made but go fishing for additional complaints/breaches. Given there are no clear guidelines particularly around medical record keeping a veterinary practitioner can often find themselves with multiple breaches unrelated to the original complaint made.</p>
<p>46 Power to dismiss certain complaints  (1) The Board may dismiss a complaint if the Board is satisfied that the complaint—  (a) is frivolous or vexatious or otherwise lacking in merit, or  (b) is a complaint in respect of a matter that has already been dealt with as a complaint under this Part, or  (c) is trivial in nature</p>	<p>The VPB rarely exercises this. The current highly charged and emotional clients can be vindictive and damaging to veterinary practitioners. Many complaints need to be dismissed prior to the veterinary practitioner being notified. The majority of complaints are around clients not wanting to pay for services or communication issues whereby the veterinary protector has actually provided adequate communication.</p>
<p>48 Person may apply to Tribunal for administrative review of disciplinary finding of Board (1) A person in respect of whom the Board has made a disciplinary finding may apply to the Tribunal for an administrative review under the Administrative Decisions Review Act 1997 of that finding and any action taken by the Board under section 47. Note. A decision of the Tribunal determining an application under this section may be appealed to the Supreme Court directly. See Schedule 5 (Occupational Division) to the Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 2013.</p>	<p>The VPB does not review any appeals of a decision internally in accordance with the NCAT Occupational Divisions process prior to the matter going to NCAT.</p>
<p>77 Membership of Board  (1) The Board is to consist of 8 members appointed by the Governor.  (2) Of the members of the Board—  (a) 4 are to be veterinary practitioners selected by the Minister to represent each of the  Veterinary Practice Act 2003 No 87 [NSW]</p>	<p>These guidelines are only loosely followed. The VPB does not have a balanced representation of general practitioners or practitioners in regional areas.</p>

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Current version for 13 January 2023 to date  
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following—

- (i) specialist veterinary practitioners,
  - (ii) veterinary practitioners practising in urban areas,
  - (iii) veterinary practitioners practising in rural areas,
  - (iv) academics in the field of veterinary science,
- (b) 2 are to be veterinary practitioners selected by the Minister,
- (c) 2 are to be persons who are not veterinary practitioners and are selected by the Minister to represent consumers of veterinary services

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## Universities Contribution and Impact

<b>University Deficits</b>
<b>Veterinary Shortage</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There are inadequate lecturers to fulfil teaching requirements and universities licensing requirements.</li><li>• Many lectures, tutorials and practicals have been cancelled and postponed due to veterinary lecturer shortages.</li></ul>
<b>Veterinary Student Selection</b>
Veterinary student selection is still highly selective for academic and high achieving characteristics with poor correlation with resilience, troubleshooting and life skills required for general practice veterinarians.
<b>Low Graduate Numbers Entering General Practice</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Undergraduate veterinary students are seeing the cold face of the industry and changing career paths in the final months of university.</li><li>• It is estimated that less than one third of veterinary student graduates are actually working in general practice after graduation.</li></ul>
<b>Technical Skills Development</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Veterinary lecture shortage has limited the ability to deliver practical training to veterinary students.</li><li>• During the COVID-19 pandemic many veterinary students were unable to complete their practical rotations so graduates are without the technical and surgical skills required. During this time many students did not develop the client communication skills as most practices were curbside consulting or conducting consultations via telehealth.</li><li>• With changes to the Greyhound Racing Industry universities no longer have access to ex racing greyhound cadavers for surgical training.</li></ul>
<b>Professionalism and Soft Skills</b>
Universities are not teaching the soft skills including professionalism, emotional intelligence, team management and leadership skills. Veterinary surgeons are expected to be able to run a business, manage a team and provide emotional support to mentally unhealthy clients on a daily basis.
<b>Universities Impact on Mental Health</b>
Mental health is shunned and pushed under the carpet in Vet Schools

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Students have a fear of not being eligible for registration if mental health is flagged as an issue during undergraduate studies.

Pass/fail assessment criteria sets veterinary students up to be highly strung and must never fail.

Other courses and faculty assessment requires a cumulative pass mark which allows students to learn from their mistakes and understand the world's not over. If they fail one assessment it can be caught up later in the semester.

University rotations expect that veterinary students work 12 hour days as well as on call and working weekends. This is not consistent with Fair Work paid employment standards nor safe working standards so why should students be forced to adhere to such requirements. This then sets the tone that that is how the entire industry operates.

While at university students undergo clinical rounds where students present cases and specialist and senior clinicians criticise clinical reasoning in front of other students. This is an important aspect of learning and developing clinical reasoning skills however generally involves significant bullying, harassment, intimidation and humiliation of undergraduate students. The human medical profession has been actively working on this for a number of years but has not been addressing veterinary schools.

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## Veterinary Nurse and Technician Registration and Registration

To continue to grow our industry veterinarians need to be able to delegate non veterinary work to skilled, trained allied veterinary professionals. There has been the development of tertiary education programs offering Bachelor degrees in Veterinary Technology. There is however no formal recognition by veterinary surgeon licensing boards or regulatory framework for veterinary nurses and veterinary technicians. At present the entire veterinary treatment both veterinary and non veterinary falls on the licence of the last veterinarian to have treated/touched the patient.

Veterinary nurses and technicians need a formal licensing system similar to that of human nurses whereby they are accountable for continued professional development and meeting allied veterinary professional standards. This would also work towards improving veterinary support staff remuneration and industry respect for these evolving roles as veterinarians are unable to provide the depth of services required and expected.

## Wildlife

Veterinarians love our wildlife and are passionate about protecting them, delivering optimal care and returning them back to the wild in a timely fashion but this does come at a cost. In a report by the NSW Veterinary Practitioners Board it was estimated in 2019 that in excess of 21,000 native or free living animals were presented to private veterinary practices. The average veterinarian reported 168 hours per year in providing free veterinary services to wild animals. It is absurd for the government or the public to expect a crippling industry suffering shortages and a mental health crisis to make such contributions.

Cost of Wildlife
Veterinary hours contributed = 168 per year (average of 4.4 hours per veterinarian per week)
Cost of wildlife know to have received treatment in 2019 = \$11,550,000.00
→ For 21,000 patients @ \$550 per patient

In NSW there are also no provisions for paid veterinary services for wildlife in emergency situations such as fire, flood or drought yet the government and public expect these services of veterinarians and veterinary practices. We must also remember that most veterinary practices are small and often family-owned businesses that also need support.

Most of NSW wildlife is covered by WIRES however this organisation has no value or respect for the veterinary services provided by general practitioners and does not actively forward donations made by members of the public for veterinary care to veterinary practices. This was commonly observed following the 2019 bushfires, where by \$102,478,085.00 was received in public donations presumed for medical, veterinary and rehabilitation but little as 0.3-3% of wildlife donations annually are received by veterinary practices.

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## Local Government

### Shelters and Stray Animals

Our local shelter only takes in dog strays Monday to Thursday (1pm-4pm) and access to drop boxes Friday to Sunday. Outside of these hours all dogs present to local private practices.

Many parts of NSW do not have animal shelters. Many local government shelters often do not take cats. Cats are not covered under the Companion Animal Act the same way that dogs are so local government shelters can turn them away.

Local government shelters have varying rules and guidelines. The public presume that local shelters are animal welfare organisations, but local governments see themselves as regulatory and enforcement agencies. This means that;

- They do not treat injured companion animals.
- They have no role in injured wildlife. This is difficult as to who is responsible for injured kangaroos in urban and semi-urban areas.
- Cats are free living and should be returned to where they were found. This is difficult, especially with they are often feral, neonates or injured.
- Stray rabbits, birds and chickens are not accepted into local government shelters.

Veterinary practices spend hours each and every day searching databases, scanning microchips, updating microchips and making sure that dogs that have been brought in off the street are not injured. The community does not understand the time, effort and resources that go into providing this unpaid but expected service.

## Emergency Response

### Emergency Animal Diseases

- There are not enough veterinarians to effectively respond to emergency animal diseases.
- There are new and evolving Zoonotic Diseases appearing all the time.

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## Options Moving Forward

1. Changes to legislations
  - a. Patients treated as a team, not an individual
  - b. Changes to protect veterinarians
  - c. Changes so that veterinarians are not required by law to provide out-of-hours and emergency services
  - d. Change that veterinarians do not have to provide endless care to unowned animals presented to their practice after work
2. Changes to veterinary boards
  - a. To better protect veterinarians
  - b. To dismiss frivolous and vexatious complaints
3. Changes to complaint handling process
  - a. Consumer to pay a fee to lodge a complaint
  - b. Any company with any financial consideration need to forward the complaint on to the Department of Fair Trading
4. Public awareness campaigns
  - a. Around the cost of medical treatment and veterinary treatment
  - b. Pet Insurance
  - c. Veterinary mental health
5. Veterinary Award Update
  - a. To reflect medical practitioner wages and appropriate penalty rates for Saturday and Sunday rates
6. Changes to Boards
  - a. If general practitioners are going to be regulated by them then current general practitioners need to be on the board
7. Veterinarians needs to be supported
  - a. Independent board representations
  - b. Union or advocating body
8. Universities
  - a. Selection for soft skills suited to general practice
  - b. Government support in sourcing and securing lecturers
9. Veterinary Nurse and Technologist Registration and Regulation
10. HECS Fee Support
11. Government Funding of Veterinary Services
  - a. Wildlife
  - b. Strays
  - c. Emergency responses
    - i. Fires
    - ii. Flood
    - iii. Emergency and emerging disease