

Media Release

The Hon Ros Spence MP
Minister for Agriculture
Minister for Community Sport
Minister for Carers and Volunteers



Friday, 15 December 2023

NEW BILL TO STRENGTHEN ANIMAL WELFARE STANDARDS

The Allan Labor Government is strengthening standards for the care and protection of animals – encouraging Victorians to have their say on the draft *Animal Care and Protection Bill*.

Minister for Agriculture Ros Spence released the draft Bill for public consultation today, which proposes new laws to replace the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986* (POCTA Act), which is more than 35 years old.

The draft Bill will allow for earlier intervention before harm occurs by explicitly recognising animals as being sentient – setting minimum care standards for animals in Victorian law for the first time.

Animal cruelty offences have also been strengthened under the draft bill, including higher penalties to address the most serious of crimes. It also recognises that cruelty can be physical or mental.

A new animal cruelty offence is proposed in addition to the current general cruelty and aggravated cruelty offences. The new 'intentional cruelty' offence will be for the most serious types of cruelty and include higher penalties.

There is a proposed expansion to enforcement powers for Authorised Officers to conduct investigations and assist animals – this aims to better protect animals and allow earlier intervention.

There is nothing in the Bill to prevent activities like farming, fishing, hunting and racing from continuing. The draft Bill aims to strike the right balance to protect animals, while supporting people to continue interacting with animals responsibly.

The reform will help maintain consumer and community trust in Victorian animal based activities and industries, and will demonstrate to trading partners that Victoria welfare practices are modern and fit for purpose.

The draft Bill was developed following two rounds of public consultation that received more than 2,500 responses, along with direct engagement with more than 50 organisations that represented farmers and other agricultural and animal welfare stakeholders through various meetings and workshops.

If passed, the new Act would not come into force for at least two years to allow time to develop supporting regulations that will detail requirements for specific species and activities involving animals. These regulations will be informed by further industry feedback, research and consultation.

Consultation on the draft Animal Care and Protection Bill will close on 8 March 2024.

To provide feedback on the Bill, visit engage.vic.gov.au.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Agriculture Ros Spence

"These new laws will strengthen our ability to protect animals from cruelty, while support our valuable animal industries to continue operating responsibly and productively."

"We have listened to industry as part of developing these updated regulations and look forward to continuing the consultation to ensure our Bill best reflects the expectations of Victorians."

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