

AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND COLLEGE OF VETERINARY SCIENTISTS

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ANZCVS CHAPTER-LED POSITION STATEMENT

Title:

Recognition of Animal Sentience

Chapter of Origin:

Animal Welfare Science, Ethics, Policy and Law Chapter

Authors:

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Position Statement:

Animals are sentient. Sentience is the capacity to have a range of positive and negative affective experiences, including pleasure and pain.

Vertebrates, cephalopod molluscs, and decapod crustaceans meet the scientific criteria to be classed as sentient. Recognising animal sentience advances welfare by emphasising the importance of minimising negative experiences and promoting positive experiences and expression of agency where possible during animal management and care.

This recognition is integral to achieving improvements in animal welfare laws, policies, standards, training and education. Frameworks, such as the Five Domains Model, provide structured approaches for evaluating how animals are faring.

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Disclaimer: ANZCVS views may change over time as more evidence emerges.

Background:

Sentience refers to the capacity to feel and have a range of positive and negative affective experiences including pleasure and pain. Science has established that a wide range of species (including all vertebrates and at least some classes of invertebrates such as cephalopods and some crustacea) meet the scientific criteria to be classed as sentient¹.

Sentience is recognised in declarations and legislation²⁻⁶. Professional veterinary organisations, including the Australian Veterinary Association (AVA)⁷ and New Zealand Veterinary Association (NZVA)⁸ have affirmed that animals are sentient, thereby having the capacity to experience positive and negative emotions⁷⁻⁸. This is why, when discussing welfare outcomes with clients, veterinarians acknowledge that a good life for animals depends on positive outcomes outweighing negative outcomes.

Several frameworks aim to assess animal welfare, each with its strengths and weaknesses. The Five Domains Model^{9, 10} is an example of a comprehensive tool used globally for animal welfare assessment¹¹. It has also been adopted by industry bodies, e.g., Meat and Livestock Australia¹² and the Zoo and Aquarium Association Australasia¹³.

The benefits of veterinarians recognising sentience in the animals they treat include:

- supporting owners as they seek to make end-of-life decisions that prioritise animal welfare;
- helping them to explain the value of enrichment, choice and agency, and not simply pain relief, as a core element of animal husbandry;
- helping to ensure that animals are treated with care, respect, and dignity as a recognition of scientific evidence;
- helping to ensure that animal use is humane, through the World Organisation for Animal Health's international animal welfare standards, through recognition of sentience, and the Global Animal Welfare Strategy¹¹.

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