



NORTHERN TERRITORY CATTLEMEN'S ASSOCIATION INC.

Advancing and protecting the interests of cattle producers in the Northern Territory

Member - National Farmers' Federation & Cattle Council of Australia

The Secretary
Social Policy Scrutiny Committee
GPO Box 3721
DARWIN NT 0801
via email
SPSC@nt.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: NTCA Submission to the Animal Protection Bill 2018

The Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association (NTCA) has been the peak primary industry body in the Northern Territory for the past thirty-four years. Representing over ninety per cent of the Territory's cattle herd, from small family pastoral businesses and Indigenous organisations to large corporate entities, its members are custodians of over 700,000km² of the NT landmass.

The NTCA and its members are arguably the principal stakeholder affected by any animal welfare legislation dialogue due to the sheer number of domesticated animals controlled within the industry. Pastoralists in the NT manage a cattle herd of over 2.1 million head, as well as a significant number of other stock and domestic animals such as horses and dogs, dwarfing the exposure to legislative change by any other industry, community or demographic by a significant margin. The significant area of the NT landmass for which pastoralists are environmental custodians also includes significant populations of native fauna species.

For these reasons, the NTCA is appreciative for the opportunity to provide input to the *Animal Protection Bill 2018*. The NTCA generally supports the contemporary approach of Animal Protection Bill, acknowledging the Bill is essentially a contemporised version of the current *Animal Welfare Act*.

The NTCA does not support the change to the title of the Bill. The Title and Objects of the Bill are very similar to the current Animal Welfare Act other than "welfare" is replaced with "care and protection". The terms "Animal Protection" suggests *animal rights* rather than *animal welfare* is the priority of the legislation, which changes the intent of the Bill altogether. The proposed title has the connotation that in the NT animals need to be "protected" and that "care" of animals is not currently adequate. From an industry's perspective, the change to the title of the Bill suggests that 2.1 million head of cattle will require to be "protected" under the Bill.

The NTCA supports the current legislative approach where the Animal Welfare Act administers the minimum level of care and cruelty to animals amongst other matters and the Livestock Act administers the Australian Animal Welfare Standards for cattle providing clear direction for people responsible for cattle specifying 54 "Must Do" standards.

The key points of concern for the NTCA in relation to this Bill, which the NTCA respectfully requests be considered by the Social Policy Scrutiny Committee, are:

1. That the interaction between the Animal Protection Act after it is commenced and the *Livestock Act* specifically with respect to the cattle welfare standards which are adopted under the *Livestock Act* be maintained. The NTCA does not support any change to the current education and compliance approach for the welfare of cattle in the NT, and supports regulation and compliance monitoring of the cattle industry to continue under the *Livestock Act*.



2. The NTCA supports appropriate staff selection and training for Authorised Officers conducting investigations on cattle properties under the proposed Bill. The NTCA members support good welfare outcomes for their cattle, but must have confidence in the regulatory system and those tasked with its enforcement. The NTCA is concerned that, in the event of an investigation on a cattle property relating to an alleged offence under the Animal Protection Act, there are few safeguards in the Bill to ensure that the Authorised Officers have knowledge of the legislation, knowledge of cattle husbandry in the northern Australian environment and have an independent mindset to allow for a rigorous investigation to take place.
3. The NTCA is seeking clarification on the draft Regulations or the intent of the proposed Regulations that will implement exemptions to Offences in the Bill in relation to the following before it will support the amendments in the proposed Bill relating to the same:
 - a. associated with dog baiting (clauses 27 and 28).
 - b. electrical devices (clause 30) – the judicious use of electric jiggers in accordance with the Livestock Standards.
4. The NTCA is concerned about the implementation of sufficient Standard Operating Procedures for non-veterinarian Authorised Officers to destroy animals. Pastoralists often destroy their own animals when there is no other option (such as veterinary assistance), and need to be satisfied that their animals will be destroyed by other persons only when it is absolutely necessary. Pastoralists accept the need for this provision in certain situations but seek assurances that the Authorised Officers will provide adequate opportunity for the owner of the animal(s) to care for their livestock, in the first instance, before taking any action.

The NTCA seeks to remain engaged in this process, and if the Committee requires further information regarding this submission, it is urged to contact NTCA Chief Executive Officer Paul Burke at any time.

Yours sincerely,

Paul Burke
Chief Executive Officer

8th March 2018