

AJP Policy Document

Legislation and Regulation Reform for Animal Protection

AJP supports legislation and regulation that prioritises the well-being, protection and rights of animals as sentient beings, ensuring they are not subjected to exploitation, harm or cruelty. It is imperative that animal welfare and protection legislation is adequately resourced and equipped with robust compliance monitoring, appropriate penalties and regulatory enforcement capabilities.

Animal welfare legislation should be drafted with the sole intention of recognising animal sentience and protecting animals, without influence from industries that profit from their exploitation. The principles enshrined in the Animal Welfare Act 1999 must be enforceable, without loopholes that allow industries to evade responsibility by self-regulation. Until adequate animal protection legislation is in place, AJP will also campaign to remove and prohibit exemptions and inconsistencies that allow animal cruelty to occur (for example, codes of practice for the “welfare” of farmed animals).

AJP supports a legal framework that reflects a societal commitment to valuing, protecting and respecting animals, fostering responsible and compassionate treatment in all contexts and industries. Without stringent, and enforceable, legal protection, animals remain vulnerable to cruelty and exploitation, their welfare jeopardised by profit-driven motives. Empowering and resourcing authorities to share information and enforce legislation and regulations is essential, ensuring individuals and organisations are held accountable for infringements. Championing animal-centric legislation paves the way to a more just and humane society where positive animal welfare¹ is legally recognised and animals are granted by the law the dignity and protection they deserve.

¹ A scientific network entitled ‘Laying the foundations for positive animal welfare’ has been established to advance its scientific understanding (<https://LIFTanimalwelfare.eu/>). This network comprises more than 330 scientists from 42 countries. The resulting definition is “Positive animal welfare is defined as the animal flourishing through the experience of predominantly positive mental states and the development of competence and resilience” <https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/epdf/10.1098/rsbl.2024.0382>.

Animal welfare has become a global concern, which first requires adequate regulation at a national level.

There is an urgent need to overhaul New Zealand's animal welfare governance system to enable a paradigm shift in the value of animals and human responsibility towards them.² It is crucial that improved animal welfare and protection is prioritised by legislative reform and strengthened regulatory enforcement to avoid ongoing exploitation and harm at human hands.

A Kantar Poll conducted nationwide in April 2023 showed that the welfare or treatment of animals is extremely, or very, important to three in four New Zealanders.³

A Horizon Research poll conducted nationwide in June 2023 shows that 90% of New Zealanders believe it is important to protect the welfare of animals farmed in New Zealand and 71% agree that the Government should do more to promote greater awareness of farmed animal welfare internationally.⁴

Purpose and Objectives of the Animal Protection Policy

AJP advocates for a new legal framework that recognises animals' right to live without suffering harm from humans and ensures that their lives and well-being are protected by the advancement of New Zealand's legal system.

The core purpose of the animal protection policy is:

- To safeguard the welfare and well-being of animals
- To promote humane treatment of animals in all sectors (agriculture, entertainment, research, etc.)
- To reduce instances of animal cruelty, neglect, and exploitation
- To foster public awareness and ethical responsibility regarding animal rights
- To protect endangered species and their habitats

² Animal Protection Index (2020). Despite often being lauded as a leader in animal welfare and protection, New Zealand has a very low ranking in global animal welfare indices: <https://api.worldanimalprotection.org/country/new-zealand>

³ Press Release: SAFE for Animals. (2023, September 19). *Political Parties Neglect Animal Welfare, Survey Reveals*. <https://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PO2309/S00145/political-parties-neglect-animal-welfare-survey-reveals.htm>

⁴ HorizonPoll incorporating ShapeNZ. (2023). <https://www.horizonpoll.co.nz/page/675/80-say-impo>

AJP opposes all exploitation of animals and advocates for their ethical treatment in all human-animal interactions. We stand against all practices that subject animals to stress and/or harm. Our vision is for a society that places value on the well-being of animals and prohibits all practices that exploit or harm them.

Our advocacy entails the development and promotion of policies that end harmful practices and legally protect animals. Holistically, AJP policies promote a vision of a world where animals can thrive in ways that respect their inherent needs and behaviours.

Key Objectives

1. Appoint a dedicated Commissioner for Animals, responsible for overseeing the implementation, monitoring and enforcement of animal welfare and protection laws, to coordinate and lead animal protection efforts (see separate policy *Commissioner for Animals*).
2. Abolish the classification of animals as property and introduce consistent legislation that defines and acknowledges animal sentience, ensuring legal protection from harm
3. While uniform animal protection laws are being developed, campaign for the removal and prohibition of exemptions or ambiguities that enable cruelty to animals, such as Codes of Practice for the supposed “welfare” of farmed animals
4. Promote collaboration between law enforcement agencies to combat animal abuse and its links to interpersonal violence.
5. Apply import or sales restrictions on animal products sourced from outside New Zealand that do not meet the farmed animal welfare standards applied to domestic production.⁵
6. Advocate for the creation and implementation of an international treaty on animal rights

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⁵ Animal Policy International (2024). *Closing the Welfare Gap: Why New Zealand Must Apply Its Animal Protection Standards to Imports*. <https://www.animalpolicyinternational.org/closing-the-welfare-gap>