

AJP Policy Document

Commissioner for Animals

The Animal Justice Party Aotearoa NZ (AJP) believes that all animals in Aotearoa deserve adequate representation in Parliament, to ensure they are protected from exploitation and mistreatment.

To strengthen the voice of animals, we are advocating for the independent position of Commissioner for Animals to be established. Animal welfare is currently regulated by the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI). This is the same Government department responsible for seizing export opportunities and overseeing agriculture productivity¹. Decisions on animal welfare policies are being driven by industry stakeholders who are invested in profiting from the use of animals.

We believe this is detrimental to the rights and welfare of animals, as there is a clear conflict of interest, resulting in inadequate standards and an inability for animal welfare to be the primary concern in many areas.

Key Objectives.

1. Appoint an independent Commissioner for Animals who will have the authority to undertake a comprehensive review of the current system, and provide national leadership on animal protection.
2. Ensure adequate funding towards research and policy making that will improve animal well-being as backed by science.
3. Propose that the Commissioner for Animals has the power to hold MPI and other stakeholders accountable for the effective administration of the Animal Welfare Act 1999.
4. Ensure the Commissioner for Animals maintains independence from the executive Government to prevent conflicts of interest.
5. Ensure the Commissioner for Animals is equipped to make recommendations to improve enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act 1999 and to increase or add penalties where these are considered necessary.

¹ MPI stats

6. Ensure adequate resources are appointed to organizations such as MPI and RNZSPCA to allow them to enforce the Animal Welfare Act 1999.
7. Ensure that the Ministry for Primary Industries updates the national Animal Welfare Strategy '2013'², and these updates include strenuous positive protections to be enacted.

Animal welfare standards and known breaches

The Animal Welfare Act 1999³ outlines the needs of animals as follows:

- Proper and sufficient food and water.
- Adequate shelter.
- The opportunity to display normal patterns of behaviour.
- Physical handling in a manner which minimises the likelihood of unreasonable or unnecessary pain or distress.
- Protection from, and rapid diagnosis of, any significant injury or disease.

These basic needs must be met by law and oftentimes they are not⁴, hence the need for such a position as the Commissioner for Animals to be established. An independent Commissioner for Animals should be equipped to propose changes to legislation and enforcement where these basic requirements are being ignored or compromised.

Why do we need the Commissioner for Animals to be established?

New Zealand is the second largest exporter of animal products globally⁵, and while our Animal Welfare Act may seem adequate, the accompanying Codes, shaped by the animal agriculture industry, at times directly breach this Act. Because Aotearoa has such a large export industry, it is crucial that ethics and standards are upheld. As This industry is governed by stakeholders who do not have an impartial interest⁶, the rights and welfare of animals is often not prioritised. Simple things like the right to adequate shelter are being ignored and animals are suffering as a result⁷. New Zealand promotes animal welfare as our 'brand image' and prioritises animal welfare as part of our export story. It would seem that we are only capable of improving welfare standards

as a part of our export image but while there are animals being housed inappropriately, enduring inadequate shade and shelter, and being denied basic freedoms, we can not claim this image as truth⁸. The Commissioner for Animals would ensure a better

² Animal Welfare Strategy

³ Animal Welfare Act Ref

⁴ Proof

⁵ Global export stats

⁶ Research about subpar standards

⁷ Proof of inadequate housing and standard of care.

⁸ Safe or SPCA link

outcome for all animals including farmed animals, animals in entertainment, companion animals, wild animals, and animals in research, testing and teaching.

Key legislative changes and priority issues for the Commissioner for Animals to address:

AJP will work towards legislation to repeal any codes of welfare that conflict with the requirements of the Animal Welfare Act 1999. The changes to legislation will be the framework the Commissioner for Animals utilises to ensure proper practices are enacted in animal spaces, such as animal agriculture and animals used for entertainment purposes. Along with multiple other organisations such as Save Animals From Exploitation 'SAFE'⁹, Royal New Zealand Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Incorporated 'RNZSPCA'¹⁰, the New Zealand Animal Law Association 'NZALA'¹¹, Helping You Help Animals 'HUHA'¹², and the New Zealand Anti-Vivisection Society 'NZAVS'¹³; AJP firmly believes an independent commissioner who is solely responsible for improving the lives of animals, will help to create a future where animals are no longer being exploited or harmed. Animals should be allocated the right to no longer be viewed as commodities or property. As living, sentient beings they deserve protection and conservation.

References

Animal Welfare Act 1999
Commissioner for Animals Petition - SAFE
Commissioner for Animals
Independent Office of Animal Protection
"Reputation, Regulatory Capture, and Reform: The Case of New Zealand's" by Danielle Duffield
Animal Welfare in New Zealand, Oversight Compliance and Enforcement
NZAVS Supports the Call for a Commissioner for Animals
NZALA to release a report into inconsistencies between the Codes and the Act
New Zealand Animal Law Conference 2019
NZALA_Farmed_Animal_Report
New Zealand Animal Welfare Strategy, Ministry for Primary Industries
<https://www.mpi.govt.nz/dmsdocument/3963-Animal-Welfare-Matters-New-Zealand-Animal-Welfare-Strategy>
Commissioner for Animals Policy, created September 2023, updated April 2025

Commissioner for Animals policy | Created September 2025

⁹ SAFE

¹⁰ SPCA

¹¹ NZALA

¹² HUHA

¹³ NZAVS