



## AJP Policy Document

# Independent animal welfare governance to reduce harm

The Animal Justice Party (AJP) envisions a New Zealand where compassion, sustainability and ethical practices guide our treatment of animals. While we advocate for a complete transition to a plant-based farming system, we recognise that meaningful societal changes require time and a ‘Just Transition’.<sup>1</sup> In the interim, we are committed to reducing the most severe harm and mistreatment of animals by improving oversight of farming practices and strengthening legislation to provide stronger protections and ensure higher welfare standards for all animals in Aotearoa.

New Zealand's animal welfare system must be free from conflicts of interest and bias. Currently, the role of Minister for Animal Welfare is embedded within the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI), an institution heavily tied to the animal agriculture sector. To address this, AJP calls for the establishment of an independent Commissioner for Animals.<sup>2</sup> This role would ensure impartial oversight and monitoring of animal welfare and protection in Aotearoa New Zealand and more effective enforcement of, and compliance with, the Animal Welfare Act 1999. See Regulatory Oversight and Enforcement Policy.

The Animal Welfare Act 1999 outlines several needs (known as the “Five Freedoms”) which must be provided for farmed animals:

- 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.

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<sup>1</sup> MBIE. (2021) *Just transitions to transform disruptive change into positive change*. <https://www.mbie.govt.nz/business-and-employment/economic-growth/previous-economic-development-work/just-transition/just-transitions-guide/foundations/what-are-just-transitions>

<sup>2</sup> See AJP policy *Commissioner for animals*

While the Five Freedoms are insufficient to protect all the rights that sentient animals are entitled to (such as the right to life), they represent the minimum legislative standards to be adhered to. However, current farming methods and the codes of welfare frequently do not meet these standards, especially in intensive animal farming. Additionally, there is limited action or motivation from Government decision makers or regulators to initiate and drive positive welfare law reform<sup>3</sup> to align current farming practices with the Five Freedoms.<sup>4</sup> AJP would therefore implement, as interim measures, regulations to ensure that the Five Freedoms are met in animal agriculture.

Emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, are increasingly being used in animal agriculture to monitor, manage or even conceal harmful practices. Without ethical oversight and transparency, these tools risk entrenching cruelty and further distancing the public from the realities of animal exploitation. AJP supports legislation to ensure that any technological use involving animals prioritises their welfare and does not enable or obscure mistreatment.

### **Key Objectives:**

1. Establish a Commissioner for Animals, see Regulatory Oversight and Enforcement policy.
2. Abolish the classification of animals as property and introduce consistent legislation that defines and acknowledges animal sentience, ensuring legal protection from harm. See Legislation and Regulation Reform Policy.
3. Prohibit the use of artificial intelligence and emerging technologies that enable or conceal animal cruelty, and legislate for transparency, ethical oversight and welfare-first design in all AI applications involving animals.

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<sup>3</sup> 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>.

<sup>4</sup> University of Otago. (2019). *Animal Welfare in New Zealand*. <https://ourarchive.otago.ac.nz/esploro/outputs/report/Animal-Welfare-in-New-Zealand-Oversight/9926479549501891/filesAndLinks?index=0>