



Summer 2016-17

## IN THIS ISSUE

Registrar's Reflections	1
Season's Greetings	1
Registration and Approval Renewals	1
Concerns Regarding Veterinary Advice to Certify Livestock as Being Fit for Transport	2
Tips for Veterinary Surgeons Responding to a Board Investigation of a Complaint	3
Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Writing Prescriptions	3
Specialist Registration	4
Contact	4

## REGISTRAR'S REFLECTIONS

Unbelievably another year is drawing to a close and Christmas is nearly upon us. I think it tends to sneak up on me each year as Christmas decorations appear in the shops just after Easter. It is a crazy busy time which is often aptly called the silly season.

It is also a time to reflect on the year past; or further. It is now just over ten years since I have been the Registrar of the Board. Much has happened during that time. When I joined the Board in September 2006 we had 1003 registered veterinary surgeons and 434 approved veterinary nurses in WA. Now we have 1,538 registered veterinary surgeons and a three- fold increase in approved veterinary nurses to 1,294. Registered veterinary practices have increased at a slower rate but the number has risen from 222 in 2006 to 277 in 2016.

During this time the Board has moved to paperless Agendas and using iPads for meetings, an online system for the renewal of registrations and approvals has been introduced, veterinary practices are regularly inspected every five years and the drafting of a new Veterinary Practice Bill has almost been completed. It also marks ten years since the State Administrative Tribunal was introduced with the resulting restructuring of

the Board's complaints processes. These are just some of the changes.

***What changes will the Board and the veterinary profession see in the next ten years?***

In December this year, the Australasian Veterinary Boards Council is collaborating with the Veterinary Schools of Australia and New Zealand and a futurist, Paul Higgins, to look at the veterinary profession in the year 2031. In a future newsletter I will be including some of the discussion and ideas from the Forum. It will be fascinating to see what they come up with and, eventually, to see how right they got it.

This year the Board has resolved to finalise a strategic plan for a less ambitious but more practical period of three to five years to look into the future and identify the areas of growth and development necessary to deal with the challenges ahead. I am anticipating some fascinating discussions as the Board ponders the future.

***What changes do you anticipate in the veterinary profession in the next five, ten or twenty years? I would love to receive your comments.***

Finally, putting the craziness of the time of year aside, I would like to wish everyone a wonderful Christmas and all the best for the coming year.

## REGISTRATION AND APPROVAL RENEWALS

In mid September 2016, all registered veterinary surgeons and approved veterinary nurses should have received an email notification that their annual renewal was due for 2017. If you haven't received your notice please contact the Board office on 9317 2353.

The absolute deadline for the payment of your renewal fee is 31 December 2016. If you are paying near the deadline make sure that you have your log in details and password before the Board office closes at 4.30pm on 23 December 2016. We will not be able to assist you with log in issues after this date.

The online payment facility on the Board's website will cease to be available after midnight on 31 December 2016.

As of 1 January 2017, veterinary surgeons and veterinary nurses who have not renewed will not be able to legally work in WA.

*Season's Greetings*

*The members and staff of the Veterinary Surgeons' Board wish everyone the very best for the festive season and a happy, healthy, prosperous New Year.*

*The Board's office will be closed from 4.30pm on Friday 23 December 2016 until 8.30am Tuesday 3 January 2017.*





## **CONCERNS REGARDING VETERINARY ADVICE TO CERTIFY LIVESTOCK AS BEING FIT TO TRANSPORT**

The Livestock Compliance Unit (LCU) of the Department of Agriculture and Food WA monitors compliance with the Animal Welfare Act 2002 (the Act) within the livestock industry.

Staff of the LCU attend intensive livestock establishments, points of aggregation and investigate alleged breaches of the Act to ensure that appropriate animal welfare outcomes are achieved. Examples of alleged breaches of the Act include animals that are suffering from conditions which would cause them, or are likely to cause them unnecessary harm, if they were transported. Harm is defined in the Act as including an "injury, pain and distress evidenced by severe, abnormal physiological or behavioural reactions".

The LCU has worked hard over the past several years to educate saleyard, abattoir and knackery staff about their obligations under the Act in identifying and dealing with compromised animals. Positive improvements have been effected at most facilities, evidenced by the facilities' prompt response in dealing with animal welfare issues and making timely reports to the LCU when breaches of the Act are suspected. The LCU has prosecuted cases where animals suffered or were likely to suffer unnecessary harm during transport.

Consequently, livestock owners are increasingly seeking veterinary advice prior to transporting their livestock to these facilities if they are unsure if an animal is fit to be transported. It has been noted by the LCU that some veterinarians advise clients that animals can be transported when it is clear to the inspector that the animals are suffering harm. This is particularly problematic where legal action may result against the person

that transported the animal and further, contradictory veterinary advice is obtained.

Of course there are circumstances where it is appropriate for a veterinarian to certify a compromised animal as fit for transport, where it is in the best interest of the welfare of the animal. However, this requires careful consideration with the animal's welfare paramount and the conditions of transport clearly specified. The Act makes no exemption for transporting compromised animals for convenience or commercial reasons. The fact that an animal is being transported directly for slaughter does not, in itself, justify the transport if a reasonable and more humane alternative is available. An animal sent for slaughter to a knackery is subject to the same welfare standards as animals destined for slaughter for human consumption.

While the LCU encourages livestock owners to seek veterinary advice in relation to animal welfare matters, including transport, it has come to the LCU's attention that there can be problems with the veterinary advice that is being given such that animal welfare is not being adequately protected. In some cases the advice given is contrary to accepted standards.

Veterinarians who provide advice to livestock owners should be familiar with and adhere to animal welfare legislation, welfare guidelines and industry standards, such as relevant Codes of Practice, Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines – Land Transport of Livestock (soon to be implemented in WA) and other industry guides such as the "Is It Fit to Load" guide. These documents set the minimum benchmark for animal welfare and are available on the Department's website at:

[www.agric.wa.gov.au/animal-welfare](http://www.agric.wa.gov.au/animal-welfare)

It is advisable for veterinarians to keep comprehensive clinical notes and evidence of examinations and advice provided to clients if asked to advise on whether an animal is fit to transport. The veterinarian may be called as a witness in court should a matter be prosecuted.

Without a carefully considered approach to this issue, there is a high risk of tensions developing within the livestock industry, poor animal welfare outcomes and a loss of public confidence in livestock industries and the veterinary profession.

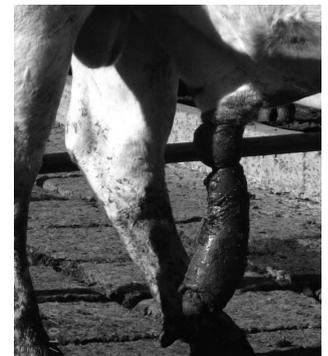
If veterinarians have any questions in relation to these matters they are encouraged to contact Dr Maike Turnbull (Veterinary Officer - Animal Welfare Regulation) 9363 4054, Mark Stuart (Senior Policy Officer) 9363 4051 or by email

[animal.welfare@agric.wa.gov.au](mailto:animal.welfare@agric.wa.gov.au).

**The below pictures show cases where two different WA veterinary surgeons signed certificates stating that the animal was fit to transport.**



Bull with injured leg



Bull with penis injury



## **TIPS FOR VETERINARY SURGEONS RESPONDING TO A BOARD INVESTIGATION OF A COMPLAINT**

Under the provisions of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1960, the Board must investigate complaints received regarding the professional conduct of a person who is or was, at the time the conduct took place, a registered veterinary surgeon. It should be noted that an investigation of a complaint by the Board is in itself not an allegation of unprofessional conduct. However if the Board investigation receives sufficient evidence of unprofessional conduct by a veterinary surgeon, the Board is obliged to refer a complaint to the State Administrative Tribunal (SAT).

The Board receives between 30 and 40 formal written complaints against veterinary surgeons a year. In considering these complaints the Board has identified a number of areas where respondent veterinary surgeons may not always respond appropriately or adequately. This document provides some tips for veterinary surgeons to assist them in responding to an enquiry from the Board.

While it is understandable that veterinary surgeons are concerned and upset upon receipt of a complaint, the importance of a measured, professional, honest, and complete response cannot be emphasised enough. In particular:

- you are required to cooperate fully with any and all inquiries from the Board. Make sure you do so promptly, with respect, and in a professional manner;
- responses to complaints should be simple and be in direct response to the complaint. Unnecessary details should be avoided;
- responses should avoid speculation as to the motives of the complainant, accusations, and inflammatory remarks;
- the clinical records for the animal which is the subject of the complaint are always required in the response. Do NOT make any attempts to change, embellish or alter the clinical records;

- review all practice procedures and protocols on a regular basis, and particularly after you receive a complaint. Even if a complaint is dismissed, a review of practice protocols is recommended in order to identify how future complaints can be avoided; and
- your registration as a veterinary surgeon is a privilege – not a right.

Although it is not required, you may prefer to retain a legal advisor to assist you. It is important that before engaging anyone to assist you with legal advice, you check that they are registered with the Legal Practice Board of Western Australia (LPBWA) and have a current practising certificate. There is a searchable database of registered legal practitioners on the LPBWA website

<https://www.lpbwa.org.au/Home.aspx>

A legal practitioner can provide an unbiased opinion of a complaint. They may also assist you with correspondence to the Board, including providing a response to a complaint.

If the complaint is referred to the SAT you are strongly encouraged to have legal representation. In general, all matters referred to the SAT are referred to mediation or compulsory conferences and the Board always has legal representatives at these meetings.

Remember, registration as a veterinary surgeon is a precious commodity. It is your livelihood. Complaints submitted to the Board should be taken seriously and responded to promptly and respectfully.

### **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT WRITING PRESCRIPTIONS**

The Board has received a number of queries about prescriptions from veterinary surgeons and the public. These are some of the most common questions and the answers to them:

#### ***How do I write a prescription for a client?***

Regulation 37 (S4 drugs) and regulation 51 (S8 drugs) of the Poisons Regulations 1965 describe the requirements for writing prescriptions. In summary the following must be included in a prescription:

- the name and address of the prescribing veterinary surgeon;
- the name and address of the person caring for the animal and the animal's name, if any;
- the name and quantity of the substance;

*(continued Page 4)*

**Q&A**





- directions for use (if necessary);
- the date on which it is issued;
- the maximum number of times it may be repeated, if any, and (where applicable) the intervals at which it may be repeated; NOTE: veterinary surgeons are not permitted to specify repeats in prescriptions for S8 drugs;
- the words "For veterinary use only" or "For animal treatment only" must be included;
- if a prescription contains an unusual dose the prescriber shall indicate that such a dose is intended by underlining that part of the prescription and initialling the same in the margin; and
- the signature of the prescribing veterinary surgeon

***If a client requests that I provide them with a prescription for a scheduled drug that I have prescribed for their animal must I provide one?***

There is no requirement for a veterinary surgeon to provide a prescription to a client on request.

***Can I charge for writing a prescription?***

There is nothing to prevent a veterinary surgeon from charging a reasonable amount for writing a prescription.

***Do I need a special prescription pad?***

No. Veterinary surgeons are not issued with prescription pads. The prescription may be written on any suitable paper or letterhead.

***Am I allowed to write a prescription for a client to fill with an online pharmacy?***

When you write a prescription you are not able to specify where it should be filled. There is no issue with a client filling a prescription with an online Australian pharmacy. However, caution should be used when a client expresses an intention to use an overseas online pharmacy. All veterinary medicines used in Australia must be registered with the Australian Veterinary Pesticides and Medicines Authority and there are penalties for importing unregistered veterinary medicines. For further information see <http://apvma.gov.au/node/18511>.

***Am I permitted to fill a prescription written by another veterinary surgeon without examining the animal?***

No. In WA only a registered pharmacist can fill a prescription on behalf of a veterinary surgeon. If you provide scheduled drugs to an owner without examining the animal first you may be in breach of the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1960.

*Congratulations!*

**SPECIALIST REGISTRATION**

Congratulations to Dr Claire Sharp who has recently been granted specialist registration in Veterinary Emergency Medicine and Critical Care.



**VETERINARY SURGEONS' BOARD OF WA**

MEMBERS OF THE BOARD

- Chair: Dr Peter Punch – AVA nominee
- Dr Graham Harradine – Elected member
- Dr Michael Paton – Dept of Agriculture and Food nominee
- Ms Catherine Carroll – Ministerial appointee

**HOW TO CONTACT US**

- Registrar: Dr Sue Godkin
- Postal Address: PO Box 1721 Melville South WA 6156
- Office: Suite 1, First Floor, Melville Professional Centre, 275 Marmion Street, Melville WA 6156
- Telephone: (08) 9317 2353 Facsimile: (08) 9317 2363
- Email: [admin@vsbwa.org.au](mailto:admin@vsbwa.org.au) Web: [www.vsbwa.org.au](http://www.vsbwa.org.au)