

# Animal Welfare Science Centre Review 2020

## **Craig Johnson**

Professor of Veterinary Neurophysiology and Animal Welfare Science  
Director of Research Ethics  
Co Director, Animal Welfare Science and Bioethics Centre  
School of Veterinary Sciences  
Tāwharau Ora  
Massey University  
Palmerston North  
New Zealand

## **Bidda Jones**

Chief Science & Strategy Officer  
RSPCA Australia

## **Darryl D'Souza**

Executive General Manager  
SunPork Solutions

Review undertaken 25<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup> February 2020  
Report submitted 15<sup>th</sup> March 2020

# Preamble

## History

The Animal Welfare Science Centre (AWSC) was established in March 1997 as a collaborative venture between three partner organisations (the Victorian Department of Primary Industries (which has since undergone multiple name changes and mergers), the University of Melbourne and Monash University).

The Centre's initial aims were to conduct:

- strategic animal welfare research to resolve major animal welfare issues
- student training
- targeted industry, public and tertiary education designed to improve animal welfare and productivity and to assure local and international consumers, the public and Governments that the welfare standards for Australian animals are underpinned by sound and well-accepted science.

With the stated roles of:

- improving the welfare of farm, companion, laboratory and captive animals
- improving the sustainability of animal production agriculture through ethical husbandry practices
- enhancing the quality of life for both animals and people through better understanding of the relationships between animals and society
- establishing a solid research capability on which to build national leadership in the field of animal welfare research, development and extension.

Since its foundation, the mission, vision and aims (or outputs) of the Centre have remained unchanged:

<b>Vision</b>	Animal welfare and its constant improvement are societal and cultural norms
<b>Mission</b>	To contribute to improved animal welfare as a world leading provider of expert information, advice and education underpinned by rigorous research
<b>Aims/Outputs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Develop scientifically defensible welfare methodology.</li><li>• Use scientifically defensible methodology to establish, amend or validate animal welfare standards and practices.</li><li>• Develop and support industry education and training strategies and provide scientific advice to support the modification of codes of practice and the development of quality assurance programs to introduce scientifically defensible welfare standards in the animal industries.</li><li>• Understand public and consumer attitudes to animal welfare to assist Governments and industry in:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• developing animal welfare policy</li><li>• assuring local and international consumers, public and other governments of the sound welfare standards for Australian domestic animals</li></ul></li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure tertiary students entering the animal industries are better prepared to provide sound, science-based advice on animal welfare practices to industry, interest groups and the public.</li> <li>• Provide high quality postgraduate and postdoctoral training for the next generation of researchers and teachers in animal welfare science.</li> </ul>
<b>Program areas</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Welfare methodology</li> <li>2. Housing and husbandry effects on animal welfare</li> <li>3. Attitudinal effects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The effects of the attitudes of stockpeople, animal handlers and animal owners on the welfare of their animals.</li> <li>• The effects of attitudes to animal welfare on consumer and community behaviour.</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. Tertiary and post-graduate education and training</li> </ol>

## What does it mean to be an academic Centre of Excellence?

Animal welfare science has several focusses which are complementary, but to some extent separate. Much animal welfare research is applied and is aimed at measuring and improving the quality of life of animals in specific circumstances. Despite this, theoretical aspects are important components of the discipline. Examples of these aspects include the implications of sentience on the way we treat animals, the ways in which our understanding of their affective states informs our responsibility towards them and how this responsibility differs as the animals' circumstances change.

An academic centre of excellence should be undertaking both theoretical and applied scholarly activity. It should be able to clearly demonstrate how it's theoretical developments lead to improvements in the applied research that it undertakes and, ultimately, deliver benefits to animals. The independence of an academic centre gives it the ability to freely contribute to the discipline of animal welfare. Links between the Centre and its stakeholders provide funding and often access to animals for experimental purposes. There is often a tension between these two aspects of the scholarly activity of a centre. Even so, a vital part of the role of the academy as a whole is to act as a critic and conscience of society and both independence and links with stakeholders are essential to this function.

## Changing environment

In the two decades since the inception of the Centre, the Australian public has become increasingly aware of, and concerned about animal welfare. This change in attitudes, coupled with an increased engagement in activities that raise these concerns, particularly in opposition to farm animal welfare issues – through participation in letter-writing campaigns, petitions, rallies and direct contact with politicians – has been documented in the Centre's own research (e.g. Coleman 2018).

Major retailers have responded to this shift by identifying and supporting product lines with higher welfare claims, increasing consumer choice and awareness. In the past 3-5 years in particular, Australia has also seen a sharp rise in interest in veganism and diets that reduce meat and dairy, coupled with an increase the availability of non-animal protein products. Importantly, this trend is not confined to urban consumers. Most recently, a federal government-commissioned report from 2018 found that 95% of people view farm animal welfare to be a concern and 91% want at least some reform to address this (Anon

2019). The report found these concerns were spread relatively evenly across Australia, and between urban and rural areas.

These changing societal expectations present a threat to the social licence of many animal industries. It seems that the public want higher standards, reform of regulation and increased transparency but they do not trust government to deliver these. Such an environment provides an ideal setting for an independent scientific voice to provide advice and leadership in animal welfare to help ensure animal industries adapt and stay ahead of the curve.

## **Recognition of challenges**

Much of the Centre's funding (\$6.5M) has been sourced from the Victorian Department of Primary Industries, livestock industries (via RD C's and CRCs). More recently this has been expanded to include ARC Linkage funding and other funding from Zoos Victoria, Greyhounds Victoria etc.

The University of Adelaide and SARDI joined the Centre in 2015. Under this new agreement, the SA partners provided in-kind contribution to the AWSC, including the provision of a 0.5FTE Executive Officer, however this contribution was not delivered, and the Victorian partners funded the EO position at 0.5FTE. In 2019, following a review, the SA partners formally withdrew from the AWSC.

In 2017 the Victorian Department of Primary Industries withdrew research funding from the University of Melbourne. This decision reduced funding by c. \$500k per year. The Ohio State University and USDA were admitted as new partners in 2019 but did not contribute any funding to the Centre.

## Terms of Reference

*The current review has 7 specific terms of reference which will be addressed below. Recommendations following from the review will be dealt with in a subsequent section.*

### **1. Critical analysis of the scientific performance and impact of the Centre in improving the welfare of farm, companion and captive animals.**

Much of the research undertaken by the Centre over the last 4-5 years has sought to address key issues affecting farm animals, and to a lesser extent, companion and captive (zoo) animals. Specific examples that highlight the scope/variety of issues being addressed by the Centre are included below.

- Minimal confinement housing systems for sows
- Effective stunning systems for pigs
- The welfare of bobby calves in the meat supply chain
- Milking order and animal welfare in large herds
- Sham-chewing and sow welfare and productivity
- Welfare implications of group lactation at various ages
- Causes of smothering in commercial free-range laying hens
- Assessment of factors influencing behaviour and welfare of birds in free range systems (broilers)
- Phasing out of mulesing: cost, benefits and opportunities
- Methods of field euthanasia for livestock that preserve brain material
- Assessing and Addressing On-Farm Sheep Welfare
- Quantifying welfare improvements in the live export industry
- Socialisation of greyhounds to optimise their racing success and maximise successful rehoming
- Human-animal relationships in zoos: Optimising animal and visitor experiences
- Monitoring public attitudes to livestock industries and livestock welfare
- Evaluation of the welfare risks and impacts of roping (of wild horses)

In many instances, the Centre's RD&E programs have informed discussions around these key issues, whilst in other cases they have been instrumental in assisting industries to adjust to changed practices, e.g. the shift from single stalls to group housing of sows. Peer-reviewed scientific publications from the Centre have been used to inform the review of Standards and Guidelines for animal welfare (which have replaced Model Codes of Practice), most recently for poultry and pigs. However, when seeking an independent review of poultry welfare science, the Victorian Government (DEDJR) commissioned the University of Bristol rather than the Centre. Additionally, the Centre is recognised for its programs looking to enhance attitudes of stockpeople, animal handlers and animal owners to positively affect the welfare of their animals.

In the absence of a national animal welfare framework, the path to enact change is no longer straightforward. It is essential that the Centre retains the touchpoints with industry and policymakers to affect change. Key questions of relevancy within the national animal welfare context need to be considered in order that the Centre can continue to operate as effectively as it has in the past.

### **2. Review performance relative to recommendations of 2015 review and 2019 Strategic Plan.**

#### **2015 Review Recommendations:**

**Recommendation 1.1.** The AWSC should continue and enhance its focus on the 2 mechanisms of delivery of research outputs (a) high quality peer-reviewed journals and (b)

directly to intensive and extensive livestock industries, zoo managers and companion animal owners and explore “new media” means to reach a wider community audience.

*For the most part the AWSC has delivered on this recommendation.*

**Recommendation 2.1.** That the AWSC fully consider (and reconsider) all options to assist with ‘core’ funding and mechanisms to provide a more stable AWSC funding base.

*This has been a particularly challenging Recommendation given the various changes in partnerships that have arisen since the last review. Nevertheless, the funding sourced has been substantial and can be viewed as having successfully delivered on this recommendation.*

**Recommendation 2.2.** That the AWSC consider mechanisms to fund and maintain a comprehensive and vibrant online presence showcasing the work of the Centre.

*The communication strategy adopted by the Centre has enhanced its dissemination of information to all of its stakeholders. Rather than deliver a vibrant online presence, the approach of direct engagement with industry and the public via seminars have been successful. Communication using online spaces is notoriously competitive and requires significant resource if it is to be effective. It is arguable that maintenance of such a vibrant online presence would not be best use of the currently limited resources available to the Centre.*

**Recommendation 2.3.** That the AWSC consider the type and level of public comment that may best serve the Centre and the support (communications expertise, training, and its duty of care to spokespersons) required to achieve this.

*The lack of a national AW RD&E framework has meant that delivery on this Recommendation has not been easy. Nevertheless, direct engagement with industry and public has to all accounts been successful.*

**Recommendation 2.4.** That the AWSC consider the level of course offerings in relation to resources of AWSC scientists during the next strategic planning round.

*This Recommendation has been successfully met with increased course offerings by the Centre. In some ways this has resulted in the unintended consequence of reducing available face-to-face time available to support post-graduate research students and to seek additional sources of funding.*

**Recommendation 2.5.** That the AWSC consider the composition and role of an Advisory Committee.

*This recommendation has not been addressed, but the present review panel is of the opinion that an advisory committee is not necessary for the Centre. Processes for ensuring student, staff and stakeholder input into the Centre’s strategic plan are covered in the panel’s recommendations.*

**Recommendation 2.6.** That the AWSC consider an appropriate evaluation method and frequency during its strategic planning process.

*There is no evidence that this recommendation has been addressed except for a single KPI report.*

**Recommendation 2.7.** During development of the next Strategic Plan, KPIs incorporate particular levels, growth or improvement targets in addition to only measuring activities.

*This Recommendation has been addressed by KPI reporting.*

**Recommendation 2.8.** During the development of the next Strategic Plan strong consideration be given to sustaining strong communication with relevant Government departments, and effective planning with other research centres (not part of AWSC) to ensure maximum national coordination and efficient use of resources to work on the most important animal welfare issues.

*This Recommendation was addressed in part with the establishment of the SA node of the Centre. However, since the departure of Prof Alan Tilbrook from SARDI to Univ of QLD, both SARDI and UoA have since exited the Centre. In speaking with the Centre management, further engagement with other research centres has not been undertaken. Given this experience, the present review panel is of the opinion that such large-scale formal collaborations are not prudent for the Centre.*

**Recommendation 3.1.** The AWSC should increase efforts to ensure student projects and theses result in quality peer-reviewed as well as bespoke industry-relevant publications, and in the context of an expanded AWSC, continue to take opportunities provided by host universities to increase biomedical collaboration and potential Category 1 funding support. In addition, the AWSC should continue to carefully monitor student progress and ensure that they receive appropriate mentoring, professional development and opportunities for intellectual exchange and skills development and sharing.

*The publication rate of student projects appears to be relatively good. However, there are industry-funded projects listed in the Centre's output which have not been published or turned into peer-reviewed publications. The issue of student mentoring and professional development has been addressed by the students themselves rather than by the Centre staff and remains an area of concern.*

**Recommendation 4.1.** The AWSC engage a new independent Chair and re-structure itself to include both representatives of the five partner organisations and additional members with particular skills. The Review Committee suggests the Board seek members with skills in risk management, legal, finance, strategic planning, biomedical and animal welfare. Some remuneration for the Chair should be considered.

*Outside of an independent Chair and the establishment of a Centre Board, this recommendation was not addressed to the extent that it was made. Given the changes in Centre partners, the current panel does not see the need for an expanded Board but there is a continuing need for effective strategic planning.*

**Recommendation 4.2.** The AWSC address governance issues by adopting a Charter or Terms of Reference (which cover aspects such as Director's Duties, Terms of Office, Rotation of Board Members, Training for Directors and key staff Appointment, Performance and Appraisal).

*This recommendation has been addressed.*

**Recommendation 4.3.** The AWSC develop a five-year Strategic Plan in consultation with AWSC staff and stakeholders. The Plan should address whether additional committees (such as an Advisory Committee) are required and if so, take responsibility for Terms of Reference and Appointments. The Plan should take into account the capabilities of the two 'nodes' (South Australia and Victoria) and undertake a gap analysis to identify where the next focus should be nationally or internationally, identifying any potential new partners. The Strategic Plan should also address succession planning.

*This Recommendation was addressed initially. Since the exit of the SA node of the Centre, significant efforts to preserve Centre structure (funding for Research Fellows) rather than review of the strategy has not served the Centre well in addressing the gaps and the challenges that the Centre currently faces and more than likely will face in the next 2-3 years.*

**Recommendation 4.4.** The AWSC should continue to address its funding structure and assess whether measures such as endowments, bequests, benevolent funding or the establishment of a foundation would be of benefit to the Centre, increasingly drawing on the University of Melbourne and the University of Adelaide for support.

*In speaking with the Centre management, this Recommendation to have measures around endowment, bequests and benevolent funding was supported, but attempts to identify these appear not to have been successful to date. The view of the current panel is that a re-positioning of the Centre as a leader in progressing animal welfare science would increase the likelihood of attracting benevolent funding.*

**Recommendation 5.1.** The AWSC develop a 5-year Strategic Plan that reflects the changes in the organisation, capabilities of the two 'nodes' (South Australia and Victoria) and the opportunities and challenges as an independent, multi-party, multidisciplinary, evidence-based, ethical animal welfare science centre. The strategic plan should be developed with involvement from key stakeholders to ensure relevance and future support for the organisation and its valuable work.

*This Recommendation was addressed, but as mentioned previously, focus was turned inward to preserve structure rather than looking for additional opportunities to enhance collaboration (within and external to UoM).*

**Recommendation 5.2.** After full integration of parties into the new AWSC and its operational functionality, explore developing further collaborations and partnerships, for example CSIRO and others (Syd Uni, UQ, UWA) to ensure a truly national approach to animal welfare science as well as increasing further capacity and value.

*This Recommendation has not been addressed.*

**Recommendation 5.3.** Consider expanding the scope of research activities within budgetary capacity to include a duty of care agenda; quantitative measures of positive animal welfare; novel ways to quantify animal welfare; broadening of the scope of work with red meat, dairy, fish and companion animals; attention to alternative and future farming systems.

*The scope of this Recommendation is vast and in many ways the Centre has addressed it. But where it has been achieved, the Centre has done so, for the most part, in a very insular manner.*

**Recommendation 5.4.** Develop the value proposition, identifying current capacity and capability as a means of embedding the appreciation within current investors as well as promoting to potential new investors.

*This Recommendation is one that most research centres would struggle to address, and the Centre is no different. Outside of its KPIs, there is little information that can be made available to demonstrate 'practice change, reputation and deliverables' contributing to advancing the cause of animal welfare.*

**Recommendation 5.5.** Continue to strengthen the relationships with multiple components of the livestock industry, for example the lot feeders industry.

*This Recommendation appears to have been addressed.*

**Recommendation 5.6.** Explore potential opportunities to garner support, including funding, from the broader food value chain including the retail sector with a view to underpinning the 'welfare thinking' within this sector with good science.

*This Recommendation has been partially met but only on an ad hoc basis rather than as part of a concerted strategic imperative.*

**Recommendation 5.7.** The AWSC should assess the feasibility of increased industry placements, securing scholarships support from non-traditional sources (e.g. the food retail sector), and mentoring or professional development and course work aimed at increasing commercial skills/ industry awareness for AWSC RHD students.

*This Recommendation does not appear to have been addressed. The lack of this within the Centre has been specifically highlighted by both the Student and Research Fellow groups.*

**Recommendation 5.8.** The AWSC should explore expanding its extension role to include commercial agribusiness service providers and other professionals in the broad animal welfare domain (e.g. veterinarians, animal health officers).

*We are unaware if this has been specifically addressed. The supporting information provided did not make this evident.*

**Recommendation 6.1.** In relation to the circumstances in which animal and food industries operate in Australia, it is recommended that the AWSC note (a) how Animal Health Australia (AHA) applies risk management as part of good corporate governance and views animal welfare as a management risk within Australia's animal health system, and (b) risk management strategies of food retailing firms and how AWSC can assist with the necessary input from science and developing process for facilitating this impact.

*We are unaware if this has been specifically addressed. The supporting information provided did not make this evident.*

**Recommendation 6.2.** In relation to the national scene, it is recommended that the AWSC further note several recent inputs to sociological aspects of animal welfare and their relevance to the AWSC and the AWSC's potential to make innovative contributions to public policy.

*This recommendation refers to the potential for the Centre to promote a social (behaviour) change approach to improving animal welfare outcomes. -There is no evidence that this recommendation has been progressed, but the potential for the Centre to make innovative contributions to public policy remains.*

**Recommendation 6.3.** The AWSC should maintain active two-way communication with key animal welfare policy professionals and organisations in Canberra highlighting the progress being made in animal welfare science and training (as well as translation including practice change in industry) that is in the national interest and in which Australia must maintain a high international reputation and active profile.

*The recommendation relates to the potential for the Centre to act to fill the void left by the federal government's withdrawal from the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS) by engaging directly with federal government officials and national peak bodies and NGOs. While staff from the Centre have been invited to participate in several government committees, the Centre does not appear to have taken pro-active steps to engage as its focus has been elsewhere.*

**Recommendation 6.4.** Given that replacement of the previous national policy body AAWS remains under consideration, the AWSC should determine its capability and capacity to market its expertise and provide advice to organisations such as RSPCA, AVA, commercial agribusiness service providers and food retailers in regards to the elements of evidence-based policy and/or requirements for "welfare audits".

*This recommendation does not appear to have been addressed. The panel is of the view that the Centre would need to re-establish itself as a thought leader in animal welfare in order to successfully market its expertise to other organisations.*

**Recommendation 6.5.** It is recommended that in relation to the international scene, the AWSC continue to monitor World Bank, OIE and FAO developments with a view to capturing opportunities for AWSC involvement and beneficial influence.

*We are unaware if this has been specifically addressed. The supporting information provided did not make this evident, but it is difficult to see how this activity could be captured in such a format.*

**Recommendation 6.6.** The AWSC should provide an information fact sheet highlighting the exceptional complementary expertise to which AWSC has access across Melbourne and Adelaide Universities.

*The withdrawal of the SA Node from the Centre makes this recommendation obsolete.*

As detailed above, the Centre has partially implemented the recommendations of the 2015 review. This is unsurprising given the significant change of environment resulting from the withdrawal of the SA Node and the numerous and varied nature of the recommendations. The present review panel were not concerned by the extent to which recommendations had not been addressed.

## 2019 Strategic Plan Initiatives

The mission of the Centre is defined in the strategic plan as: “To contribute to improved animal welfare as a world leading provider of expert information, advice and education underpinned by rigorous research.”

Key objectives:

1. Conduct rigorous, innovative, basic and applied research to improve animal welfare.

*The Centre has delivered on this initiative, although it is gradually becoming less able to fulfil this than it has been in the past. There are several potential contributing factors to this reduction in capacity. The similarity in capability between members of the Centre is very noticeable with most of the senior research staff overlapping in their expertise. This is especially apparent when comparing the Centre with multi-disciplinary animal welfare programs now being developed in other institutions such as UQ, UWA and UoA and it gives the Centre a one-dimensional feel. To some extent this has been due to the departure of the SA Node, but it is also clear that there has been little internal focus on broadening this expertise base. Recent collaborations would suggest that this may be being addressed but there is little evidence of any strategic plan to mould the future expertise of the Centre to ensure that it remains at the forefront of animal welfare research.*

*The securing of funding from a range of streams has been significant and has helped to support the Centre, but there is a risk that this kind of funding model can result in a more reactionary focus rather than a planned development. In the past, a hallmark of the Centre was its foresight in addressing animal welfare issues well ahead of industry. This appears to have become an exception rather than the norm in recent times. The ‘braveness’ of the Centre has dimmed to some extent. Causes of this dimming may include the lack of time being made available to the leadership for strategic thought, changes in the ways in which industry operates and the needs that they have of the Centre, or the Centre being less well connected to other animal welfare stakeholders than it has been in the past.*

2. Provide valued independent, authoritative scientific knowledge and advice for members, partners, stakeholders, animal industries (sectors) and the community

*This initiative is very similar to initiative 1 in the sense that the independent and authoritative advice is often provided in the form of research outputs that are based on the results of the innovative, basic and applied research undertaken by the Centre. The advice provided by the Centre is undoubtedly independent, authoritative and science-based. The value of this advice is a measure of how it is received by stakeholders and this depends more on their overall perceptions of the Centre rather than on the quality of any particular advice. The dimming of the Centre's light has been mentioned above and this is a risk to the way in which the advice provided by the Centre is received by stakeholders.*

### 3. Provide high quality animal welfare education and training

*There has been something of a deficiency in this aspect of the Centre's activities. The postgraduate students identified several aspects of their association with the Centre that they felt could be improved:*

*Students are well supported by their supervisors, but often have little contact with other researchers in the Centre.*

*Internal communication within the Centre is poor and students often feel on the outside looking in rather than being an integral part of the Centre's activities.*

*Isolation from other groups within the university is a problem. This may be in part due to the recent temporary relocation of the Centre.*

*The students have little opportunity to develop transferable skills as part of their programs. Opportunities such as helping with undergraduate teaching would be welcomed and would provide opportunities to develop skills that would be useful when applying for subsequent employment.*

*Little attention is given to future career pathways for students and they often reach the end of their studies with little idea of the possible opportunities for future employment that are available to them. Opportunities to introduce students to industry and other stakeholders would be welcomed by the student body.*

*The similarity in capability of the senior research staff at the Centre reduces opportunities for students to gain experience with a broad range of research methodologies and may prevent students from other disciplines (e.g. physiology, epidemiology or social sciences) who have an interest in animal welfare from joining the Centre.*

### 4. To constantly improve the capability of the Animal Welfare Science Centre.

*This aspect of the Centre's activities has been hampered by the recent changes in structure and funding. It is vital that the Centre's activities in this area are not neglected during future developments. One result of recent changes, already mentioned, is the relative skillset monoculture of the senior researchers, many of whom have a similar methodological focus. This lack of breadth has the potential to limit the Centre's ability to remain at the forefront of animal welfare science.*

## **3. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of the Centre particularly in relation to its scientific performance and its development and application of scientific outputs.**

### *Strengths*

*Peer reviewed scientific publications have been significant and make a major contribution to the standing of the Centre. Scientific training also appears to be significant compared to output from other welfare RD&E groups.*

*The AWSC's provision of secretariat management for the National Animal Welfare Research and Development and Extension Strategy with some 25+ members (no mean feat) has been instrumental in driving the strategy. In addition, one of the few cross-sectoral projects commissioned by the*

*NAWRD&E Strategy, Public attitudes to livestock industries and livestock welfare, was led by the Centre scientists.*

#### *Weaknesses*

*Internal collaborations between Centre and Vet School almost non-existent, and an opportunity yet to be addressed. Loss of key partnerships with SARDI and UoA have not been adequately addressed. The benefits of partnerships with Ohio State and the USDA are not clear to those outside the Centre.*

#### *Risks for the Future*

*One of the Centre's prior strengths has been that its RD&E programs were more forward looking and less reactionary than many other organisations, particularly the animal production industries. The recent drive to constantly get more funding has increased activity in applied aspects of the research program, but at the same time reduced capacity for more forward-looking activity. Over time, this is resulting in the Centre being seen more as a small-study research provider than as a thought-leader in the field of animal welfare.*

*In the past, much of the science leadership at the Centre has been dominated by two senior scientists. To date some generational change has taken place, but success has been mixed. The Centre's strategy to foster the next animal welfare science leaders is not clearly enunciated.*

#### **4. Identify how AWSC has met (or not met) the individual expectations of partner organisations.**

*It is clear that RD&E funding has and will always be an issue. Having said this, the Centre has been particularly successful in sourcing ~\$5M outside of Partner funding from the Victorian Government. The list of peer reviewed scientific publications has been substantial and the consensus is that many of these would not have occurred without the presence of the Centre to act as a focus for animal welfare research. The fostering of new capability, especially graduating Higher Degree Research students, continues to be high for the Centre. The fact that this was achieved amidst the challenges posed by the withdrawal of SARDI and UoA, the reduction in funding from the Victorian Government and loss of key mid-career capability demonstrates the success of the Centre within its Strategic remit.*

*Nevertheless, the withdrawal of the SA partners from the Centre and the reasoning for this must be considered. The Review undertaken by SARDI and UoA culminating in the recommendation to invoke Clause 24.1 (a) of the Centre Agreement to enable them to withdraw from their participation is quite damning in its assessments. These include:*

- (i) unable to provide convincing evidence of benefits directly accruing to UoA or SARDI due to their participation in the Centre Agreement*
- (ii) The cost to SARDI of replacing lost capability as a condition of continuing membership of the AWSC*
- (iii) Withdrawal of UoA and SARDI from the Centre Agreement per se is unlikely to materially affect the conduct of animal welfare RD&E in South Australia.*

*Other feedback indicates a strong perception by South Australian partners and shared by interstate colleagues who are not members of the AWSC, that the AWSC is Melbourne-centric. There is a feeling that they have not been valued as "true partners" by the AWSC Board and Executive. Disagreements over the disciplinary basis of animal welfare science were also cited as a source of tension between established scientists in the Victorian node and their South Australian colleagues. The fostering of Partnerships like that of The Centre and SARDI/UoA require significant effort and a willingness on both sides to make these collaborative partnerships work. This does not seem to have*

*been the case in this instance. The withdrawal has undoubtedly left the Centre in a weaker position going forward.*

*The Partnership between the Centre and AgVic was reviewed in 2015 and was very favourable in its assessment of the Center's performance. Despite this, the Centre has received significantly reduced funding from AgVic and it seems very likely that this reduction will continue and deepen into the future. This reduction of funding does not seem to have resulted in a re-appraisal of the value to AgVic or a redirection of priorities for the Centre.*

**5. Provide key recommendations to the Board re Strategic direction the AWSC should take over the next 5-10 years to optimise its contribution towards enhancing animal welfare in farm, companion and captive animals, its delivery of information towards a more informed community and to the strategic plans of partner organisations.**

*The strategic direction of the Centre appears to be unchanged with the change in leadership, despite the operating environment constantly changing over the last few years. The current strategy/structure of the Centre should be re-evaluated to ensure that it is still relevant to its stakeholders.*

*The Centre needs to find ways to conserve and enhance its critical mass. Both the number of researchers at the Centre and the number of disciplines in which they have expertise will be important in maintaining viability into the future.*

**6. Identify changes in the Centre's operating environment and provide recommendations to the Board taking into account the retirement of the University of Adelaide and the South Australian Research and Development Institute from the Centre and the collaborative ties with The Ohio State University and The United States Department of Agriculture - Agricultural Research Service - Livestock Behavior Research Unit.**

*Succession management is going well as viewed from inside the Centre, but from outside, the Hemsworth name is still seen as the face of the Centre. The transition between leaders needs to be carefully managed and Prof. Fisher needs to be given time and support to develop his reputation with stakeholders and his vision for the future of the Centre.*

*A multidisciplinary approach is becoming increasingly important in animal welfare science. The relatively narrow research focus of the Centre is limiting its ability to undertake research and development across the breadth of disciplines recognized as related to animal welfare. Whilst a number of staff have expertise in animal behaviour and veterinary sciences, physiology, epidemiology and social science are poorly represented in the expertise of the Centre.*

**7. Identify funding opportunities and sources that will secure the future operations of the Centre.**

*Further reductions in AgVic funding seem close to a certainty and the Centre needs to address this loss and also to consider the value of AgVic as a partner in the Centre. It seems that AgVic now provides little of value, but still expects to influence the activities and outputs of the Centre. Formal agreements with partners such as Ohio State and the USDA should be carefully evaluated before they are entered into. Such large partnerships require significant effort to initiate and maintain and the SARDI/ UoA experience indicates that they can cause significant damage to capacity and reputation if they fail. It may be sensible to focus on a number of smaller, more flexible partnerships and collaborations rather than concentrate on fewer large programs.*

## Recommendations

1. The Centre should develop its community of postgraduate students in order that they broaden the skills that they acquire through being associated with the Centre and that they are increasingly utilised as a resource for the Centre. A senior member of staff should be identified to act as facilitator for the student body and should encourage other staff members to contribute to student activities whenever possible.
2. The Centre should undertake an urgent situational review incorporating its current challenges and opportunities and use this to identify future directions that will better serve its purposes.
3. The Centre should revise and update its mission statement and goals with the aim of providing a new strategic plan. This will enable the Centre to flourish through the currently fluid fiscal and conceptual environment and maintain its status as a world-class thought leader and research provider in the discipline of animal welfare. We encourage the Centre to utilise the skills and capabilities of all its members in this process.
4. The Centre should ensure that its methodological basis be as broad as possible to reflect the current scope of animal welfare science. Efforts should be made to replace physiological expertise that has been lost from the Centre and to encourage the development of social science capability.
5. The Centre should focus on external collaborations on a project-by-project basis. Where such collaborations prove to be fruitful over time, the Centre should consider developing a more formal arrangement on this solid foundation.
6. The Centre should develop strong links with clinical staff at the School of Veterinary Science through the development of research collaborations. The considerable research expertise within the Centre constitutes a valuable resource for clinicians and their access to clinical material could provide a useful basis for smaller research projects.
7. The Centre needs to develop more nuanced ways of assessing its impacts on animals, society, students, government, industry and researchers rather than maintaining its current KPI focus on funding and research outputs.
8. The Centre should undertake regular (at least annual) priority setting exercises to ensure that it maintains currency in the animal welfare space. As part of this process the Centre should make efforts to involve stakeholders when setting its priorities.
9. The Centre needs to reassess how it balances its efforts between maintaining current funding streams and seeking new avenues of support. Finding new ways to promote the Centre's potential to address emerging issues in the animal welfare space will help it to better tell its story and attract alternative funding sources.
10. The Centre should seek to re-establish its role in thought-leadership by undertaking projects that contribute to the theoretical understanding of animal welfare science.

## References

Anonymous (2019). Criminal Code Amendment (Agricultural Protection) Bill 2019 [Provisions] Submission 12

G Coleman (2018). Public animal welfare discussions and outlooks in Australia. *Animal Frontiers* 8 14–19. <https://doi.org/10.1093/af/vfx004>