



OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
VICTORIA

AUSTRALIAN VETERINARY ASSOCIATION
ANNUAL CONFERENCE
Monday 5th June, 2017

Dr Robert Johnson, President, Australian Veterinary Association (AVA)
Mr Graham Catt, Chief Executive Officer, AVA
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen.

I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathered, and pay my respects to their elders, past and present and any elders with us today.

On behalf of all Victorians, it is my pleasure to welcome you to Melbourne.

And as your Annual Conference opens this morning, I want to touch upon three particular topics: pets, biosecurity and family violence.

Let me explain, starting with pets.

I understand this is the first time in a decade that the Australian Veterinary Association has held its annual conference in Victoria.

Much has changed in the last ten years.

First, Melbourne is now in the midst of a population boom. Just last year alone, the city grew by more than 2.4% - or 107,000 people.

And, according to demographers, we are on track to overtake Sydney as the largest city in Australia.

As a result, parts of the city – including the City Square – have been turned into construction zones as we work to remain one of the most liveable cities in the world.

Needless to say, these changes have increased the collective blood pressure of the city.

While I'm not sure what this all means for Victoria's pet population, I know what it means for their owners.

What it means is – now more than ever – we need to spend more time walking, patting or just looking at our pets.

We don't have a pet at Government House. But there have been many in the past. Sir Rohan and Lady Delacombe's Labrador, Zara, was in fact laid to rest in the garden, complete with her own engraved headstone. Just as Sir Rohan was the last of the British born Governors, Zara was the last of the British born pets.

Let me turn to the topic of biosecurity.

Much has changed globally as well as locally, since your last annual conference here in 2007.

The economic rise of Asia in general, and China in particular, is projected to create a middle class of more than 3.2 billion people by 2030. Demand for food is consequently expected to double by 2050.

And this social and economic transformation is happening just as Free Trade Agreements have opened new market opportunities in China, Japan and South Korea.

Unsurprisingly, there has been much discussion about what this means for Australian agriculture. For instance, there have been suggestions that we could double production by 2050.

The thinking is that – given Australia’s reputation for clean and green produce – we are ideally placed to sell high quality fresh food to Asia’s middle class. That means the Asian Century could, for Australia, become the Agricultural Century.

And what does this mean for Australia’s vets?

It means animal health and welfare – biosecurity – is, more than ever, going to be a matter of national importance.

It means the work you do is as important as it has been since the days when Australia rode on the sheep’s back.

It means – now more than ever – we need your leadership, your advocacy and your expertise.

The last decade has seen one other change that I would like to draw to your attention. That change may at first appear to be unrelated to the work of veterinarians, but it is related.

And that issue is family violence.

Let me explain the connection.

It has taken decades for family violence to be seen as a mainstream issue in our society. In Victoria, the eloquent advocacy of Australian of the Year, Rosie Batty has helped make it a headline issue – advanced then through Victoria’s Royal Commission into Family Violence. And, last month, the Victorian Government committed to implement every recommendation of the Royal Commission.

I would ask for your help in the fight against family violence. And I am asking because of the proven link between family violence and cruelty to animals.

Researchers have found that people who harm their animals are more likely to harm their partner or children. In other words, acts of violence are seldom isolated and are often linked.

That connection will often put vets on the frontline of family violence prevention.

With that in mind let me ask you to reflect:

Have you ever cared for a pet or animal that has been treated with cruelty?

Have you ever wondered what else the person who harmed that animal was capable of?

Did you suspect that person also harmed their partner or family?

Our collective greater understanding and awareness in this regard will no doubt see more women and children protected.

Otherwise, that leaves me to say – on a much lighter note – ‘Welcome to Melbourne’, and I hope that you are able to enjoy all that our city and beautiful State has to offer, in addition to the socialisation and mental stimulation that this conference promises to you.

It is with great pleasure that I now open the 2017 Australian Veterinary Association Conference.

Have a great conference.