

# RAWS NEWSLETTER



## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

A 'Paw-sitive' triumph - **Bhutan's** journey in achieving 100% sterilisation coverage of free-roaming dog population

Overview of animal welfare progress in People's Republic of **China** (2024)

**Australia:** Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS)

### Let's keep the momentum going

Greetings to all in the region from the WOAHA RAWS Advisory Group for the Asia-Pacific! As promised in our last newsletter, this issue will feature the success story of dog population control in Bhutan, an overview of the progress on animal welfare in China and news on the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy. We are delighted to see all these fruitful advancements in the region, and believe that you will enjoy learning about them as much as we do. We hope you will find this newsletter inspirational!

### What's RAWS?

The Regional Animal Welfare Strategy (RAWS) for Asia-Pacific was developed and endorsed by Members and Partners of the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) in 2008. It aims to provide an overarching, agreed framework and guidance for WOAHA Members and non-members in the region to implement WOAHA animal welfare standards, and to serve as the basis for developing Action Plans. Since its endorsement, RAWS has been fostering the advancement of animal welfare in the region, alongside socioeconomic development, focusing on standards on animal transport, slaughter and culling, capacity building, education and raising awareness.



RAWS Advisory Group meeting, Tokyo 23 Jan 2025

### Note from the Chair

I was privileged to attend the 92nd General Session in Paris in May, where delegates agreed to amend Chapter 7.1, the introduction to the recommendations for animal welfare, to incorporate the Five Domains model which allows consideration of positive and negative experiences of the animal, as well as defining animal-based, resource-based and management-based measures in welfare assessment.

Closer to home, we've just held the first in a series of WOAHA subregional animal welfare webinars for the Pacific, building on momentum from the Focal Point Training in Tokyo. The webinar was designed to facilitate the sharing of experiences, successes, challenges, and recommendations among participants from the Pacific region and WOAHA Partners — a promising platform for continued learning and collaboration. A heartfelt thank you to everyone who contributed to making the webinar such a success — whether through presentations, behind-the-scenes organisation, or active participation.

As you read through this edition, I hope you'll find moments that resonate with your own experiences and spark new ideas for collaboration.





## A PAW-SITIVE TRIUMPH - BHUTAN'S JOURNEY IN ACHIEVING 100% STERILISATION COVERAGE OF FREE-ROAMING DOG POPULATION

### THE PROBLEM OF GROWING DOG POPULATION IN BHUTAN

Dogs hold a significant place in societies across the world, providing companionship and serving various practical roles such as guarding livestock and crops, assisting in search and rescue operations, offering therapy, and ensuring security. The global dog population exceeds 700 million, with an alarming 75% roaming freely without direct human supervision.

The growing population of free-roaming dogs raises significant public health concerns, particularly due to the risk of transmitting zoonotic diseases like rabies. Each year, millions of people suffer from dog bites, with approximately 99% of human rabies cases resulting from such incidents. Unfortunately, free-roaming dogs play a major role in perpetuating the spread of this disease, especially in many countries across Asia and Africa.



The increasing dog population presents challenges concerning animal welfare, as many dogs endure harsh living conditions with limited access to essential care and resources. Additionally, they contribute to societal issues such as environmental littering and night-time noise disturbances.

In Bhutan, the community's compassionate approach toward animals has played a role in the rapid growth of the dog population, as individuals provide food and shelter even when the dogs have no specific owners. This growing population has led to several concerns, including public health risks, environmental pollution, zoonotic disease transmission, and community disturbances caused by barking and biting. According to national data, 6,873 people suffered dog bites in 2021 alone. Furthermore, between 2006 and 2023, 19 people lost their lives due to rabies transmitted by dogs. Recognizing these long-standing challenges, the government has implemented intervention measures to manage the growing dog population and mitigate its associated issues.

### HISTORY OF DOG POPULATION MANAGEMENT IN BHUTAN

Recognising the numerous challenges posed by the rising free-roaming dog population, the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB) has implemented various strategies to manage the dog population and control rabies. Initially, dog population management relied on widely used methods of the time, which gradually evolved based on lessons learned from their implementation.

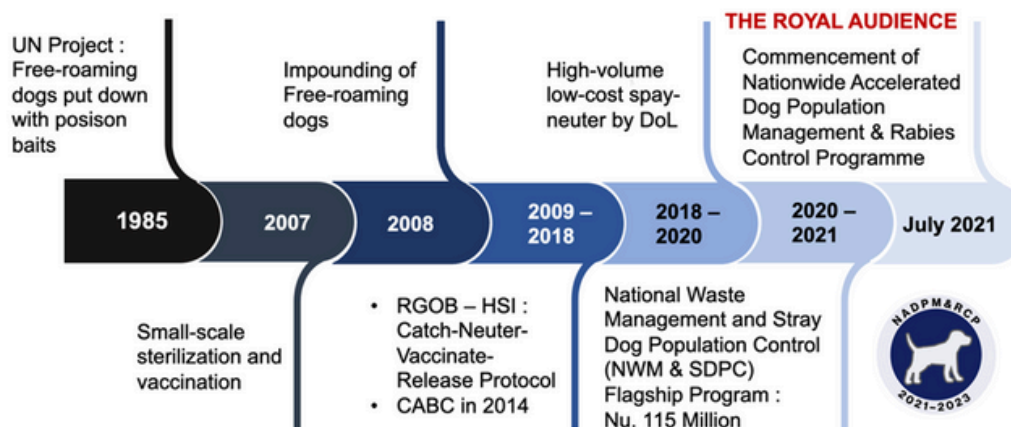
During the 1970s and 1980s, Bhutan attempted multiple measures to address the issue. However, these efforts were met with resistance from the community due to cultural and religious beliefs. By the 1990s, authorities carried out translocations to control localised surges in dog populations. This approach not only failed to produce the desired results but, in some cases, even led to legal disputes.

In 2008, the government allocated funds to establish nationwide shelters for free-roaming dogs. However, this initiative proved unsustainable and raised concerns regarding animal welfare.

While sterilisation had long been recognized as a humane and effective method of population control, the sterilisation efforts in the 2000s were carried out on a limited scale and lacked the necessary coverage, resulting in only short-term impacts.

In 2009, the Department of Livestock (DoL) partnered with Humane Society International (HSI), USA, to address the issue through the "capture-neuter-vaccinate-release" (CNVR) protocol, marking its first implementation in Bhutan. The project was rolled out in three phases, each lasting three years. The first two phases (2009–2015) were conducted under an equal partnership, with both RGoB and HSI contributing 50% of the resources in cash and in-kind support. In the third phase (2016–2018), RGoB increased its financial contribution to 65%, while HSI provided 35% in in-kind support. To ensure long-term sustainability and greater community involvement, the Community Animal Birth Control Program (CABC) was introduced as a component of the initiative in 2014. The collaboration concluded in June 2018.

### HISTORY OF STRAY DOG POPULATION MANAGEMENT IN BHUTAN





## LIMITATIONS OF THE PAST INTERVENTIONS

Despite intensified efforts to manage the dog population through various approaches, these strategies failed to achieve the desired results due to several key factors:

- **Undefined targets:** A major limitation across all past initiatives in Bhutan was the absence of clear, measurable objectives. Without specific targets, evaluating the effectiveness of these approaches proved challenging.
- **Lack of coordinated implementation:** Previous strategies were implemented at the national level with minimal involvement from local governments, leading to poorly synchronised work plans. As a result, Dog Population Management (DPM) activities were carried out inconsistently, and sterilisation programs were not executed simultaneously across the country.
- **Resource constraints:** Limited availability of financial and human resources restricted the scale of these initiatives, making it difficult to cover all districts within a short period.
- **Incomplete coverage:** Since full coverage was not prioritized, unsterilised dogs continued to reproduce, sustaining the problem.
- **Minimal stakeholder and community involvement:** A lack of public awareness regarding the importance of dog population control, coupled with strong religious sentiments, led to resistance against past measures. Sterilisation programs conducted without community participation were ineffective, and sporadic, small-scale efforts failed to produce meaningful results.
- **Absence of an exit strategy:** The lack of a well-defined exit strategy made it difficult to sustain the limited and short-term progress achieved through these initiatives.

## THE FLAGSHIP PROGRAM

### NATIONAL WASTE MANAGEMENT AND STRAY DOG POPULATION CONTROL (NWM & SDPC) FLAGSHIP PROGRAM IN MARCH 2020

Despite the Royal Government of Bhutan's continuous efforts to manage the dog population using various approaches, the number of dogs continued to rise. Issues such as dog bites and disturbances like night-time barking remained prevalent, frequently making headlines in mainstream media. Recognising the urgent need for sustained and reinforced action, the government launched the National Waste Management and Stray Dog Population Control (NWM & SDPC) Flagship Program in March 2020.

This three-year program aimed to achieve at least 95% sterilisation and vaccination coverage for free-roaming dogs, 100% registration and sterilisation of owned dogs, and to reverse the owned-to-unowned dog ratio from 30:70 to 70:30 by 2023. Additionally, the Dog Population Management (DPM) component of the program set a long-term goal of eliminating dog-mediated human rabies deaths by 2030. The NWM & SDPC Flagship Program was implemented between March 2020 and February 2023. The program covered five Dzongkhags - Bumthang, Haa, Paro, Thimphu, and Tsirang successfully sterilising a total of 9,147 dogs, achieving coverage rates between 80% and 94%.

## THE FLAGSHIP PROGRAM

### NATIONAL ACCELERATED DOG POPULATION MANAGEMENT AND RABIES CONTROL PROGRAM (NADPM & RCP)

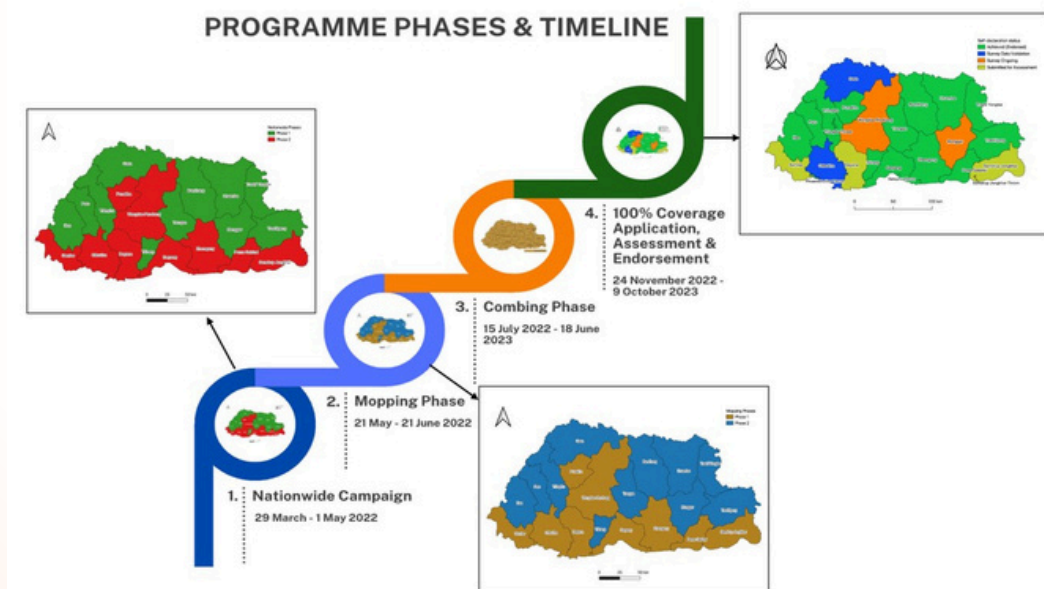
Approximately a year into the implementation of the NWM & SDPC Flagship Program, His Majesty the King granted a Royal Audience to officials from the Department of Livestock, De-suung (Guardian of Peace) organisation and His Majesty's Secretariat on July 30, 2021. During the audience, His Majesty directed the department to develop a swift and comprehensive plan to manage the free-roaming dog population in a professional, humane, and compassionate manner.

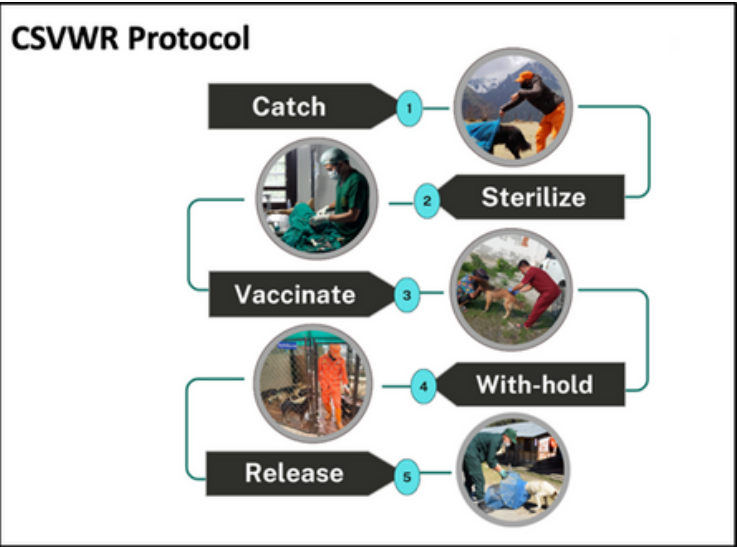
As a result, the Nationwide Accelerated Dog Population Management and Rabies Control Program (NADPM&RCP) was launched. The program was designed with clear, time-bound objectives, increased budgetary support, strong stakeholder and community involvement, and robust policy backing, following a whole-of-nation approach with well-defined exit strategies to ensure long-term success. The key objectives of the program were:

- Achieve 100% sterilisation of free-roaming dogs and ultimately eliminate them from public spaces.
- Promote responsible pet ownership through digital identification and registration of all pet dogs.
- Effectively manage feral dog populations.
- Strengthen rabies control efforts through intensified vaccination campaigns and achieve the global goal of "0 by 30" - zero human deaths from dog-mediated rabies by 2030.
- Conserve the native Chang-Khyi dog breed.

In collaboration with the De-suung Office, the Department of Livestock executed the program in multiple phases - Nationwide Campaign, Mopping, and Combing - successfully covering all 20 Dzongkhags (Districts) and four Thromdes (Municipalities) in less than two years.

Inspired by the Royal Command to professionally, humanely, and compassionately manage the free-roaming dog population, the program implemented the Catch, Sterilise, Vaccinate, Withhold, and Release (CSVWR) Protocol. Notably, the 'withhold' part, unique to Bhutan, was introduced to ensure animal welfare and provide compassionate post-surgery care.





The program was carried out with a total budget of Nu. 295 million (US \$ 3.32 million) and involved 12,812 personnel, including 9,036 De-suups (national volunteers). To meet the human resource requirements for nationwide implementation, the Department initiated an HR capacity-building process through on-the-job training led by national experts. Within just two years, the program achieved significant milestones, including 100 percent nationwide sterilisation coverage of free-roaming dogs and the vaccination of over 90 percent of them.



CATCHING AND TRANSPORTATION OF DOGS



FIELD STERILISATION CLINIC



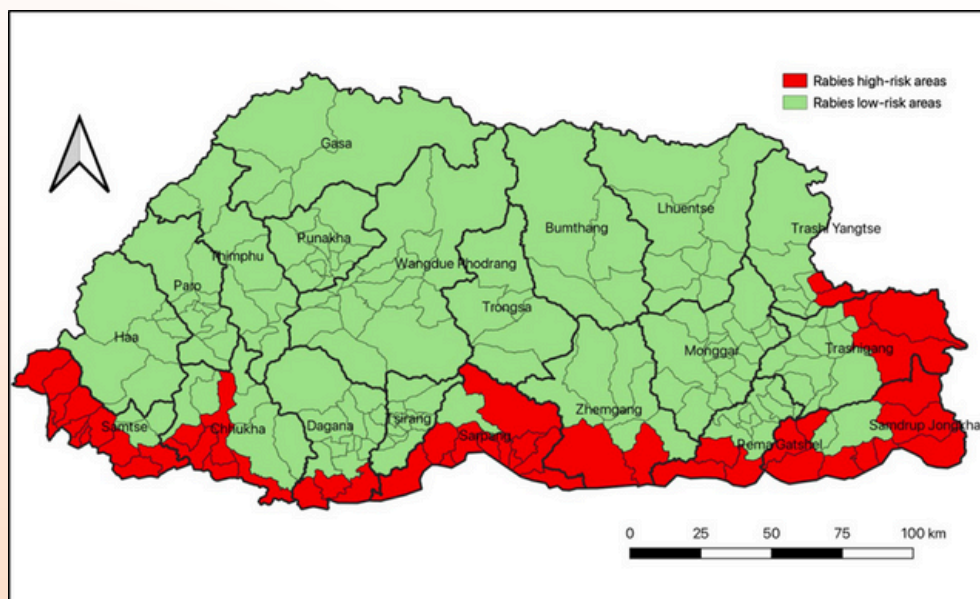
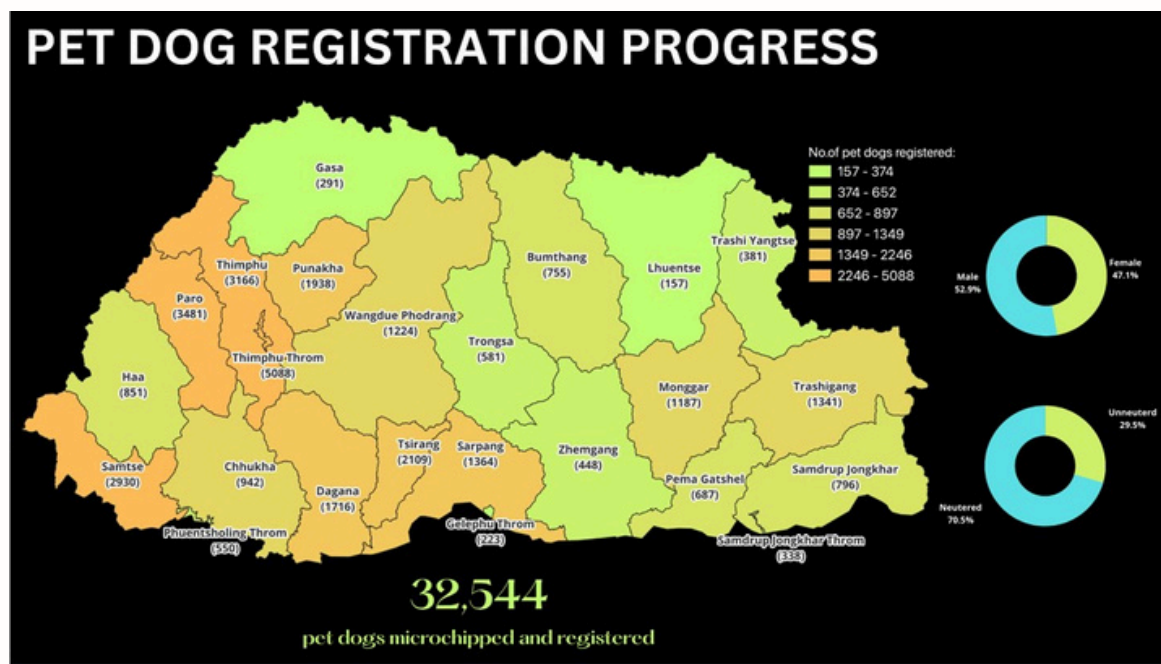
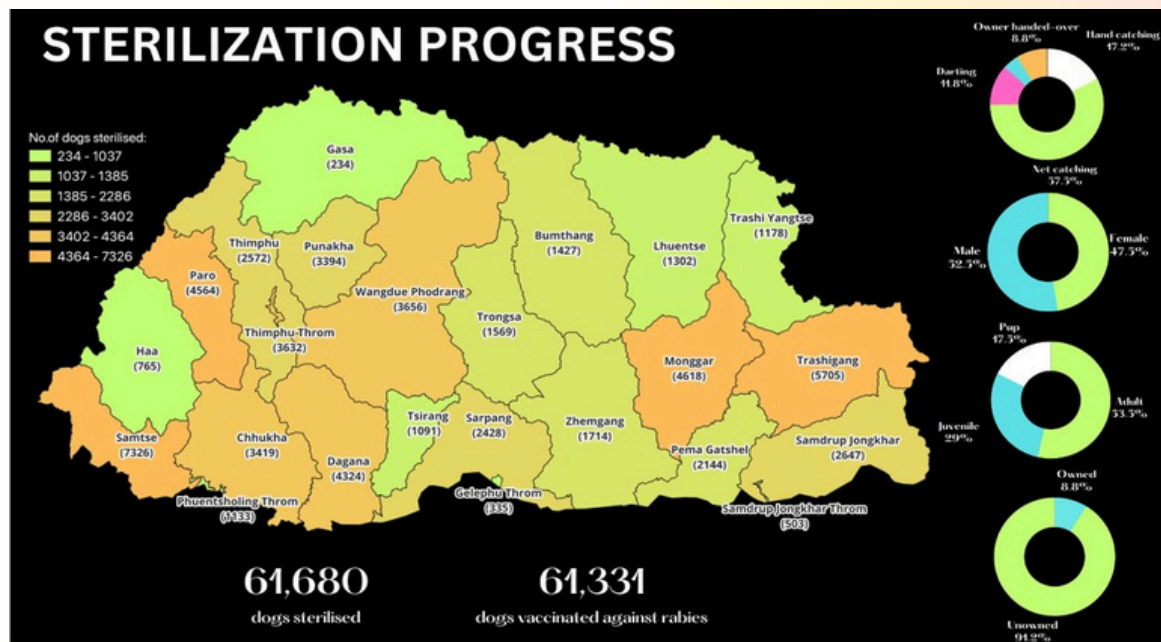
RECOVERY AND WITHHOLDING SHELTER

- The key accomplishments include:
- Sterilisation of 61,680 dogs (91.2% unowned and 8.8% owned).
  - Microchipping and registration of 32,544 pet dogs.
  - Anti-rabies vaccination of 61,331 dogs (91.1% unowned and 8.9% owned).
  - Amendment of Livestock Rules and Regulations, 2022.
  - Construction of the Chang-Khyi Conservation Centre (CCC) for conservation of native breed.



RELEASE AFTER SURGERY





### MASS DOG VACCINATION (MDV) IN RABIES HIGH-RISK AREAS

According to Bhutan's National Rabies Prevention and Control Plan (2017), the country is classified into high and low-risk areas. This categorisation is based on factors such as disease epidemiology, proximity to international borders, and road connectivity. The risk-based classification enables the implementation of tailored strategies, with a greater focus on high-risk areas.

The mass dog vaccination (MDV) program is intensively carried out annually in all designated high-risk areas, aiming to achieve at least 70% vaccination coverage among unowned free-roaming dogs and 100% among owned dogs.

RABIES RISK MAP OF BHUTAN, 2023





To commemorate this historic achievement, a closing ceremony took place on October 27, 2023, in Thimphu, with the Hon'ble Prime Minister and other distinguished guests in attendance. During the event, certificates of recognition were presented to the Dzongkhag (District) and Thromde (Municipality) Administrations. Additionally, a commitment agreement to sustain the accomplishments was signed between the Director of the Department of Livestock and the respective Dzongdas (District Administrators) and Thrompons (Mayors). In the same spirit, program closing ceremonies were also held in Phuentsholing, Bumthang, and Trashigang on October 30, 2023, to cover the remaining regions.

In addition, in recognition of their outstanding partnership, the De-suung organisation was honoured with a certificate of commendation. Likewise, in acknowledgment of their invaluable support, key stakeholders such as the Department of Forests and Park Services, Bhutan Power Corporation, and Animal Welfare Organizations including the Royal Society for Protection and Care of Animals, Jangsa Animal Saving Trust, and Humane Society International were presented with certificates of appreciation.



Born from the visionary initiative of His Majesty the King, the program received exceptional support, steadfast commitment, and collaboration from policymakers, government agencies, private sector entities, local governments, and communities. It was embraced as a national endeavour at every level, reflecting our King's vision of creating a healthier and safer Bhutan for all.

Bhutan has achieved a global feat, becoming the first country to sterilize its entire free-roaming dog population in under two years. This extraordinary achievement marks a significant step towards the nation's goal of becoming free from free-roaming dogs and dog-mediated human rabies. Moving forward, maintaining this success will require ongoing support, dedication, collaboration, and commitment from all stakeholders and citizens to ensure its long-term sustainability.

**Disclaimer:** All photographic and textual content for the article detailing Bhutan's achievement of 100% sterilisation coverage for its free-roaming dog population was supplied by Dr. Kinley Dorji. Dr. Dorji is the WOA National Focal Point for Animal Welfare in Bhutan and holds the position of Veterinary Superintendent at the National Veterinary Hospital in Motithang, Thimphu.



## Overview of animal welfare progress in People's Republic of China (2024)

People's Republic of China has been actively participating in animal welfare progress in various ways. Recently, China has held two important conferences, which have effectively promoted its animal welfare progress.

In September 2024, the 6th China Animal Welfare Science Conference was held in Chongqing. More than 400 animal welfare experts, scholars and practitioners participated. Li Jinxiang, the former chief veterinarian of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, delivered a speech at the conference, emphasizing the importance of animal welfare to the sustainable development of the livestock industry and pointing out that China's wisdom and solutions should be contributed to the global animal welfare cause.



The 6th China Animal Welfare Science Conference

Also, plenty of experts from both domestic and abroad conducted in-depth discussions on the importance, development status and trends of animal welfare from different perspectives and shared advanced experiences and practical cases domestically and abroad. The group standard "Animal-friendly Farm Grade Evaluation" was issued at the conference, which would provide direction and norms for the construction of animal-friendly farms.



The group 'Standard animal-friendly farm grade evaluation' was issued

In October 2024, the 2024 World Conference on Animal Welfare in the Sustainable Agri-Food systems was held in Beijing. More than 500 representatives of international institutions, experts, scholars and entrepreneurs from over 20 countries and regions around the world attended the conference. Yu Kangzhen, Counselor of the State Council, also former Vice Minister of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, Ambassador Marco A. Suazo, Director of the New York Office of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research, and Vinod Ahuja, Acting Representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in China, delivered speeches.

This is the Fifth World Farm Animal Welfare Conference held in China, and Beijing's Pinggu District has also been designated as the permanent point of the World Farm Animal Welfare Conference. At the conference, 19 domestic and foreign institutions issued the "Creating a Sustainable Future - Consensus on Animal Welfare in the Agri-Food systems", proposing that farm animal welfare advocates a scientific, safe, humane and environmentally friendly production mode, which is an important means to achieve the green development of the livestock industry and ensure human food safety. It is an important way to achieve "One Health-One Welfare" for humans, animals and the environment.

The international communities should reach a broad consensus, take concerted actions, strengthen international cooperation and exchanges, and reshape the future of a sustainable, responsible and efficient livestock industry. It is advocated that the particularities of the national conditions of all countries in the world should be respected, and support should be given to all countries to explore farm animal welfare breeding models that meet their own resource conditions and the requirements of the sustainable development of the livestock industry according to the characteristics of their own livestock industry development and consumer demands, so that farm animals can better contribute to human development. International cooperation and exchanges should be strengthened, and relevant departments should be encouraged to develop and apply technologies in improving farm animal welfare to achieve the green development of the livestock industry and jointly reshape the future of a sustainable, responsible and efficient livestock industry.



A Consensus on Animal Welfare in Agri-food Systems



The 2024 World Conference on Animal Welfare in the Sustainable Agri-Food systems

**Disclaimer:** All photographic and textual content for the article detailing overview of animal welfare progress in People's Republic of China (2024) was supplied by Dr. Teng Xiangyan. Dr. Teng is the WOA National Focal Point for Animal Welfare in People's Republic of China and holds the position of Professor, Principal for Research of Animal Health Standard & Policy China Animal Health and Epidemiology Center, MARA, People's Republic of China.





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# Australia

## Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS)

Australia is renewing the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS), which will present a national framework for Australia's system and all animals, while recognising the need for flexibility across jurisdictions and animal groups. The renewed AAWS will build on the successes of the previous strategy, which expired in 2014, with updates reflecting contemporary science and evidence.



## NATIONAL STATEMENT ON ANIMAL WELFARE

The [National Statement on Animal Welfare](#), which was endorsed by all Australian, state and territory Agriculture Ministers and published on 13 December 2024, is an important first step in renewing the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS).

Acknowledging the role of animal welfare practices and standards informed by science and evidence, the nationally agreed statement sets a vision that describes the aspiration for the future of Australia's animal welfare system.

The national statement reflects a joint commitment by all governments to issues of national significance and identifies priority areas of opportunity for animal welfare across Australia, through leadership and coordination, standards and implementation, reporting and compliance, research and development, education and communication, and international engagement.

Four context-setting statements in the national statement identify some important considerations when addressing the priority areas for opportunity for Australia's animal welfare system. These statements acknowledge the interconnectedness of animal welfare with other national priorities and issues of significance, such as climate change and biosecurity, and the importance of partnering with First Nations people to incorporate their teachings and perspectives on protecting and caring for all animals.

The national statement was informed by broad consultation with stakeholders across Australia's animal welfare system, including animal industries, animal handlers, non-government representative organisations, veterinarians, research bodies, First Nations organisations and the government.

In 2025, stakeholder engagement will focus on key stakeholders within Australia's aquatic and livestock and production industries to describe practical actions under the AAWS.

More information about the AAWS is available on the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry website - [Renewal of the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy](#).



**Disclaimer:** All photographic and textual content for the article detailing Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS) was provided by Dr. Emily Orchard-Mills. Dr. Orchard-Mills is the WOA National Focal Point for Animal Welfare in Australia and holds the position of Acting Director at the Farm Animal Welfare Section, of Animal Welfare Branch, Plant and Live Animal Exports, Welfare and Regulation Division in the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF)





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## NEXT ISSUE

Stay tuned as we share with you  
more encouraging updates from  
our Members and Partners!

## INFORMATION

For more information about the  
RAWS, our previous newsletters  
and other WOAH animal welfare  
activities in the Asia-Pacific, please  
visit our regional website: [rr-  
asia.woah.org/en/projects/animal-  
welfare](http://rr-asia.woah.org/en/projects/animal-welfare)

