

# Vetboard Victoria newsletter

## March 2019



### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

In the first issue of Vetboard Victoria's newsletter for 2019, we reflect on ongoing changes at the Board and provide some suggestions about communicating with clients.

In June 2019, the Seventh Veterinary Practitioners Registration Board of Victoria will reach the end of its three-year term.

This newsletter is an opportunity to reflect on improvements and changes at the Board that will no doubt continue when the Eighth Board commences its term this year.

The main project currently underway is a review of the Board's Guidelines, with stakeholder consultation on a draft of the revised guidelines anticipated in the second quarter of 2019.

We are continuing to review Board policies and procedures and update the letters we use to communicate with veterinary practitioners and the public about registration or complaints.

We are also following up on our rebranding and a small update to the Board's website with a general look at our approach to communications. I extend my thanks to the 435 veterinary practitioners (12.5% of registrants!) who completed an online survey on this topic and provided many useful comments and suggestions. Particular thanks to the representative sample of veterinary practitioners and other stakeholders who agreed to be interviewed by an independent communications consultant and offered valuable in-depth insights into how we can better communicate with all our stakeholders. All feedback will help guide continuous improvements to our communications.

As part of an upgrade of our records management software, we plan further changes to our website through 2019. By the end of the year we expect all applicants for registration to be able to register online.

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### President's message continued...

While on the general topic of improving communications, in this issue, in place of the usual case studies, the Board offers some suggestions about good practice when communicating with animal owners.

An item from Greyhound Racing Victoria, the regulator of the Victorian greyhound racing industry, explains the requirements on racing greyhound owners to make specific attempts to prevent the euthanasia of healthy greyhounds and encourage re-homing.

Agriculture Victoria has provided information about an anthrax outbreak in Swan Hill earlier this month, and the threat posed to Australia by recent African Swine Fever outbreaks in China and other countries.

In closing, a special request of all Victorian veterinary practitioners to sign into the VetConsole on the Board's website before May 2019 to ensure their contact details are up to date before the renewal period begins. See the renewal essentials checklist on Page 3 of this newsletter.

Peter Mansell

**President**

**Veterinary Practitioners Registration Board of Victoria**

## ADDRESSING CLIENT EXPECTATIONS WITH GOOD COMMUNICATIONS

Clear communications can help prevent confusion on the part of animal owners; and they can also prevent disputes and notifications to the Board.

Here are a few tips to help you review your advertising, signage, website, social media and patient forms.

### Don't make assumptions.

Owners do not know everything that a veterinary practitioner knows – they do not know industry norms and may not understand technical language; so, if you do not explicitly tell an owner something, they may have no way of knowing about it.

Before you produce publications for owners, ask a layperson to read them – for example, a friend who is not a veterinary practitioner, a trusted client, or even a family member. Get them to tell you what they think you are saying.

The following statements are a few common assumptions the Board has encountered in matters considered by investigation and hearing panels:

#### **Owners know my clinic is not staffed at night.**

Unless you tell them, they will not know. Post a sign in your waiting room, state it on your website, and include it on admission forms for overnight patients.

#### **If I change the diagnosis, owners know the treatment will change.**

Owners are likely to assume the treatment remains the same unless you tell them otherwise. When you explain a new diagnosis, explain the new treatment plan and offer other options that are available.

#### **Owners know they can go to an emergency clinic or get a second opinion.**

Some owners certainly know about specialist and emergency clinics, but many may not. If the patient is at risk or you cannot make a diagnosis, explain the other services that are available. If other options are likely to be more expensive, tell the owner and allow them to choose.

#### **Owners know that we only operate during set hours and that some services are only available at specified times.**

Like you, owners have to schedule their time. Specifying when various services are available will help them to make appropriate choices and avoid frustration. For example, if ultrasound is only available

at certain times or by appointment, make this clear in all your written and verbal communications.

#### **Owners know that patients are triaged.**

Most owners think *their* animal is your first priority. Help them to understand that an animal that is at greater risk than theirs must be seen first, particularly in emergency settings. If the situation changes, inform the owner. For example, if an owner has been told their pet will be operated on at 10am but a more urgent case has presented in the interim, ask reception to inform the owner.

#### **Be clear and consistent**

Ensure all your communications are clear and consistent. For example, if you change your hours, ensure that they are updated everywhere – on your website, at the clinic and in all advertising and social media. If you have an on-call vet but the clinic is not staffed 24 hours, be clear what you are offering.

If a consent form or website says you will contact the owner before providing any treatment that is not on the consent form, that is what they will expect. If there are routine interventions for which you would not seek additional consent, say so. You do not have to list every possible intervention, but you do need to say that you will not contact them about interventions you consider routine. Offer them the opportunity to discuss this with you.

#### **Key principles**

Many communications are not covered in this article, but the following few key principles should underpin all communication:

- Don't make assumptions.
- Be clear and consistent.
- Use every day English.
- Ensure that options are presented and understood.

Additional care may be required for clients with communication difficulties or who are not fluent in English.

If this seems daunting, consider engaging a professional writer. It is an expense, but it may be cheaper than you dedicating your valuable time.

As a minimum, ensure that a layperson reads everything you publish for owners.



## AVBC COMMUNICATIONS SURVEY

Veterinary practitioners may remember the article in the September 2018 newsletter on the work of the Australasian Veterinary Boards Council (AVBC).

The AVBC's functions include to

- assure educational standards in the accreditation of veterinary schools,
- administer the National Veterinary Examination, and
- assess the accreditation of applicants for specialist endorsement.

The AVBC also conducts skills assessments for registered veterinary practitioners applying for Australian visas.

As Vetboard Victoria did recently, the AVBC is seeking feedback from Victorian veterinary practitioners on the effectiveness of its communication strategies via an online survey.

While all are welcome to complete the survey, we particularly encourage veterinary practitioners who have had contact with the AVBC to do so, e.g. applicants for specialist endorsement, NVE graduates, or registrants who had a skills assessment for an Australian visa.

To complete the AVBC's anonymous survey, go to: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/AVBC2019>

## GREYHOUND RACING VICTORIA EUTHANASIA RACING RULE LRR 42.6

This article has been produced by Greyhound Racing Victoria (GRV) for the information of veterinary practitioners. Comments or enquiries from practitioners should be directed to Dr Gavin Goble, Greyhound Welfare and Re-homing at [ggoble@grv.org.au](mailto:ggoble@grv.org.au).

Greyhound Racing Victoria is the regulator of the greyhound racing industry in Victoria.

Since early 2015, GRV has driven industry reform to prevent the euthanasia of healthy greyhounds and encourage re-homing activities. As a key element of the reform, in June 2016 Greyhound Racing Victoria introduced new **Local Racing Rule (LRR) 42.6**. This rule, which was updated in October 2017, sets out specific requirements on owners of racing greyhounds in relation to preventing the euthanasia of healthy greyhounds and encouraging re-homing.

The onus to comply with this rule is on the registered owner of the racing greyhound.

However, it is important that veterinarians understand or at least are aware of the existence of the rule when advising greyhound clients. **NOTE the rule does not apply to retired racing greyhounds that are living in the community as pets.**

**In summary, GRV Local Racing Rule 42.6 says:**

1. Owners must give their greyhound a minimum of 28 days wind-down from racing related activities before making a decision to euthanase, and

2. Owners must undertake specific re-homing attempts to avoid euthanasia of their greyhound, including attending a Greyhound Adoption Program (GAP) behavioural assessment, and contacting a third-party re-homing group and at least two other appropriate people, and
3. Owners must submit a Notice of Intention (NoI) to Euthanase their greyhound at least 14 days prior to euthanasia.

Failure to comply with LRR 42.6 is a **Serious Offence**, which means an owner who does not comply can be prosecuted through the Racing Appeals and Disciplinary Board (RADB).

The first GRV prosecution for a breach of LRR 42.6 resulted in a 2-year suspension of that person, with 18 months suspended for 2 years pending no further breaches.

### Exemptions that may apply

Three types of exemptions to the requirements of LRR 42.6 may apply where a greyhound owner is seeking to euthanase their greyhound:

1. **Medical:** if the greyhound is seriously injured or seriously ill, the three steps listed above are not required, and euthanasia may occur immediately on humane grounds. However, to support the application of this exemption, the owner must obtain veterinary certification that the greyhound is 'suffering from an incurable condition or injury that causes significant pain

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or discomfort, or a marked reduction in quality of life', and provide this certification to GRV. The GRV Euthanasia Certificate contains the required certification.

- 2 **Behavioural:** if the greyhound is behaviourally unsuitable to be re-homed, the owner may be exempt from the re-homing requirements if the owner obtains veterinary certification (GRV Re-homing Unsuitability Certificate) that the greyhound is "displaying significant behavioural characteristics that negatively impact on its suitability as a pet, including aggression towards humans or other animals".

The owner must still complete the 28-day wind-down period and submit an NoI (with the certificate) at least 14 days before euthanasia.

Certification of behavioural unsuitability for re-homing is at the veterinary practitioner's discretion based on available evidence, and practitioners should not certify a behavioural issue if they do not have enough evidence to support that determination.

A GRV Euthanasia Certificate is also required if euthanasia is performed.

- 3 **Legal:** if the greyhound is required by a court order to be euthanased, the three steps listed above do not apply, and euthanasia may occur immediately.

The owner must provide GRV with the GRV Euthanasia Certificate and the legal documentation that evidences this exemption.

The decision to euthanase a greyhound ultimately rests with its registered owner (or their delegated representative such as the trainer):

1. It is the owner's responsibility to comply with the rule.
2. The rule applies to all Victorian-based owners, regardless of where the greyhound is located.
3. The Notice of Intention is a mechanism for the owner to notify GRV of their intent to euthanase; GRV never grants "approval" to euthanase a greyhound.

Greyhound Racing Victoria does not expect veterinarians to enforce this rule, but GRV would request that, where possible, veterinarians make owners aware that they have obligations under this rule and that they can contact GRV for more information. GRV also requests that veterinarians advise GRV of any greyhound death or euthanasia at their clinic by providing an appropriate euthanasia or death certificate (emailed to [retirements@grv.org.au](mailto:retirements@grv.org.au)).

In all cases, the racing rules require GRV-registered participants who own greyhounds to provide these certificates to Greyhound Racing Victoria within two days of the greyhound's death.

**Client questions about LRR 42.6:** Greyhound Racing Victoria's Retirements Officer, (03) 8329 1108 or [retirements@grv.org.au](mailto:retirements@grv.org.au)

**Queries about this article:** Dr Gavin Goble, Greyhound Welfare and Re-homing at [ggoble@grv.org.au](mailto:ggoble@grv.org.au) or 0429 553 411

**Download GRV Euthanasia Certificates:** [www.greyhoundcare.grv.org.au/new-local-rule-42-6/](http://www.greyhoundcare.grv.org.au/new-local-rule-42-6/)

## AFRICAN SWINE FEVER ON THE MOVE

### From Agriculture Victoria

African Swine Fever (ASF) is a severe viral disease affecting domestic and wild pigs. This transboundary animal disease can be spread by live or dead pigs and contaminated pork products. The virus can survive for months in raw and frozen pig meat as well as some processed pig meats, and if ingested these products can spread disease to other pigs. Signs in pigs include fever, loss of appetite, shivering, breathing abnormally, and sometimes coughing. There is no treatment for ASF-infected

animals and currently no commercially available vaccines.

### African Swine Fever outbreaks

China is the world's largest pork producer and was ASF-free until the first case was reported in August 2018 in the north-eastern province of Liaoning. The disease spread throughout northern and central China, and by the end of October 2018 there were 45 herds confirmed with ASF in China. China has taken measures to control the situation by culling

## AFRICAN SWINE FEVER CONT...

over 600,000 pigs (to end 2018), banning the feeding of kitchen scraps to pigs, stopping transportation of live pigs from affected areas, and quarantining affected farms.

The majority of ASF outbreaks that have occurred in previously ASF-free countries, including China, Western Europe (Belgium), Mongolia and Vietnam, have been traced to feeding contaminated waste to domesticated or wild pigs.

### Tourism and border surveillance

Tourists at Taiwan's Kaohsiung International Airport discarded pork sausages in November 2018 which were found to have been contaminated with the ASF virus. South Korea, Japan, and Thailand have reported similar detections recently, with ASF-contaminated sausages and other pork products transported illegally from China by travellers in their luggage.

The Australian Department of Agriculture and Water Resources has increased border surveillance activities, including testing pork products surrendered by international travellers and sent into mail processing centres.

Of 152 pork products tested in late 2018, 6 were found to be contaminated with ASF virus.

### Keeping Australia free of African Swine Fever

Australia is currently free from diseases such as Foot and Mouth Disease and Classical and African Swine Fevers.

To protect this status, swill feeding in Australia is illegal, and pig products, such as pork jerky/biltong, sausages and un-canned meats (including vacuum sealed items), may not be imported because they pose a high biosecurity risk.

An outbreak of African Swine Fever in the Australian domestic pig population would have significant impacts on pig production and health and our export markets. Costs associated with controlling an incident, including slaughter, disinfection and movement controls, would also be substantial.

#### More information on African Swine Fever:

<http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/pests-diseases-and-weeds/animal-diseases/pigs/african-swine-fever>

## ANTHRAX DETECTED NEAR SWAN HILL

### From Agriculture Victoria

Anthrax was confirmed as the cause of sudden death of 4 sheep on a single property in the Swan Hill area in early March 2019. The farm has a history of anthrax, and stock on the property had previously been vaccinated.

Agriculture Victoria's response to this isolated anthrax incident included:

- imposing quarantine on the affected property and other at-risk properties
- carcass disposal and site disinfection
- vaccination of at-risk livestock and tracing of livestock.

Electronic identification of sheep enabled rapid forward tracing of sheep movements, allowing tracing of sheep that had been sold in the weeks before the deaths occurred.

Agriculture Victoria is undertaking further investigations to better understand the epidemiology of this incident.

### About anthrax

Anthrax is caused by a naturally occurring bacteria, *Bacillus anthracis*, that is known to be able to survive for extended periods in soil.

Anthrax detections in livestock occur in Victoria from time to time, typically in northern parts of the state. Although anthrax commonly occurs during drier warmer months when grazing cattle and sheep forage deeper into the soil, historically cases have been reported in Victoria at all times of the year.

### Detection and reporting of anthrax

This isolated incident was detected as part of ongoing surveillance for anthrax and other livestock diseases.

Veterinary practitioners investigating cases of unexplained livestock deaths in any part of Victoria should consider anthrax as a differential diagnosis, and immediately notify either local Agriculture Victoria animal health staff or call 1800 675 888, the 24-hour **Emergency Animal Disease Watch Hotline**.

Some veterinary practices have access to hand-held immunochromatographic test (ICT) kits, supplied by Agriculture Victoria, that provide results within minutes.

### Risk to public

Anthrax is of low risk to the general public because it does not spread rapidly and is not contagious. Any risk is confined to people who handle dead livestock, such as veterinary practitioners, farmers and knackery workers.

**Reporting:** Veterinary practitioners and other people exposed or potentially exposed to anthrax should refer to the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services Communicable Disease Hotline on 1300 651 160.

**More information on anthrax:** contact your local Agriculture Victoria animal health staff, call the Agriculture Victoria Customer Service Centre on 136 186 or see

<http://agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/pests-diseases-and-weeds/animal-diseases/general-livestock-diseases/anthrax-in-animals>

## AGRICULTURE VICTORIA CONTACTS AND INFORMATION

### Disease Watch Hotline

Call 1800 675 888 immediately if you suspect an emergency animal disease. This hotline is staffed by veterinary practitioners 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

### Talk to local animal health staff

Call 136 186 to be put in touch with Agriculture Victoria District Veterinary Officers and Animal Health Officers located throughout Victoria.

### Antimicrobial resistance and stewardship

[www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/amr](http://www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/amr) - includes scientific background, refresher videos, and prescribing guidelines

### General information and contacts

- [www.agriculture.vic.gov.au](http://www.agriculture.vic.gov.au)
- Email legislation or policy queries or feedback to [animal.biosecurity@ecodev.vic.gov.au](mailto:animal.biosecurity@ecodev.vic.gov.au)
- Customer service line 136 186