

**PRESIDENT'S REPORT ON ACTIVITIES  
2022**

In July last year I was appointed by the Minister for Agriculture to my third term on the Board. Drs Georgina Child and Magdoline Awad and community representative Lisa Minogue were also re-appointed, and we were joined by Drs Peter Alexander, Paul McGreevy and Kate Mills as well as community representative Sarah Hunter.

The first meeting of this new board occurred in August 2021 over Zoom, as we were still in COVID-19 lockdown. I am in awe of how quickly the new board members grasped hold of the complex business of the Board and have bought a renewed focus on animal welfare to our discussions.

In unprecedented times, grappling with a global pandemic the Board is truly blessed to have a registrar of the caliber of Dr John Baguley to support us and manage the small, highly skilled and dedicated team in the Board office to achieve our objectives.

The object of the *Veterinary Practice Act 2003* is to regulate the provision of veterinary services to promote animal welfare, to ensure consumers of veterinary services are well informed as to the competencies required of veterinary practitioners, to ensure acceptable standards are met by veterinary practitioners and to provide public health protection. The Board sets out to meet these objectives through its activities based around registration and licensing, complaints investigations and hospital inspections.

COVID-19 has led to significant challenges and changes for the veterinary profession. The increased demand for services has exacerbated workforce shortages heightening the stress many veterinarians work under. The health and wellbeing of veterinarians is a primary concern for the Board. We have a well-developed Health Program to help and support veterinarians stay involved and working in their profession under the guidance of medical professionals when needed.

Dr Mark Simpson, in his capacity as immediate past chair continues to represent the Board at AVBC. The sustainable practice committee (SPC) is working with all Australasian Boards on issues including CPD, complaints management and registration of paraprofessionals to help guide best practice. The Australasian Veterinary Exam (AVE) has ramped up the number of places available for the final clinical exam and the Board has a system in place to allow limited registration of candidates who have passed the initial MCQ exam to grow the workforce.

The number of registered veterinarians in NSW continues to grow though we acknowledge the challenges with workforce retention and attrition. We acknowledge that stress related to the Board's complaint process is of great concern. In partnership with UNE the Board has funded a PhD scholarship to research the epidemiology of complaints against veterinarians to better understand the reasons why complaints are made and continue to refine our complaints process. We continue to bring more resources to this important work.

Communication with our members is a cornerstone to be Board meeting its objectives. The revamped *Boardtalk* remains our primary communication tool and statistics show that the complaints report remains the first section read. Our aim as a Board is to educate and assist practitioners to meet their legislated responsibilities with the primary focus on ensuring animal welfare and gaining professional satisfaction from their work.

COVID-19 lockdowns followed by devastating flooding have severely limited our hospital inspection program over the last 12 months, but it has ramped up again recently. Feedback from the Inspector has been very encouraging. John Rota's role as Inspector is seen by the Board to be primarily educational and as a liaison between hospitals and the Board and to improve communication with the profession. I encourage hospitals to use the Inspector as a tool to ensure they are meeting appropriate standards. He is unlikely to be checking your surgery light for dust.

The successful implementation of the Board's finance strategy has enabled it to ensure sufficient funds are available to defend the reputation of the profession; invest in a PhD scholarship to provide the profession, the public and the Board with a greater understanding of the epidemiology of complaints; and progress a substantial upgrade to our database and website that will streamline the registration and licensing processes, enhance the user experience and facilitate the collection of data which will be used to guide the Board into the future.

The Board's financial results for 2021-22 were impacted by underperforming investment returns however the Board retains a solid financial position which allows it to invest as required to meet its legislated function. The guidance of the finance subcommittee is very much appreciated.

I would like to personally thank the Board for the faith, encouragement and support they have shown me this year taking on this role. I am incredibly proud of the way this Board has diligently applied our diverse expertise and experiences to the challenges we have faced, and the dedication Board members have shown. The work of the Board is done through the office ably led by John Baguley. The Board is eternally grateful for the hard work, dedication, and commitment of the whole team.

Steve Ferguson



Dr Steven Ferguson NSW V6464  
**President**