Animal welfare: a complex international public policy issue: economic, policy, societal, cultural and other drivers and constraints. A 20-year international perspective
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Abstract
The World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) policy definition that “animal welfare is a complex international public policy issue with scientific, ethical, economic, cultural and religious dimensions, plus important trade policy considerations” clearly demonstrates the multi-faceted nature of animal welfare. Progress made is inevitably incremental and compromises often have to be reached between animal welfare and other important societal values. Recognition of the need for managed change over agreed time-frames, and involving full consultation with affected animal user groups, is essential. This paper draws on case studies involving intensive livestock agriculture, live animal exports for slaughter, religious slaughter and vertebrate pest control in both New Zealand’s domestic experience, gained over the last 20 years, and international (OIE) experience, gained over the last ten years. Case studies will also highlight policy considerations relating to animal health, food safety and the impact on the environment. Important drivers of animal welfare change will be discussed, as will the constraints to making changes. The paper will conclude by commenting on the direction, and rate, of animal welfare change and the impact of animal welfare being addressed, not only at the national and regional level, but now also at the international level.

Keywords: animal welfare, constraints, drivers, international, New Zealand, public policy

Introduction
The title of the book, A Cool Eye Towards Eden (Webster 1995) communicates the notion of measured and pragmatic progress towards a desired future animal welfare state. In the subsequent book, Limping Towards Eden (Webster 2005), the inference is that progress is less than optimum and that a utopic animal welfare state is unlikely to be an achievable goal. Strategies for improving animal welfare have been broadly classified by Mellor and Stafford (1999) into two approaches: the ‘gold standard’ approach (where this represents the ideal that is to be attained in a particular situation) or the ‘incremental improvement’ approach (where a series of smaller goals are set and achieved in a step-wise fashion towards the same ideal); and the authors discuss the advantages of adopting the latter approach. Bayvel and Cross (2010), in turn, view animal welfare improvement as an incremental change management issue, and challenge, with improvement being very much a ‘journey’ rather than a short to medium term ‘destination’ per se.

The need for improvement in animal welfare policies and practice continues to attract ever-increasing public, political, professional and media attention at both a national and international level. However, animal welfare non-governmental organisations and organisations representing animal user groups often have quite different perceptions on the need for change to current practice. Moreover, even when there is agreement that change is needed, there is often disagreement on an acceptable time-frame for such change. In such an operating environment, questions such as ‘Where are we heading?’, ‘Are we going fast enough?’ and ‘Have we adequately addressed all implications of the proposed change?’ are inevitable. Over the last two decades or so there has, however, been a growing acceptance that the question has become one of ‘when, how and over what time-frame’ will change take place rather than one of ‘if’ such change is required or economically feasible.

At national, regional and international levels there is also a trend towards increased dialogue between the various stakeholder groups and interests. At an international level, initiatives such as the proposed Universal Declaration on Animal Welfare and the involvement of organisations such as the OIE, the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the Council of Europe, the International Organisation for Standardisation, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the International Finance Corporation is strategically significant. As an inter-governmental organisa-