

Avoid putting vet on the spot

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DOES the farmer put the vet in an animal welfare conflict? Sometimes, yes.

Given New Zealand's economic dependence on agriculture, and the growing attention to animal welfare here and overseas, it is unsurprising there has been concurrent development of animal-welfare law.

Although education brings about change in some farmers' thinking, sadly some require enforcement through the courts. Lawyers and organisations like MAF Enforcement are necessary to ensure the interests of the many are not compromised by the unlawful actions of the few.

Vets are generally viewed as goodhearted people who genuinely care about the welfare of the animals and attend to the interests of the animal's owners. Vets' sense of moral responsibility is reflected in the existing ethical and legal duties applying to them.

Increasing attention to animal welfare affects vets and farmers, particularly those

struggling to prioritise or balance animal welfare with business interests, or attitudes based on outdated farm practices.

Here's a real-life scenario. A vet makes a routine call to a farm and in the course of duties also notices a pile



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of testicles, while in a nearby paddock with blood running down their hind legs is a mob of recently converted steers. What is the vet to do?

Potentially there is conflict. On one hand the vet is obliged to ensure any surgery is done by a properly authorised person, in a proper way including pain management. On the other hand there are business interests the vet is unlikely to wish risking by offending an established client.

Consider develt-

ting. The vet carries out the annual surgery on the sire stag for a client deer farmer, something done for the past 10 years. The vet knows the client is not approved to remove velvet from his animals yet has never enquired who does it. If it's not the usual attending vet or approved person,

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probably the farmer has develtvetted the spikers; again, potential conflict.

In many instances the vet may be able to tactfully point out what needs to be changed to ensure everyone fulfills their legal animal welfare obligations. Some vets will automatically contact the authorities if in doubt, but the days are numbered when a vet may turn a well-intentioned blind eye.

Not only are vets under increasing legal scrutiny; drag-net initiatives such as those implemented by MAF in respect of deer develtvetting practices increase the likelihood

of detection of non-compliance by vet and farmer.

It is debatable whether every non-complying individual will be identified, but no farmer wants to come under investigation. Common sense indicates it is less trouble to obtain accreditation and do things properly than to face the stress, time and financial costs of criminal charges, lawyers and court proceedings.

Like most people in business, vets also face dilemmas in prioritising loyalties and interests. Failure to appropriately prioritise animal welfare carries an increasing risk of detection and penalty. So wisdom and a simple sense of fair play dictate the farmer avoids putting their well-intentioned vet in a situation of conflict and at risk of legal accountability.

Minimising the conflicts will safeguard the well-being of vet, animal and farmer.

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