

Australian Animal Welfare Survey 2023 Summary Report

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Key points

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Australian Animal Welfare Survey aimed to understand Australians' beliefs and behaviours related to animal welfare, providing insights for policy change and effective advocacy strategies.

The survey methodology involved prioritising research questions, developing an online survey, recruiting 1,000 representative Australians to complete the survey, disseminating findings, and sharing materials and data for further research and adaptation.

FINDINGS

9 in 10 Australians agree that animal welfare should be protected by the government through legislation.

Australians believe an independent and impartial authority should have the final say on animal welfare policy decisions.

Australians trust animal welfare groups, researchers, and practitioners and think these groups should have more say in policy decisions.

Australians believe that policy decisions should prioritise impacts on animals, incorporate scientific evidence, and consider animal sentience.

Most companion and farmed animals are viewed as sentient by Australians.

A majority of Australians have advocated for animals in the past, primarily driven by personal values. Barriers to advocacy include a lack of resources and time, and uncertainty about how to advocate.

Contents

WHY THIS PROJECT

- About BehaviourWorks Australia
- Beliefs and behaviours for animal welfare in Australia

HOW WE DID IT

- Prioritising research questions
- Representative online survey of Australians
- Sharing materials and data for replication & adaptation

WHAT WE FOUND

- The role of government in protecting animal welfare
- Independence and impartiality in animal welfare policy
- Groups that should have more (or less) say in policy
- Views about which animals are sentient
- Animal advocacy behaviours, drivers, and barriers

WHAT TO DO

- What the evidence implies for behaviour change



WHY we investigated Australians' animal welfare beliefs and behaviours





The Alliance for Animals seeks to improve decisions made about animal welfare in Australia

The Australian Alliance for Animals is a national charity that convenes animal protection organisations in Australia with the goal of creating systemic change for animals.

The Alliance commissioned BehaviourWorks Australia to understand Australian public beliefs, expectations, and behaviours regarding systemic change for animals.





**BehaviourWorks
Australia conducts
applied research to
understand and
influence behaviour
for good**

BehaviourWorks Australia is a behaviour change research enterprise at the Monash Sustainable Development Institute, Monash University.

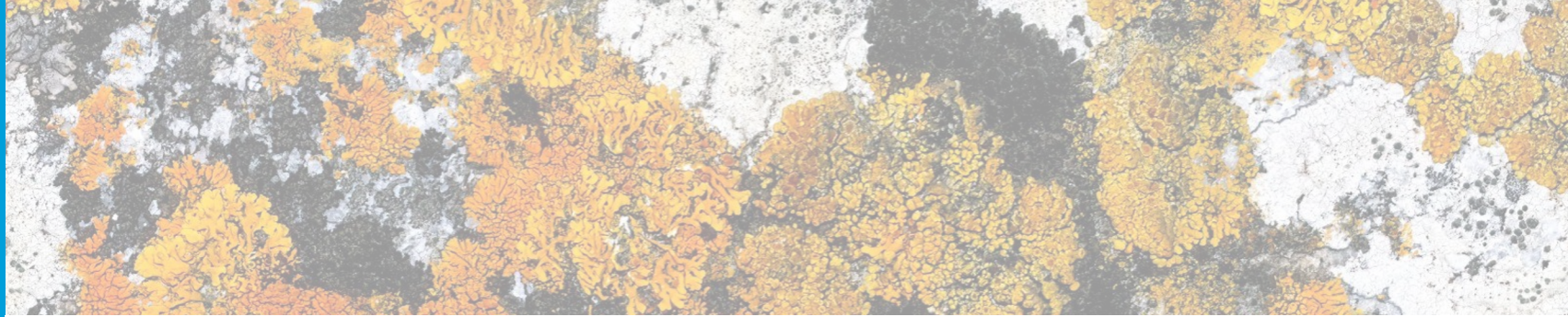
Our research and experience combine to inform the question of what behaviour change tools work best, for who, and in what circumstances.

When it comes to animal welfare in Australia, we need to understand how Australians think, feel, and act for individual and systemic change in order to advance better outcomes for animals.





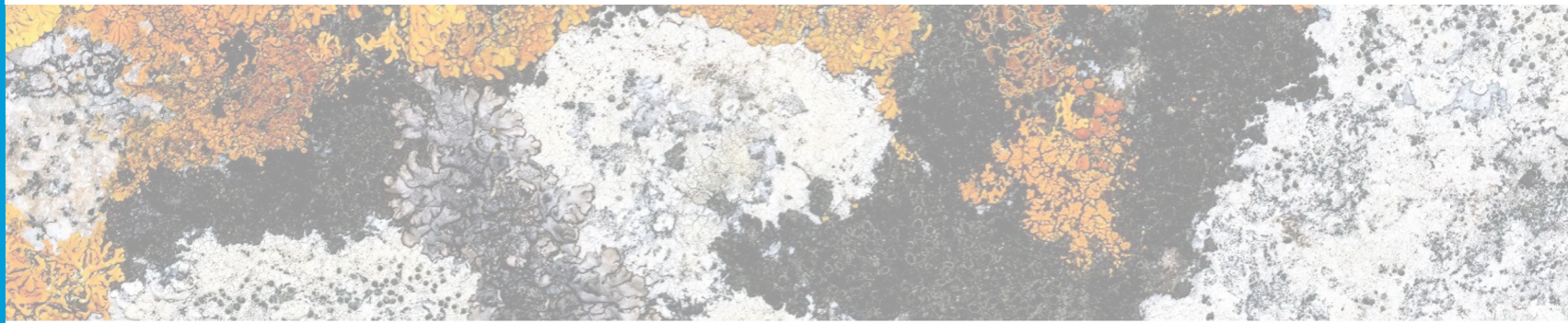
Understanding and changing human behaviour is key to advancing animal welfare in Australia



Policy decision-makers can influence animal welfare through their behaviours (e.g., changing the standards or processes for how animals must be treated or protected in their jurisdictions).

Groups in the animal welfare ecosystem can influence animal welfare through their behaviours (e.g., changing how policy is made or enforced).

Australians can influence animal welfare through their personal behaviours (e.g., caring for animals, purchasing animal products), advocacy (e.g., donating money, writing letters to politicians), and voting (e.g., choosing a candidate to vote for based on their animal welfare policy)



HOW we identified and measured beliefs and behaviours for animal welfare in Australia



We prioritised the most important Australian animal welfare policy research questions

We identified a long list of 31 research questions relevant to Australian animal welfare governance, policy, & behaviour change

We prioritised the four most important research questions in a workshop and used them to design an online survey

Prioritised research questions

Which groups should be involved / have the final say in decisions about animal welfare policy?

What role should Government play in animal welfare policy?

What factors (e.g., economic impacts, animal sentience) should be considered in animal welfare policy?

How and why do Australians advocate for animals?


We developed an online survey to measure beliefs and behaviours for animal welfare

We conducted an evidence scan of existing research work on animal welfare, including work in Australia, to identify survey items and questions.


We developed an online Qualtrics survey that was administered to a sample of ~1000 Australian adults, representative by age, gender, state / territory, and location (metro vs. regional)

We intended for the survey to be replicable in the future, to track beliefs and behaviours over time. We also planned for the survey materials and data to be open access so that other researchers and groups working in animal welfare can adapt and extend the survey work.





We are sharing the results to help accelerate change now, and materials & data to help support ongoing change in the future



Key results from the survey are presented in this report

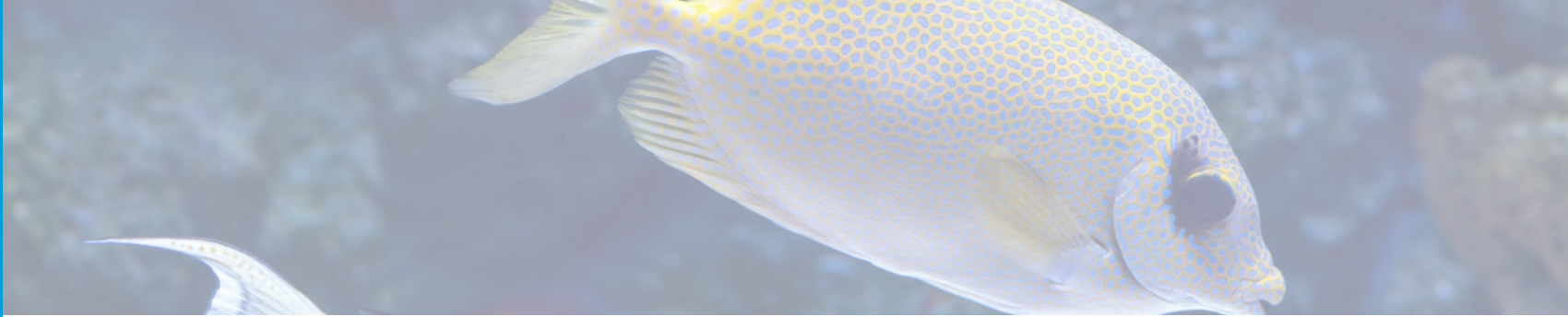
Survey materials, anonymised survey data, data documentation, and a detailed technical report are available through the Open Science Framework, a platform that supports open sharing and collaboration in science research:

Access the project page: osf.io/bf64u/

WHAT we found out about Australians' animal welfare beliefs and behaviours



**Many animals were
judged to be
sentient, and
entitled to provision
of good animal
welfare**



We asked Australians **which animals were viewed as sentient**, (able to experience positive and negative feelings such as pain, fear, pleasure, or joy).

Most animals, including companion animals, farmed animals, and other animals were viewed as sentient.

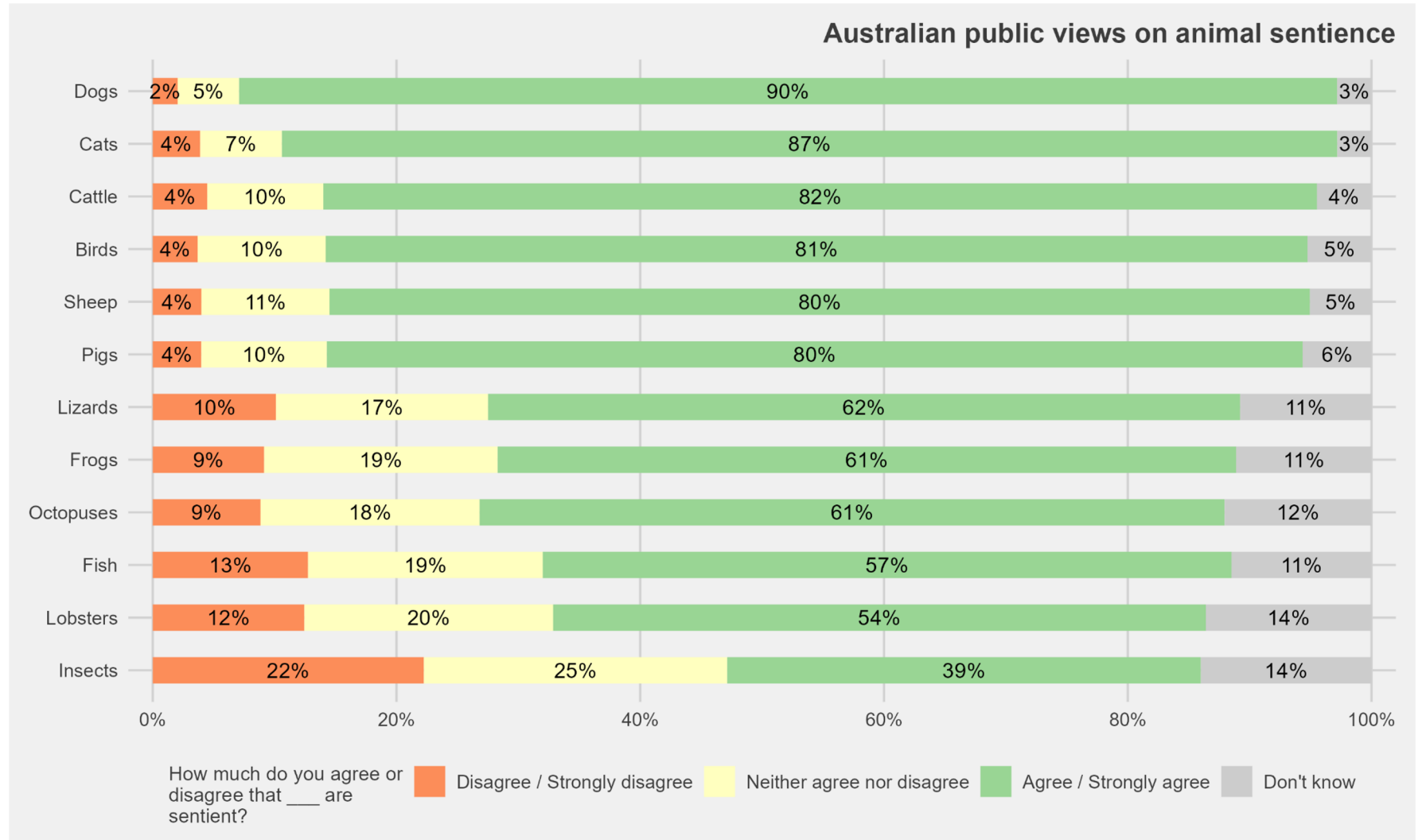
The majority of Australians agreed that the law should ensure that sentient animals are provided with good animal welfare.



Many animals are viewed as sentient

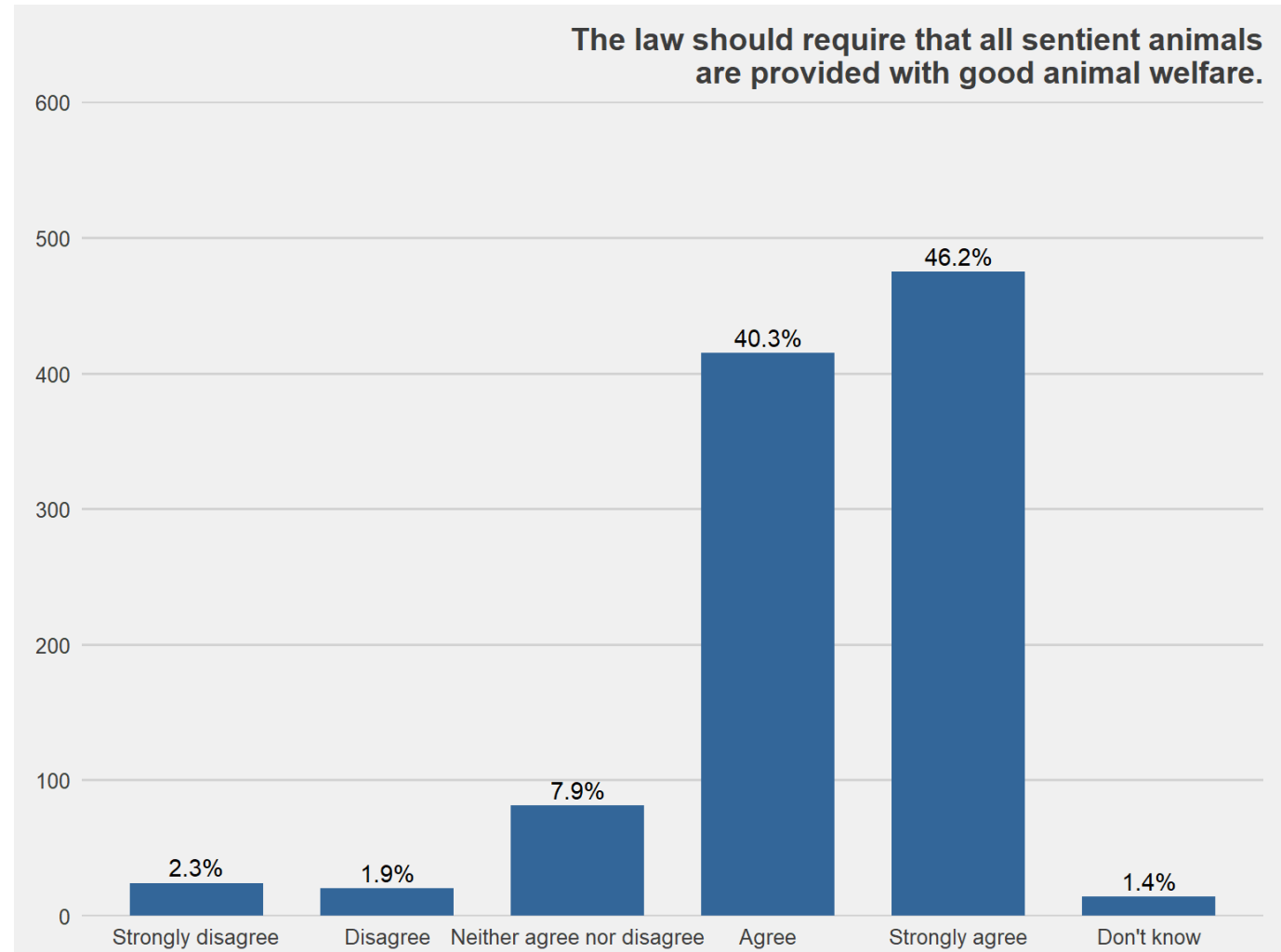
The majority of Australians (8 out of 10 or more) **viewed common mammals and birds as sentient**, including both companion (e.g., cats, dogs) and wild / farmed (e.g., birds, pigs) animals.

Surprisingly, more than half of Australians also viewed other kinds of animals as sentient, with the exception of insects. Australians were also more uncertain ("don't know") about the sentience of these kinds of animals.



Consideration of sentience in law

Almost 9 in 10 Australians (86%) also affirmed that **the law should require all sentient animals are provided with good animal welfare.**



Australians think the Government should protect animal welfare through legislation, and that community expectations aren't being met



We asked Australians about the role that Government should play in animal welfare, policy regulation, and enforcement.

Almost 9 in 10 of Australians agreed that animal welfare should be protected by the government through legislation.

We asked whether Government was seen as sharing community concerns about animal welfare.

4 in 10 of Australians agreed that the Australian federal government shared the concerns of the community about the welfare of animals.

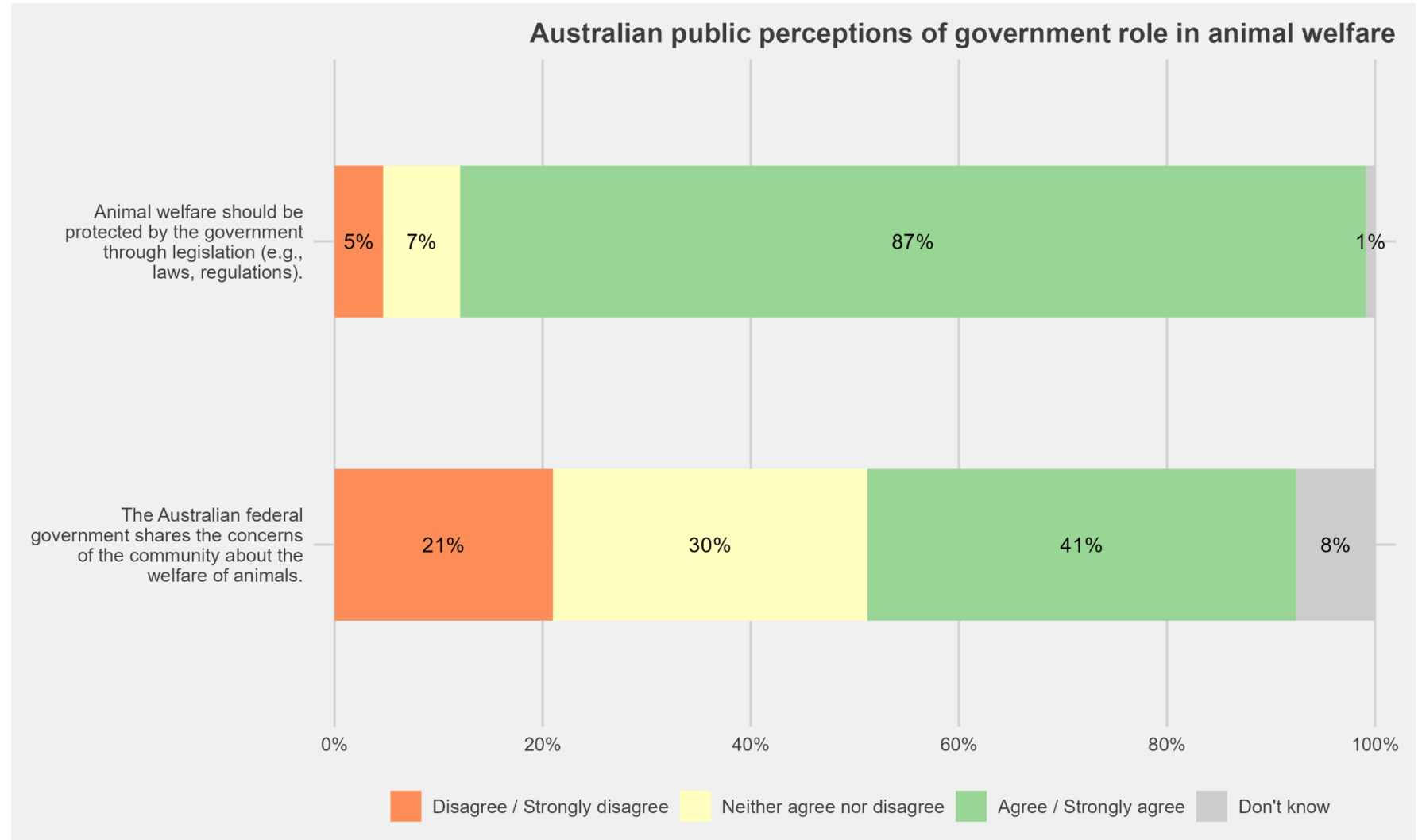


The Government should protect animal welfare

Nearly all Australians agreed that animal welfare should be protected by the government through legislation.

Less than half of Australians thought that the Australian federal government shared the concerns of the community about the welfare of animals.

These findings suggest that Government is not meeting the expectations of Australians when it comes to its role in protecting animal welfare.





Australians think an independent and impartial authority should have the final say on policy decisions that affect animals

We asked Australians about what authority should have the final decision-making power on policy decisions that affect animal welfare.

7 in 10 of Australians preferred that *an independent government agency focused on animal welfare policy* should have final say, compared to 2 in 10 preferring *government bodies responsible for agriculture policy*.

8 in 10 of Australians agreed that the authority that makes final decisions on animal welfare policy should be independent and impartial

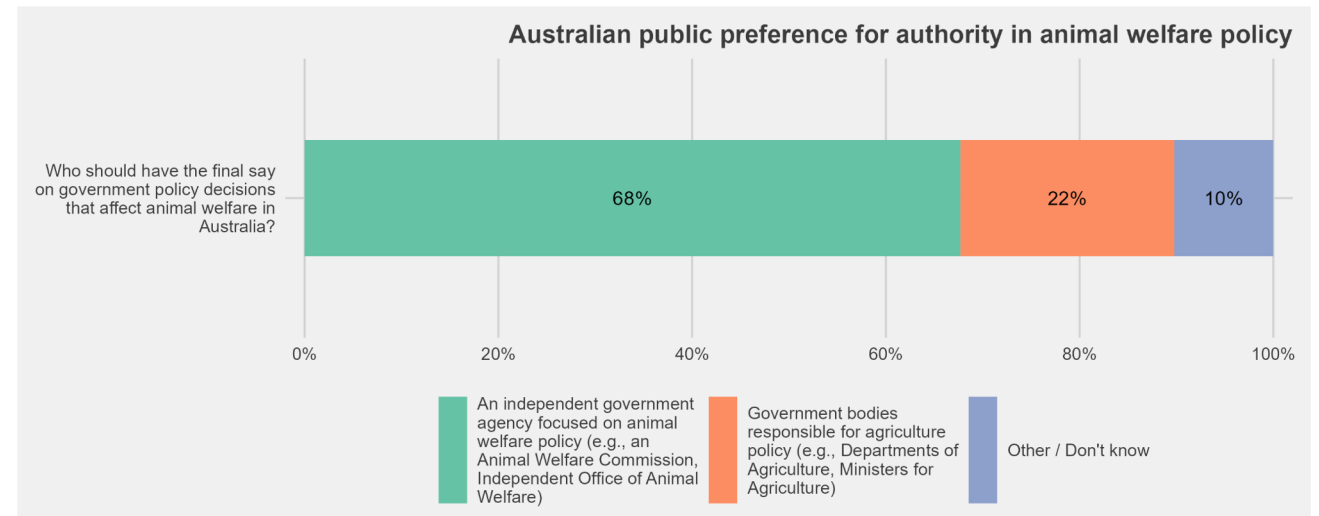
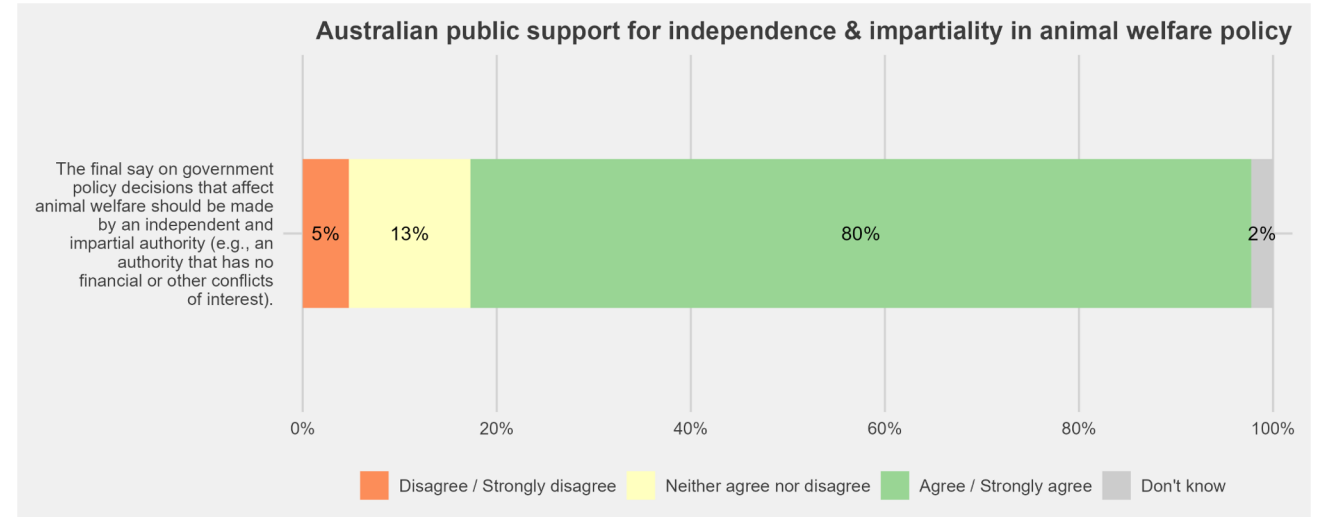
An independent final say on animal welfare

Nearly all Australians agreed that final policy decisions about animal welfare should be made by an independent body.

Most Australians (7 in 10) preferred an independent government agency to take this role.

A minority (2 in 10) preferred that government bodies responsible for agriculture policy take this role.

These findings suggest that Australians prefer a different governance and decision-making arrangement for animal welfare policy decisions. Regardless of the form that authority takes, it should be independent and impartial.






Animal welfare groups, and researchers should have more say in policy decisions than government or industry

We asked Australians about **which groups should have a say** in government policy decisions that affect animal welfare, and which groups were **trusted** when it came to animal welfare.

Australians think that Animal welfare groups, researchers, and practitioners should have the **most say** and were **most trusted**

Government representatives, the general public, consumer protection groups, and industries that use animals should have **some say** and were **somewhat trusted**

Political parties and retail & food companies should have the **least say** and were **least trusted**



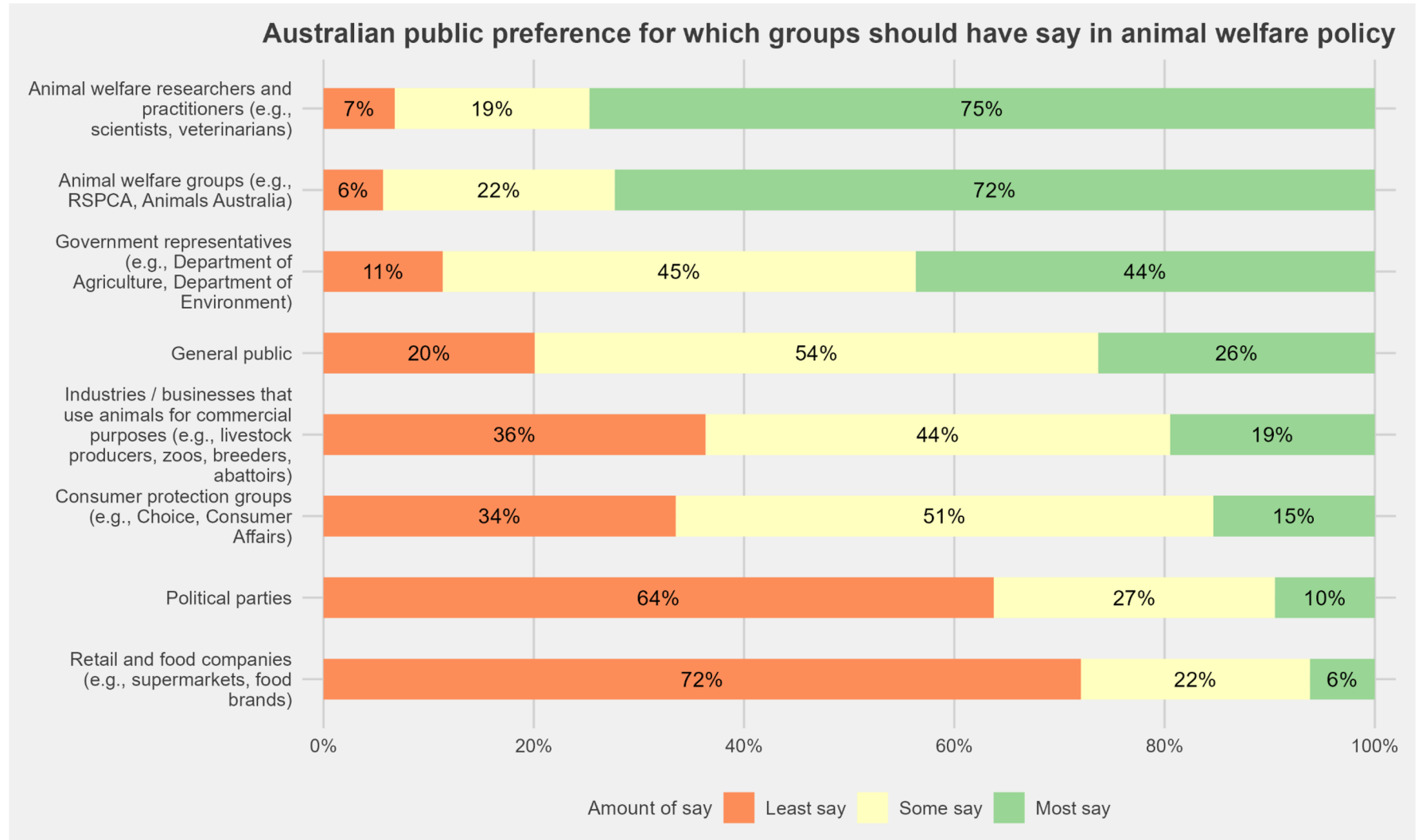
Some groups should have more say than others

Australians clustered 8 groups into three categories: those who should have the **least say**, **some say**, or **most say** in government policy decisions affecting animal welfare.

Animal welfare groups, researchers & practitioners were most frequently placed into the **most say** category.

Government representatives, general public, industry, and consumer groups tended to be placed in the **some say** category.

Political parties and retail & food companies were most frequently placed into the **least say** category.



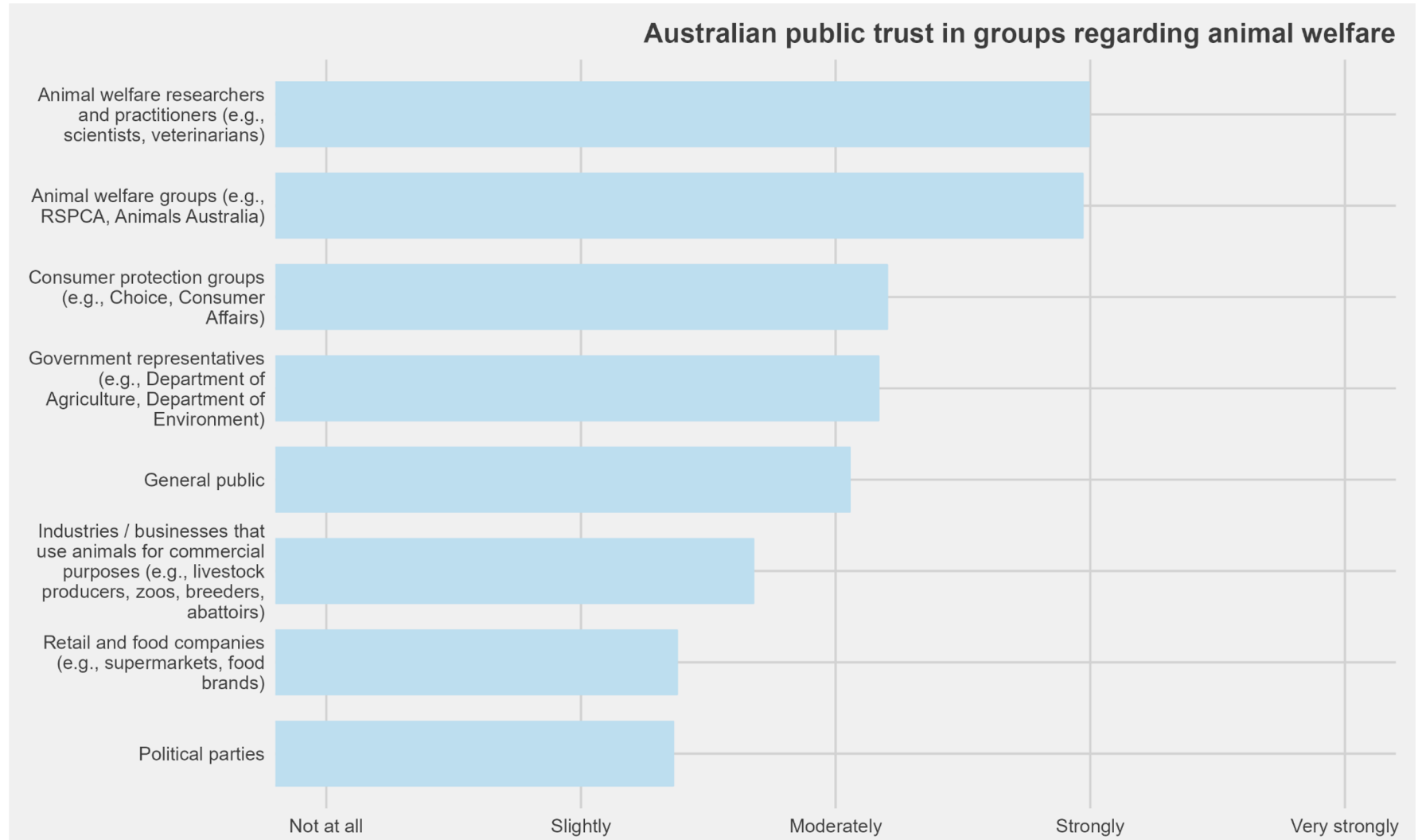
Some groups are more trusted than others

Australians expressed their trust in 8 groups when it comes to animal welfare. This figure shows the average level of trust across the sample for each group

Animal welfare groups, researchers & practitioners were **most trusted**.

Government representatives, consumer groups, and general public were **moderately trusted**.

Industries / businesses that use animals for commercial purposes, political parties and retail & food companies were **least trusted**.






Impacts on animals and scientific evidence were the most important factors for policy decision-making

We asked Australians about **what factors should be considered** in policy decisions that affect animal welfare.

Scientific evidence and impacts on animals mattered the most.

Other factors included (in order) community expectations, impacts on consumers, impacts on regulators, and impact on industries.

Australians also judged that animal welfare policy decisions should consider animal suffering in its own right, separate to any human suffering.

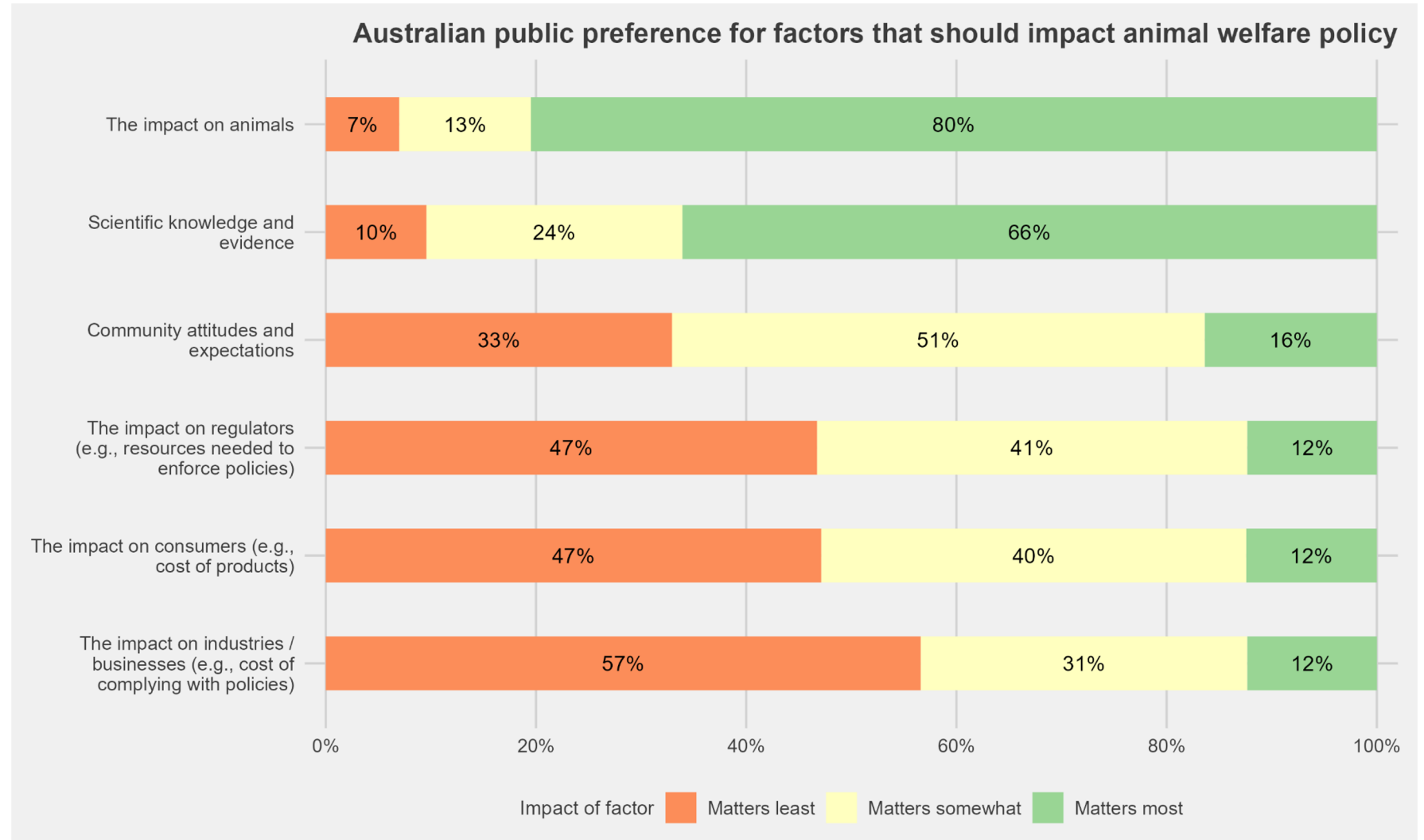


Consider impact on animals and science in policy

Australians clustered 6 factors into three categories: those that **matter least**, **matter somewhat**, or **matter most** in government policy decisions affecting animal welfare.

The **intrinsic value of animals** was affirmed, with nearly 9 in 10 (86%) of Australians saying that animal welfare policy decisions should consider whether animals will suffer, independently from humans.

These findings suggest that the interests of animals are important to Australians and should be considered in policy affecting animal welfare.






**A majority of
Australians act to
advocate for
animals, motivated
by their values**

We asked Australians about the advocacy actions they had taken to help animals.

About 6 in 10 Australians had advocated on behalf of animals. The most common actions were donating to charities, signing petitions, and talking with others about animal welfare issues.

We also asked Australians what influenced their advocacy actions. The most common driver was believing in the importance of advocacy. The most common barrier was not having the time or money to act. In general, personal values, goals, and constraints were the most influential drivers.

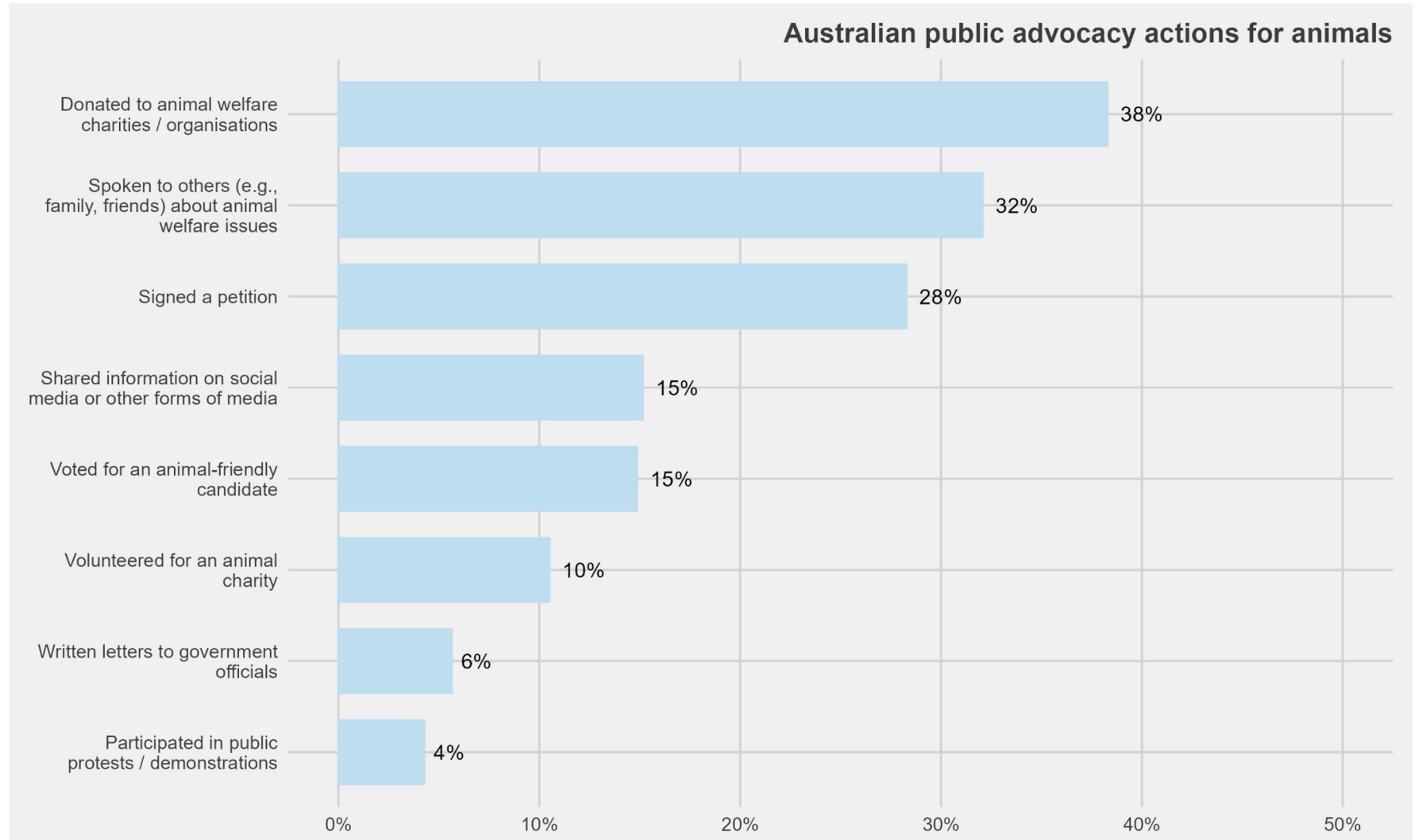


Australians advocate for animals

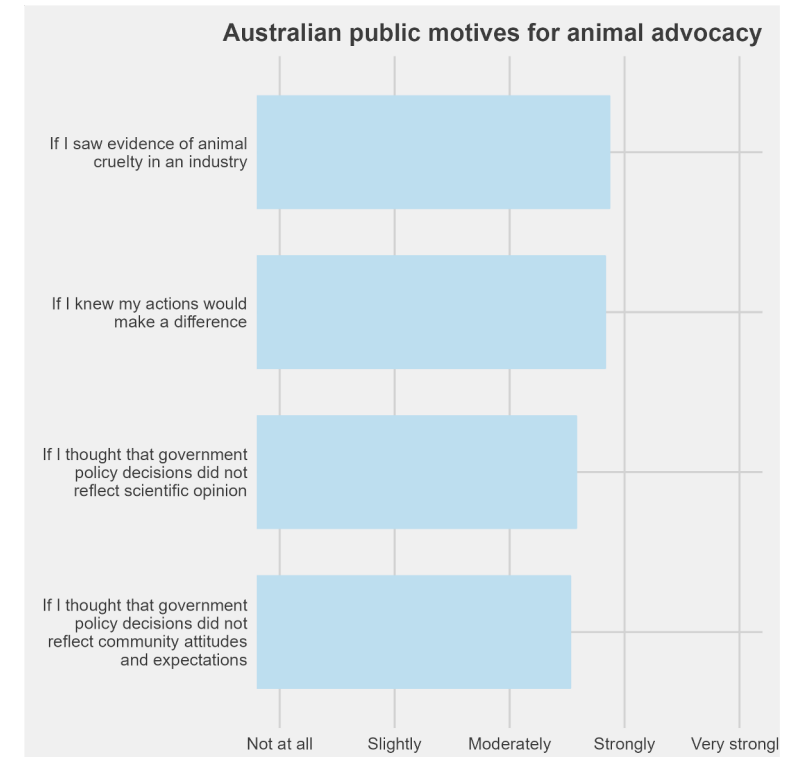
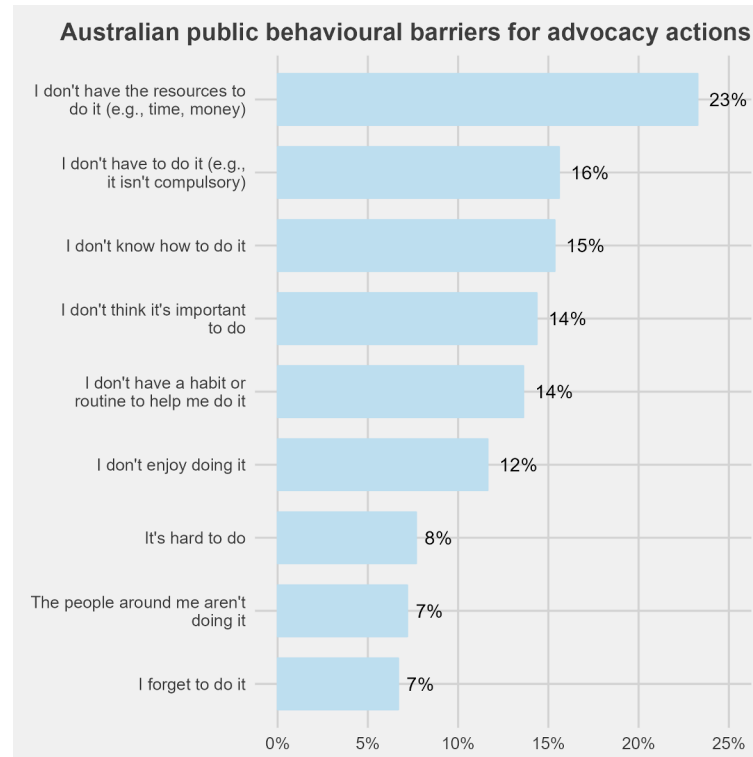
About 6 in 10 Australians had ever taken action to advocate for animals.

We asked about the most recent occasion that Australians had done each of these actions.

For each action, about 2 in 10 did it in the past month; 3 in 10 did it in the past year, and 5 in 10 did it less frequently, although speaking with others, and sharing information on social media were more frequent.



Drivers and barriers to advocacy



Strong **motivation** (think it's important, enjoyable) was a common driver of advocacy.

A mix of **opportunity** (had the resources) and **capability** (easy to do / know how to do it) were also relevant.

Insufficient **opportunity** (lack of resources, supportive environment, or habits / routines) were the most common barriers.

Poor **capability** (know how to do it) or adverse **motivation** (enjoyment / think it's important) were less common.

Believing one's actions would make a difference and seeing evidence of cruelty were slightly stronger motivators than perceptions of government policy decisions.

**NOW WHAT can
Government and people
who seek to advance
animal welfare do?**



What can animal welfare researchers do?

- **Re-analyse the Australian Animal Welfare survey data to derive new insights to help animals**
An anonymised version of the data, documentation and code is available on the Open Science Framework. Explore the data with your own research questions to understand how to improve animal welfare in Australia and beyond.
- **Replicate and adapt the Australian Animal Welfare Survey in your local context or country**
Survey materials and other documentation is available on the Open Science Framework. Replicate and adapt the survey in your own context, then compare findings to improve the coordination and impact of people working to understand and improve animal welfare.

What can Government do?

- **Update animal welfare policy to better meet the expectations of the Australian community**

Almost all Australians think animal welfare should be protected by legislation, but most don't agree that government shares their concerns

- **Consider the independence and impartiality of the authority that makes final decisions on policy affecting animal welfare**

A majority of Australians think the 'final say' on animal welfare policy should be made by an independent authority

- **Increase engagement with stakeholders and groups trusted by the Australian community when making policy decisions**

Australians believe that animal welfare groups, researchers, and practitioners should have the most say in policy decisions; these groups are also most trusted when it comes to animal welfare

- **Incorporate animal welfare, sentience, and wellbeing as key considerations in policy decision-making, using scientific evidence to inform these decisions**

Australians want policy decisions affecting animal welfare to prioritise the impacts on animals and be based on scientific evidence. Animals are judged to have intrinsic value, and many companion, farmed, and other animals are viewed as sentient and thus should be provided with good welfare

What can people who want to help animals do?

- **Implement behaviour change strategies to help people translate their attitudes and beliefs into effective animal advocacy**

Most Australians think that more can be done to protect and provide animal welfare, but about 4 in 10 have never advocated for this area. Only about half of those who have ever advocated did so in the past year.

- **Provide easy and timely ways for people to act in alignment with their values by advocating for animals**

Most people who ever advocated did so because they believed it was important. Key barriers were a lack of time or resources, or not knowing how to advocate. Making it easy and timely can help increase advocacy behaviour.

- **Communicate the effectiveness of specific advocacy actions to tap into people's desire to 'make difference'**

Clearly communicate the effectiveness and impact of specific advocacy actions, focusing on moments when personal actions can create systemic change (e.g., elections, parliamentary submissions) to inspire more people to participate

Research Team

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Conflict of interest

The authors have no conflicts to declare.

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Methodology

Between 22 February and 13 March 2023, Monash University surveyed 1,029 adults living in Australia, online using Qualtrics survey platform. Randomisation: survey blocks were presented in the following order: (1) randomised between policy / sentience (both were presented); (2) advocacy behaviours and drivers; (3) demographic information. Within a given question (e.g., trusted groups), the order of groups was randomised. Participants were recruited through the Online Research Unit's panel, with nationally representative quota sampling by gender, age group, state/territory, and metro/regional. Research ethics was received from the Monash University Human Research Ethics Committee (Project 37037).

The margin of error (95% confidence level) for the national results is $\pm 3\%$.

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Appendix. Participant demographic information

<i>How old are you (in years)?</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>percent</i>
18-24	113	11%
25-34	193	19%
35-44	179	17%
45-54	178	17%
55-64	158	15%
65 or older	208	20%
Total	1029	100%

<i>Which gender(s) do you identify as?</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>percent^a</i>
Man	507	49%
Woman	518	50%
Non-binary / gender diverse	3	<1%
My gender identity isn't listed. I identify as: (please specify)	2	<1%
Prefer not to say	0	0%

<i>Which Australian state or territory do you currently reside in?</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>percent</i>
Australian Capital Territory	18	2%
New South Wales	334	32%
Northern Territory	11	1%
Queensland	200	19%
South Australia	75	7%
Tasmania	23	2%
Victoria	263	26%
Western Australia	105	10%
I do not reside in Australia	0	0%
Total	1029	100%

<i>Which of the following best describes where you live?</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>percent</i>
Major city	696	68%
Regional city or town	263	26%
Rural area	62	6%
Remote area	7	1%
Other (please specify)	1	0%
Total	1029	100%

Notes.

a. Gender was asked consistent with Monash requirements to [measure gender inclusively](#). This means that participants could select one or more responses to the question.