

RSPCA Australia
Submission

**General Review of the China-
Australia Free Trade Agreement**

March 2026

The RSPCA is an independent, community-based charity dedicated to advancing animal welfare for the humane treatment of animals. Guided by our vision that all animals have a good life, we work tirelessly to prevent cruelty by actively promoting the care and protection of animals Australia-wide.

Our activities span all states and territories and include operating animal rehoming shelters, investigating and prosecuting animal cruelty complaints and educating the community on responsible pet ownership. Informed by contemporary values and the latest scientific knowledge, we work with governments and industries to address critical animal welfare issues.

This submission reflects our ongoing commitment to the development of policies and practices that uphold the welfare of animals across all sectors. We appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this General Review, with the objective of working collaboratively towards meaningful progress in animal welfare.

30 March 2026

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Recognising animal welfare under the China–Australia Free Trade Agreement

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the General Review of the China–Australia Free Trade Agreement (ChAFTA). The review presents an opportunity to further improve the ChAFTA by considering the inclusion of animal welfare provisions. This would demonstrate the Australian Government’s commitment to high animal welfare standards and sustainable development practices.

Animal welfare is a critical component of sustainable development, having implications for all three pillars of sustainability – economic, social and environmental. This should be recognised in any trade agreement that Australia is party to, particularly that with China, Australia’s largest trading partner. Australia is well placed to be an international leader in animal welfare practices and should seek to capitalise on this comparative advantage and market opportunity, enhancing our trade credentials and international reputation.

There has been recent significant progress in recognising animal welfare in Australia’s trade agreements with the European Union, the United Kingdom and the United Arab Emirates. In terms of the EU and UK FTAs, the RSPCA would like to see similar animal welfare provisions adopted in the ChAFTA, which include:

- Recognition of animal sentience and the connection between improved welfare of animals and sustainable food production systems
- Cooperation in international fora to promote the best possible animal welfare practices (for animals farmed for food production) and their implementation
- Exchange of information, expertise and experiences in the field of animal welfare with the aim of aligning regulatory standards related to breeding, holding, handling, transportation and slaughter of food-producing animals
- Cooperation on animal welfare research to develop science-based standards related to the treatment of animals on farm, during transport and at slaughter.

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These improvements reflect growing expectations for higher animal welfare and sustainable development practices among Australia's international trading partners and markets, as well as the Australian community. They also support animal welfare improvements domestically.

The RSPCA believes these provisions establish a good basis for animal welfare that can be built on in agreements such as the ChAFTA. Their inclusion would also uphold the sixth pillar of the Australia Government's National Statement on Animal Welfare by 'taking action to ensure that animal welfare is a standard consideration in every international trade negotiation, building our trade credentials and ensuring ongoing market access'.

Yours sincerely



Richard Mussell
Chief Executive Officer
RSPCA Australia