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Policy decision framework for conflicting world views on animal welfare issues

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ABSTRACT

Animal welfare policies deal with complex issues involving and resulting from, animal management in highly modified environments. How people consider and respond to animal welfare issues is value laden, constrained by the social norms of their peer-groups and influenced by conflicting scientific and popular opinions. In some cases, achieving a consensus about what constitutes the most socially desirable course of action to follow will simply not be possible. Instead, socially-resilient policies forged from mutual respect and understanding may be possible by bringing together the different world views of the conflicting parties in a planning model that enables them each to contribute transparently towards policy formulation. The 4-windows strategy for animal welfare policy formulation described in this paper, when applied to a farming practice of concern, such as lamb castration, can assist an agency like the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee to address the concerns of social groups outside of traditional scientific thinking and enable them to contribute to the policy process more fully. However, the 4-windows strategy may be more difficult when there is a lack of reliable information about the values and expectations of some social groups. Overall, this approach has implications for the way in which livestock farming in New Zealand may be influenced in the future by current social trends.

Keywords: policy formulation; world views; welfare advisory committee; lamb castration.

INTRODUCTION

Acceptable animal welfare is a complex, multi-faceted public policy issue which includes important scientific, ethical, economic and political dimensions (Petrini & Wilson, 2005). Compromises to an animal's wellbeing, are often considered reasonable and necessary by virtue of the benefits they bring the animal and, or humans. However, "reasonable and necessary" are context dependent and thus acceptable animal welfare can be controversial in any society. New Zealand's statutory mandate for leading and facilitating the management of animal welfare policy is the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF) Animal Welfare Group guided by the National Animal Welfare Advisory Committee (NAWAC). Working with the Animal Welfare Act (New Zealand Government, 1999), the Group "supports the expectations of New Zealanders about animal welfare and develops animal welfare standards that enhance the marketing of primary industry products" (MAF, 2004). In particular, the Group must balance between meeting the welfare needs of animals, the economics of production, scientific interests and ethical and social considerations.

The objective of this study is to enable the different viewpoints of stakeholders on an issue to be recognised, respected and used constructively in policy decision making. Policy guidelines are suggested in the paper to guide the policy process during public consultation to encourage the integration of a range of often conflicting information.

The following sections of the paper first establish the limitations to taking a single perspective in policy formulation and the value of an approach incorporating a range of world views. The next sections describe the contribution of systems thinking to developing a multiple perspective and explain the 4-windows approach in particular. The final section retrospectively considers how the 4-windows approach might have been used in NAWAC's deliberations on lamb castration and discusses some of the strengths and weaknesses of using the 4-windows approach.

Animal welfare perspectives in policy decision making

Science makes an important contribution towards determining acceptable compromises to animal wellbeing and social and economic outcomes in Government legislation for animal welfare (D.J. Mellor, Unpublished data; New Zealand Government, 1999).

People may evaluate animal welfare conditions and legislation from a non-scientific but still rational point-of-view (Weimer & Vining, 2005), or even a non-scientific and "deconstructionist" point of view (March, 1994). Both these and other views, lie outside the usual ways that animal welfare scientists debate the issues and construct policy recommendations.

Some scientists have expanded the decision making criteria for policy evaluations of animal welfare to include more subjectively evaluated concepts but have still kept their decision making contribution to largely objectively derived functions supplementary to more scientific measures. Fraser (2003) identified three different sets of criteria for

making animal welfare assessments depending upon whether or not scientists were assuming a view that: animals should be raised under conditions that promote good biological functioning in the sense of health, growth and reproduction, or that animals should be raised in ways that minimise suffering and promote contentment, or that animals should be allowed to lead relatively natural lives.

Each of these “views” was also predicated upon value assumptions about possible relationships between animals and humans (Serpell, 2004, Fraser, 2003).

If social groups have similar values, criteria and assessment scales, these can be used to assist in the negotiation of policy compromises by framing debates about trade-offs between different points along the same continuum. An example would be a trade-off between the area for animal housing and containment capital costs. Such compromises are not possible if the different social groups involved do not appreciate that trade-offs along a particular continuum are possible, or have categorical expressions of what are acceptable or unacceptable management practices.

Any specific animal welfare issue needs to be considered first within the world view of the people that initially identified it as a policy issue to appreciate how they have been influenced by their concepts of reality (Checkland & Scholes, 1990). To minimise the creation of unintended consequences, the issue and its options additionally need to be considered within the world views of the people likely to be most affected (Fraser, 2003; Parminter *et al.*, 2003; Moller *et al.*, 2003).

Systems theory in policy formulation

Policy formulation is based upon developing an understanding of the nature of a policy issue, knowing the range of suitable political solutions available to address the issue, and deciding which solution will provide a socially acceptable and politically tenable resolution (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003). It would be preferable for policy simplicity, if mechanistic cause and effect relationships could be conceptualised in relation to each issue and that these might be closely related in time and space (Senge, 1992).

If policy agencies and their advisors continue to apply mechanistic approaches with issues that are beyond the possibility of establishing a social consensus, increasingly sophisticated tools are required to incorporate multiple perspectives for forecasting, analysis and strategy. However, these seldom achieve the expected breakthroughs in policy interventions because they are designed to handle detail complexity in cause and effect relationships rather than the dynamic complexity resulting from the interactions of management practices, policy strategies and social norms (Austin *et al.*, 1998).

4-windows framework applied to animal welfare policy formulation

The 4-windows strategy originally developed by Flood (1999) is a systems framework that brings together different policy paradigms and methodologies. Each window is suitable for examining a particular type of policy question about a common issue, with unique interrogative methods, approaches to assessing validity, and ways of comparing and interpreting information from different sources. Particular world views and policy attributes are associated with each window and can be determined for policy issues such as lamb castration which is used as the example in this paper.

Window 1 – Systems of process: This window builds upon a positivist-science world view. Its focus is upon describing biological functioning and cause and effect relationships including pathways for animal management control and response. This window examines the production or management system in which animals live.

The key criteria that are salient in Window 1 for people reviewing the use of lamb castration on farm are the degree of pain caused by castration, any handling and stress caused by the procedure, and any health risks it may create. These have been well described in the scientific literature (Molony & Kent, 1997; Mellor & Stafford, 2000).

Window 2 – Systems of structure: This window can be used for exploring utilitarian, anthropomorphic world views, again mainly in the positivist literature where scientific approaches are used for problem solving and theory building (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). The focus here is upon industry and organisational functions, co-ordination, communication and control and how these affect animal welfare conditions. The window examines and describes the human forces and drivers that are directly influencing production or management system stability including their influence upon animal husbandry and living conditions.

The key criteria in this window include the availability, effectiveness, efficiency, efficacy and acceptability of suitable technologies for managing growth and lamb carcass composition. This includes the capabilities required on-farm as well as farm tradition and acceptability (Tarbotton *et al.*, 2002).

Window 3 – Systems of meaning: This window builds upon a variety of stewardship and pastoral values related to social constructivist world views. The focus is upon people’s, symbolic and ethical models giving meaning and understanding of animal management as they have observed it. It includes people’s values, norms, ideologies, beliefs, and emotions about animals and their relationships to human-kind.

The key criteria in Window 3 are the naturalness of the farming process, the quality and values associated with the production of animal products, and whether the procedure is offensive to naïve parties. People concerned about the status of animals will want them to be respected as unique created beings that can form bonds with their human protectors. This group of people emphasis the need for personal relationships with animals and reject impartial and abstract approaches as impoverished (Anthony, 2003). They expect that human beings with frequent and close animal contact will have greater familiarity with their animal's disposition, capacities, needs and behaviour, potentially resulting in better detection of any animal welfare problems. "Naturalness" is one of the frequently used criteria for assessing the need or otherwise for husbandry practices, such as castration of lambs on farm (Fraser, 2003; Lund, 2006).

Window 4 – Systems of knowledge and power: This window can be used to apply a number of ideological world views from critical theory, such as feminism and Marxism. The focus is upon the social behaviours being manifested for creating and maintaining entrenched patterns of asymmetric distributions of knowledge, privilege and political influence and control. Participants examine the distribution of decision-making power, and the social as well as the equity consequences of current practices and possible practice changes.

They maybe concerned if sheep appear to be being treated as little more than "meat producing machines", "genetically manipulated", "pumped full of antibiotics", "artificially mated" and "lambled in stressful conditions". Lamb castration becomes one more "barbaric practice" applied to defenceless creatures by the same social groups that oppress the needy and marginalised in human society. The key criteria to be taken into account in this window are the social equity between animals, producers, public, consumers, processors, and commercial interests, and the contribution of social groups on the margins of current policy decision making (Pink, 2008).

Integrating the 4-windows: Bringing the results from each of the windows together can provide new insights into the different world views, their areas of conflict and ways of incorporating their key elements in formulating new policy. Each world view, or window, is applied in turn, beginning with the windows that best represent the focus of the main advocates for change and any protagonists. Based upon the world view being examined, the critical "problems" contributing to that issue are identified and a description made of how that issue would appear once those "problems" had been satisfactorily addressed. Once this perspective has been described for each world view, the results of

each of them are compared to identify and describe the interactions between the different models of the world views. An overall strategy for a policy intervention is then designed in consultation with the affected stakeholder groups. In the case of castration of lambs, bringing together the four windows suggests the following policy options: encouraging castration only when it is necessary; undertaking castration as early as possible; and researching practical means of alleviating the pain associated with the procedure.

Castration, NAWAC and the painful husbandry code of welfare

The "Animal welfare (Painful husbandry procedures). Code of welfare, 2005" was recently redrafted by NAWAC on behalf of the MAF's Animal Welfare Group (MAF, 2005). NAWAC invited suggestions from parties being directly affected by the Code and then encouraged the public to make further submissions on the proposed Code.

When the issues in the submissions had all been considered, NAWAC went on to address the detail of selected proposals. This included ways of minimising the pain and distress for animals, such as changing the age at which castration is undertaken and the use of pain relief. While wanting to move towards reducing pain and distress for procedures causing significant pain and distress, NAWAC acknowledged the complex of issues involved; such things as pain relief availability, efficacy and safety; knowledge, experience and the practicality of their use; the costs of pain relief and the equitable distribution of those costs and benefits; and regulatory issues and societal expectations. Consequently, some limits were established and initiatives to increase the future routine use of pain relief made. Finally, when developing each Code, NAWAC considers the advantages and disadvantages of specific operations such as castration, systems where it might not be required, castration practices and methods, the acute and chronic effects of the procedure on the animal, and ways of minimising pain and distress.

DISCUSSION

Most aspects of the 4-windows approach to policy formulation appear to have been covered by NAWAC when they reviewed lamb castration in the Code of welfare. Not surprisingly given the traditional understandings of animal welfare in terms of how well the animal performs and what it feels, most emphasis in NAWAC deliberations were perhaps given to the biological and industry aspects related to Windows 1 and 2. However, the process of inviting the public and interest groups to make submissions during the development of Codes of

welfare has provided some consideration of Windows 3 and 4.

NAWAC has been able to utilise published research findings when it considers the animal and industry issues in Windows 1 and 2. It has been more difficult for NAWAC to find comparably reliable studies related to Windows 3 and 4 for all the issues that were before it. Such information can be generated reliably using methodologies from outside the scientific tradition but may require specific investment to obtain them.

The NAWAC process of policy formulation has been sequential and hierarchical. It began and ended with strongly positivistic approaches to decision making. This meant that the submissions relating to Windows 3 and 4 made more marginal changes to an existing structure for the Code of welfare. It is possible therefore that if the policy formulation process had been able to put an equal weight upon Windows 3 and 4 a different type of policy on lamb castration might have resulted? One way to do that might have been to start policy formulation with the issues being raised in relation to Windows 3 and 4 and resolve them in such a way that the people raising them could be satisfied. Then the issues related to Windows 1 and 2 could have been added and resolved by making marginal changes to the resolution of Windows 3 and 4.

If starting from Windows 1 and 2 created a different policy end-point from starting with Windows 3 and 4 then the insights and policy advantages of applying the Windows approach will have been highlighted. In practice, the results of each of the Windows can be weighted according to their political importance before attempting to resolve across them by starting with the most highly weighted Windows first.

Despite the limitations that may be created through a lack of information about the expectations of different social groups and how these may fit the different Windows, having the 4-windows framework in mind can assist NAWAC participants to be more open about their own assumptions and values. NAWAC participants can declare how these may fit particular Windows better than others and acknowledge that they may be better suited to considering some submissions rather than others. It has also been used to provide a way for structuring discussions in NAWAC about policy options and the criteria to be used to evaluate them.

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