

***Animal Welfare in Australia: Politics and Policy*, by Peter John Chen. Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2016, pp. xxi + 406. RRP \$40.00 (pb).**

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This book offers, in the author's own words, 'a broad overview of a diverse policy field', namely animal welfare in Australia. Right from the first paragraph, Chen draws the reader to the obvious paradox of public attitudes and animal welfare: we lavish attention and resources on the care of companion animals, yet slaughter and consume large numbers of farm animals (and at the same moment we campaign to save a handful of sharks). It follows that for all 'sides' involved in the policy field, not to mention policy makers, this is a difficult terrain in which to operate.

Chen's approach is one of well-read and erudite synthesis matched with original fieldwork and data analysis. Drawing together thinking from sociology, philosophy, public policy and political science, this book shines a critical light on the theme of animal welfare policy and politics in Australia. The book's scope covers public opinion, media representations, elite policy maker perspectives, and policy/advocacy systems. It is thorough and systematic in its approach.

It is important to acknowledge that the author has strong convictions regarding his subject matter. It is immediately apparent—in the reference to human versus non-human animals, for instance—that he will be highly critical of the 'animal-using' industry. Yet, these convictions do not, on my reading, hinder or impede the scholarly basis of his work or the conclusions he draws. Chen's analysis and discussion is open and even-handed.

While animal welfare may not rank with youth employment, migration and terrorism as a visible policy challenge of the era, it only takes one focussing event to propel it back on the policy agenda (as shown by the very recent April 2018 scandal involving mass death of sheep as part of Australia's live-export meat trade). This is a point that Chen himself makes in the concluding chapter – animal welfare is a policy space that is likely to ebb and flow on the public agenda.

The undoubted strength of this book is its scope—it focuses on one sector and examines it exhaustively. I strongly recommend a flick through the Annexes to this book, which contain a large and systematic corpus on key trends in animal welfare. This is a real treasure for scholars who want to pick this work up and develop its themes further. The data amassed is impressive, covering public opinion, media, original elite interviews, and so on.

For some, the absence of a single clear-cut theoretical and conceptual framework, or of well sign-posted clear and falsifiable research questions, will be a point of criticism. Chen has elected to push policy frameworks to the background and let the richness of his empirical work (including his own expert knowledge of the field) shine. I think this is a wise decision for the book but I hope to see him produce some articles that flip this and stamp home the broader lessons for policy scholars.

In that vein, the chapter on advocacy organisations (chapter 6) holds many gems that could easily spin-off into stand-alone articles. For students of advocacy organisations, this is a reminder of the contribution that focussed sector-based studies can make to a sub-field that has, over the last two decades, moved heavily towards aggregate system-level studies. The book's discussion of animal protection groups in terms of 'primary activities' and 'ideological orientation' are straightforward, yet revealing. We learn about the ideological transformation of this sector, something that has real policy import but is a dimension of policy advocacy that is often lost (or difficult to implement) in contemporary large-n policy projects.

The scope of this book is impressive. Thorough to a fault, it is no doubt **the** book for policy scholars interested in animal welfare in Australia. It will be on the reading list for my own interest group and lobbying class, and I suspect it will be on many an Australian public policy reading lists. My hope is that inspires similar treatments of other policy sectors—perhaps Chen will himself move on to new policy domains?