As its title promises, this is a comprehensive and authoritative tome on Animal Law in New Zealand.

Its core interest is the Animal Welfare Act 1999 of which the author, Neil Wells, can be said to be the founding father. With his roots in New Zealand’s police, Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) and law, he drove the revision of animal welfare law in New Zealand (NZ) that led to the 1999 Act. Its novel concept of “duty of care” was subsequently adopted in the United Kingdom (UK).

The book primarily comprises a detailed examination of the NZ Animal Welfare Act 1999 - history and context, substantive content, enforcement powers and relevant case law. As well as the general welfare provisions, there is extensive treatment of dog control, farm animal welfare, research, zoos and other activities that fall within the Act. New Zealand has made extensive use of welfare codes and minimum standards and these are also discussed.

National and international legislation relating to terrestrial wildlife conservation, marine mammals and fishing are not overlooked. One might think that, dated 1953, the Wildlife Act probably needs Neil Wells’ attention to bring it up to date.

Later chapters deal with veterinary law, practice, professional discipline, medicines and the effect of the Animal Welfare Act 1999 on veterinary surgeons. This is essential reading for any veterinary personnel practising in NZ or planning to relocate there.

In addition, there are chapters that summarise the animal welfare legislation of other common law jurisdictions - Australia, Canada and the USA. The chapter on the UK law could have done with a little more attention and news of the effects of European Union law on UK animal legislation would appear from this book not yet to have reached those carefree islands of Aotearoa.

Rightly proud to point out that NZ incorporated the “Five Freedoms” in an Act before the UK, the author has overlooked the role that these principles have long played in our farm animal welfare codes and, since 2000, in our official zoo standards. In fact, there seems to be quite a blank on farm animals in the UK law chapter.

The book is well written and is laid out in the style of a legal, rather than scientific textbook, with (oh joy!) footnotes appearing at the foot of each page (how can scientists tolerate the constant search for references at the end of a chapter or a book?). There are 12 sections and 79 chapters, some quite brief, each laced with a thought-provoking quotation. At the end, that much loved Veterinary Record article on Brunus edwardii (species nova) is reproduced; there is also a bibliography (books only) that is adequate but could have been more comprehensive, together with a detailed classification of offences, a list of websites (somewhat overloaded with SPCAs), tables of legislation and cases cited and a thorough index.

Despite its title, the book is strongly, but not surprisingly, animal welfare orientated with quite an emphasis on the policies of the SPCAs. It would have been interesting to have more information about the impact on animals of the Treaty of Waitangi and Maori interests and about the contributions of the New Zealand government to animal welfare at home and abroad.

Clearly this is a book primarily for New Zealand but, nevertheless, it is a tour de force in the specialised field of animal welfare law and should be recognised nationally and internationally as such. So many veterinary surgeons, nurses, welfarists, and lawyers have links with that country, and the similarity of the UK and NZ animal and veterinary law, as well as attitudes to welfare and conservation, are such that the book is worthy of attention in Britain. No one should work with animals in NZ without this book.

The growing breed of dually qualified vet-lawyers and anyone else interested in animal law and welfare should consider acquiring this publication. Those concerned with comparative animal law or the reform of animal welfare legislation in any country should also have a copy. It ought be present in relevant specialist libraries and any other collection of animal law literature.

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