

# INVERTEBRATES

It's not all about the backbone, evolution has produced thoughts and feelings in many species

## Policy

The Animal Justice Party (AJP) values and respects invertebrates as important members of the animal world and for their importance to biodiversity and ecosystem function. The AJP calls for more education to increase public awareness of invertebrates, and for more legal protection for complex invertebrate species.

## Key Objectives

1. Educate people about the nature and ecological role of invertebrates, their sentience and cognitive abilities, and the impact human activities have on them.
2. Include invertebrate species that are known to suffer pain such as crabs, crayfish, lobsters and cephalopods, as well as those that are likely to do so (such as other complex invertebrates), under the definition of "animal" in animal protection laws in all states and territories (see the Definition of Animal policy).
3. Mandate the humane treatment of invertebrates under state and territory animal protection laws without exceptions.
4. Encourage the use of non-lethal alternatives to control invertebrates such as insects, spiders and snails, both in large-scale agricultural settings and in domestic and small-scale settings.
5. Ban the lethal collection of insects (e.g. butterflies) for recreational or display purposes.
6. Oppose the emerging commercial breeding of insects and other sentient invertebrates for human consumption (e.g. crickets).

## Background

Invertebrates are animals without a backbone that live in a variety of terrestrial and aquatic environments. Australia has almost 99,000<sup>1</sup> species of known invertebrates and perhaps 200,000 more yet to be described. Invertebrates include groups such as insects, spiders, crustaceans, molluscs, worms, corals, sponges, jellyfish and many more. Ranging in size from the microscopic rotifer to the colossal squid, most go unnoticed, but contribute greatly to the diversity of life and play a crucial role in various ecosystems.

Historically, invertebrates have been thought to have no cognitive ability, consciousness or capacity to feel pain. This has led to callous exploitation, careless treatment, and exclusion from animal protection legislation. However, there is *increasing scientific evidence*<sup>2</sup> that this is not the case for a number of species. For example, cephalopods are now known to be *cognitively complex*<sup>3</sup>, are *intelligent*<sup>4</sup>, and *suffer*<sup>5</sup>; while there is strong evidence that lobsters, crabs and prawns are also capable of experiencing pain, although using neural pathways which are different from those found in vertebrates. *Bees*<sup>6</sup> and *ants*<sup>7</sup> have strong cognitive ability, especially communication, navigation and capacity to learn and they display strong altruism and cooperative behaviour.

Where there is a lack of data on invertebrates' cognitive ability and capacity to feel pain, the AJP considers that it is prudent to apply the *animal sentience precautionary principle*<sup>8</sup> and to treat all invertebrates with respect and care (see our Definition of Animal policy).

Over the past few decades there has been a growing public awareness that invertebrates matter and that our relationship with them needs to evolve. This has been achieved essentially through a variety of educational documentaries, e.g. the informative *My Octopus Teacher*.

<sup>1</sup><https://www.environment.gov.au/science/abrs/publications/other/numbers-living-species/executive-summary>

<sup>2</sup><https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4494284/>

<sup>3</sup><https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2352154617300189>

<sup>4</sup><https://us.macmillan.com/books/9780374537197>

<sup>5</sup>[https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-31011-0\\_2](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-31011-0_2)

<sup>6</sup><https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13592-020-00794-x>

<sup>7</sup><https://jonieffmd.com/blog/ant-intelligence-update>

<sup>8</sup><https://www.wellbeingintlstudiesrepository.org/animsent/vol2/iss16/1/>

<sup>9</sup><https://www.wellbeingintlstudiesrepository.org/animsent/vol2/iss16/1/>



Want a voice for animals in Parliament? Join, donate, or find out more about the Animal Justice Party at [animaljusticeparty.org](https://animaljusticeparty.org). You can also read our policies, here: [animaljusticeparty.org/policieslist](https://animaljusticeparty.org/policieslist).

Authorised by: Geoff Russell, 6 Fifth Ave, St Morris SA 5068