Since 1924, when the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) was established, great advances have been made in the scientific understanding of the causes, prevention and treatment of animal diseases. Infectious diseases, together with nutritional, environmental and genetic disorders, and the relevance of the condition of the animal for its susceptibility to infectious diseases, have all received worldwide scientific attention. This work has been very successful in improving the health status and productivity of animals on a global scale. However, it is only during the last 20 to 25 years that animal welfare itself has been given explicit attention. The improvements in welfare that occurred previously were a natural outcome of this work, because animal health is a key factor in animal welfare. Now that increasing attention is being paid by scientists to the causes, consequences, minimisation and management of animal suffering, the OIE anticipates that important improvements in animal welfare will occur globally.

With the intimate linkage of animal health and animal welfare in mind, the Members of the OIE in 2002 (now 172 Member Countries and Territories), unanimously supported extending the Organisation’s mandate to include animal welfare. Subsequently, the OIE permanent Working Group on Animal Welfare was established to guide the implementation of this extended mandate. Four ad hoc Groups of experts were formed to develop international guidelines in the following specific areas: slaughter for human consumption, land and sea transport of animals, and humane killing of animals for disease control purposes. Following the adoption of these guidelines in 2005, the OIE continued to pursue its global animal welfare initiative with the formation of ad hoc Groups on relevant current topics, including: the control of stray dog populations, laboratory animal welfare and livestock production systems.

Evidence of the OIE’s leadership in setting science-based international standards for animal welfare has been highlighted through two further activities. The first of these was the publication of the Proceedings of the Global Conference on Animal Welfare, hosted by the OIE in Paris, France, on 23-25 February 2004. This reflects the OIE’s commitment to communicate and raise awareness of animal welfare issues globally. The Conference was attended by OIE Members and representatives of the private sector, international animal welfare NGOs\(^1\) and scientific and professional organisations. Secondly, in 2005, the OIE published a special issue of the OIE Scientific and Technical Review on “Animal welfare: global issue, trends and challenges”. This provided a wider perspective on animal welfare as it pertains to the objectives, development and implementation of the OIE’s international guidelines on animal welfare.

Animal welfare may be characterised in various ways. Although there is ongoing discussion about the most appropriate way to define and describe animal welfare, there is general agreement that an animal’s welfare ‘status’ relates to what the animal itself experiences on a continuum between positive experiences, representing

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\(^1\) NGOs: non-governmental organisations
good welfare, and negative experiences, especially markedly negative ones, representing suffering. The mental state of the animal is therefore very important. In a negative sense, this mental state can include anxiety, fear, distress of various kinds and pain. Negative mental states can arise because of external challenges, such as frightening situations. They can also arise because of functional changes within the animal due to nutritional, environmental, health and behavioural aberrations, disruptions or restrictions. Examples are hunger due to starvation or pain due to injury or a disease-induced pathology.

Pain is among the most unpleasant, or noxious, experiences a person can have. Moreover, depending on its intensity, character and duration, pain can undoubtedly cause severe suffering in humans. It is increasingly accepted that this is also true for animals. Thus, the welfare of an animal experiencing significant pain will be compromised. This has motivated national advisory bodies in various countries and regions, including Australia, New Zealand and the European Union, to recommend that steps be taken to avoid or manage animal pain in order to minimise the suffering it would otherwise cause.

The science of understanding animal pain, and its management, is still developing, and this is reflected in an ever-increasing body of peer-reviewed literature. Nevertheless, validated strategies for pain management are available and there are opportunities for scientific advances to be more closely reflected, as appropriate, in government policies and industry practices. At the same time, it is important to take account of the constraints facing developing countries and the increasing worldwide demand for food.

In recognition of this, and the relevance of animal pain and pain management to its Global Animal Welfare Initiative, the OIE has commissioned an issue of the Technical Series. Its purpose is to assist the reader to gain a clearer understanding of current scientific thinking and likely directions of scientific research in future. Preparation of this issue has been facilitated by including updated versions of papers presented to the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS) Science Summit on Pain and Pain Management, which was held in Melbourne on 17 May 2007. Other international experts have also contributed to this issue.