

Mars and the Politics of Permission

Lobbying public money and the protection of the industrial pet food experiment

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Mars did not build the industrial pet food system by advertising pet food alone. It helped cultivate the social demand for pets, the emotional meanings attached to them, the professional institutions that advised their owners, and the political environment in which the industry operated. The result was not merely a successful range of products. It was a durable system of permission.

That system deserves examination because its public face and its neglected harms point in opposite directions. Mars and its associated bodies promoted pet ownership, companionship, responsible ownership, scientific authority, regional employment, sustainability and human wellbeing. At the same time, the veterinary and regulatory system failed to confront adequately whether industrial diets were triggering widespread periodontal and systemic disease in the animals whose ownership and feeding habits were being encouraged.

This article distinguishes documented facts from allegations and inference. Lobbying, membership of a trade association, a government grant or a ministerial meeting is not by itself misconduct. The public-interest question is cumulative: what political and institutional advantages did Mars build, what knowledge did it possess or have reason to seek, and why did the resulting system fail to identify and correct foreseeable animal suffering?

The three programmes

Programme	Principal means	System effect
Social and psychological	Research into attachment, loneliness, childhood experience, acquisition barriers and replacement intentions	Pet ownership becomes normal, emotionally valuable and repeatedly renewed
Professional and informational	PIAS, PetNet, schools, media, veterinarians, research partnerships and health claims	Corporate interests acquire the appearance of independent advice and public service
Political and regulatory	Lobbyists, trade bodies, submissions, ministerial access, grants and public private programmes	Government sees Mars as an employer, scientific authority, policy partner and responsible corporate citizen

Political influence without political donations

Mars publicly states that it makes no financial contributions to candidates, political parties or committees, supplies no corporate funds for electioneering communications, and has no employee

political action committee. That claim should be placed prominently on the record, and searches of national disclosure systems should continue rather than presuming a contrary result. [1]

The absence of direct political donations does not mean the absence of political influence. Mars also says that it engages governments, regulators, trade associations, peers and non-government organisations; employs internal advocates and external consultants; and holds leadership positions in some trade associations. Its own 2019 disclosure identified board participation in the Australian pet food association, the European and former UK pet food bodies, the US Pet Food Institute, the Sustainable Food Policy Alliance and other organisations. [1-2]

The relevant currency is therefore broader than money given to a party. It includes access, expertise, employment, investment, public funding, research, institutional appointments and the capacity to align a private commercial project with a government's public narrative. These activities are ordinarily lawful. Their importance lies in the authority and goodwill they accumulate, particularly when the company is also seeking to influence the rules governing food, pet food, animal health and veterinary services.

Australia from PIAS to public policy

Mars's Australian system began with more than manufacturing hardware. PIAS later stated that it had been established in 1966, was funded by Mars Petcare, undertook original research into relationships between people and companion animals, and had a charter that included encouraging pet ownership. Its own 2006 report said that research had been undertaken to provide data supporting the popularity and place of pets in society. [13]

The first Melbourne people and pets study was conducted in 1974. More than 400 households were initially interviewed and 286 participated in detailed qualitative evaluation. Published in 1976 as *Pets as a Social Phenomenon*, it was cited in the *British Journal of Psychiatry* in July 1977. The citation supplied PIAS's address at 117 Collins Street, Melbourne. [13-14]

By 1981 PIAS was publishing a work explicitly titled *Who Owns Who Psychological Research into the Human Pet Bond in Australia*. Later surveys measured closeness to pets, loneliness, life satisfaction, childhood pet ownership, obstacles to acquisition and intentions to replace pets. In 1994 and 2006 PIAS co-sponsored nationally comparable Roy Morgan studies. These questions furnished a map of the emotional and household conditions that sustained pet ownership. [13]

The same organisation funded the origins of PetPEP. The AVA's 2000 annual report records that Dr Diane Hopkins obtained PIAS funding to write the original programme, that the AVA adopted PetPEP nationally as its community relations programme, and that corporate and government sponsors supported its redevelopment. The report described repeated exposure of children through their primary school years, involvement by schools, veterinary clinics, councils and radio stations, and an intervention following which a New South Wales education advertising barrier was lifted under direction from the State Premier. [15]

This social programme sat beside a political and industry programme. Mars's own trade association disclosure recorded board participation in the Pet Food Industry Association of Australia. PFIAA currently says that it works closely with federal and state government departments on pet food safety and pet health. Mars is also listed as a PFIAA member. [2, 4-5]

Mars participated directly in the 2018 Senate inquiry into pet food safety. It lodged submission 106 and senior scientific, regulatory and management representatives appeared before the committee. The

inquiry considered a voluntary self-regulatory system and recorded the Advance Dermocare episode, including a compensation offer to owners of affected dogs. [6-9]

Mars now retains GRACosway. The ACT Lobbyists Register names Mars Australia as a client and identifies numerous authorised GRACosway personnel whose earlier employment included federal, state, shadow-ministerial and ministerial offices. The register proves representation and the availability of political expertise. It does not identify every meeting, instruction or policy objective, which should be sought separately. [3]

Government support has also supplied money and political endorsement. In October 2024 the Australian Renewable Energy Agency announced \$17.2 million for a concentrated solar thermal project at Mars Petcare's Wodonga factory. The Prime Minister and Energy Minister presented the project as an exemplar of regional employment, industrial innovation and a Future Made in Australia. Regional Development Victoria separately lists a Mars Wodonga pouch project under its Regional Jobs Fund, with the amount recorded as commercial in confidence. [10-12]

The environmental merits of these projects can be real. The political effect is equally real: Mars becomes a partner in jobs, decarbonisation and regional development. Its industrial pet food operation acquires public-interest credentials and senior political advocates, while the health consequences of the underlying feeding system remain outside the celebratory frame.

The United Kingdom from loneliness policy to veterinary ownership

In Britain, Mars has worked through both direct governmental engagement and industry leadership. A June 2019 ministerial disclosure records a meeting between Mars Petcare UK, Sir Roger Gale MP and the minister responsible for loneliness policy. Mars Petcare later appeared in the government's Tackling Loneliness Network Action Plan. [18-19]

Loneliness is a serious public-health problem, and pets may provide valuable companionship. It is nevertheless commercially important when a pet food and veterinary corporation helps define pet ownership as a public-health response. The corporation's interest in human wellbeing is inseparable from a market in which each additional or retained pet requires food and frequently veterinary services.

Mars's 2019 trade association disclosure recorded board participation in the Food and Drink Federation and the then Pet Food Manufacturers Association. In May 2025 UK Pet Food appointed Mars scientific and regulatory manager Dr Matt Elliott as chair. It said that he had co-chaired its Scientific and Regulatory Review Committee for nearly seven years and also chaired the Additives Working Group of FEDIAF. UK Pet Food described its own purpose as building deep trust and lasting influence. [2, 17]

Mars also addressed Parliament directly. Written evidence received by a House of Lords committee in April 2025 sought a UK-European Union sanitary, phytosanitary and veterinary agreement that would reduce checks, fees and trade friction. The submission came from Mars's Senior Manager for Public Affairs and explained that Britain was the company's second-largest market by sales value. [20]

Department for Business and Trade disclosures record Mars or Mars Petcare participating in ministerial engagements during 2025, including a multi-company meeting in June and a logistics decarbonisation roundtable in July. [21-22] Earlier Food Standards Agency hospitality records included a director attending a Mars UK reception. [28] Each entry is modest in isolation. Together they demonstrate routine access across employment, trade, public health, regulation and sustainability.

The position is more consequential because Mars is no longer only a manufacturer supplying veterinary practices. It owns Linnaeus. Mars told the House of Lords in 2025 that it operated veterinary hospitals

and clinics at approximately 180 UK locations. The Competition and Markets Authority's veterinary market investigation subsequently identified Linnaeus as Mars Petcare-owned. [20, 23]

Mars can therefore operate across pet food, therapeutic diets, scientific research, public policy and veterinary services. That vertical reach creates legitimate questions about professional independence, information flows and the incentives governing dietary advice. Ownership does not prove improper clinical conduct. It does make disclosure, scrutiny and independent research indispensable.

The United States disclosed lobbying at scale

American disclosure records make the political programme unusually visible. Mars maintains an internal federal lobbying operation and retains outside advisers. A Mars filing for the third quarter of 2025 reported \$300,000 in lobbying expense. Its fourth-quarter filing reported \$180,000. Squire Patton Boggs reported \$190,000 in lobbying income from Mars for the second quarter of 2025. [24-26]

The disclosed subjects included legislation and regulation concerning food and pet food, maintaining Food and Drug Administration resources for animal health and pet food safety, agriculture, international trade, taxation and tariffs. The bodies contacted included Congress, the Department of Agriculture, the FDA, the Department of Commerce, the US Trade Representative, the Treasury, the State Department and the White House Office. [24-26]

The Squire Patton Boggs filing also identifies lobbyists with previous roles in congressional offices and committees. That revolving-door expertise is neither unusual nor unlawful. Its relevance is practical: Mars purchases detailed knowledge of how policy is formed, how access is obtained and how proposals are framed for political acceptance.

Mars's trade association disclosure adds the Pet Food Institute, Sustainable Food Policy Alliance, National Confectioners Association and USA Rice, all with board participation reported in 2019. Trade associations permit common positions, shared technical submissions and collective advocacy while making the contribution of any individual member harder for the public to trace. [2]

Psychology and politics formed one system

The political and psychological programmes should not be treated as unrelated files. Psychological and social research could identify why people acquired pets, how strongly they attached to them, what barriers prevented ownership, and what benefits owners believed they received. PIAS, schools, veterinarians and the media could translate those findings into socially approved messages. Political engagement could then protect the infrastructure within which those messages operated.

The system did not need to instruct every participant or control every publication. It needed mutually reinforcing incentives. Journalists received ready-made pet stories. Veterinarians gained clients and authority. Schools received teaching materials. Councils received a language of responsible ownership. Governments received investment, jobs and public-private initiatives. Mars gained an enlarging and increasingly resilient market.

The approach continues in modern form. Mars states that its Waltham science hub has conducted decades of research into human-animal interaction. Its current Pets and Wellbeing Study Program involves 35,000 people across more than 20 countries, while Mars and Calm commissioned YouGov research involving more than 30,000 pet owners. [27] Research of this scale can contribute useful knowledge. It also gives Mars exceptional capacity to define the social meaning of pet ownership and to make its commercial ecosystem appear synonymous with human and animal wellbeing.

The missing disease programme

A stark asymmetry follows. Mars-funded and Mars-associated research examined the benefits of pets, human attachment, companionship, loneliness, responsible ownership and conditions favourable to continuing pet ownership. Where was the comparably energetic, independent programme asking whether the products being promoted were triggering periodontal disease and associated systemic harms?

Periodontal disease was not an obscure theoretical possibility. It was visible in veterinary consulting rooms and repeatedly treated as an ordinary feature of domestic life. The industrial response concentrated on dental products, professional cleaning and owner compliance rather than confronting the biological mismatch between carnivore dentition and soft or pulverised industrial diets. The distinction is fundamental. Managing disease within the commercial system is not the same as testing whether the system triggers the disease.

My published work from 1992 onwards proposed that diet-induced periodontal disease in domestic carnivores should be understood as a cybernetic disturbance with local and systemic consequences. Whether Mars agreed is not the decisive issue. A corporation funding extensive pet-related research, advising owners and governments, and presenting itself as a scientific authority had reason to investigate a foreseeable challenge to its products. The veterinary profession and regulators had independent duties to do the same.

The available public record presently establishes omission, institutional failure and conflicts requiring investigation. It does not yet establish every element of deliberate suppression. Active suppression would require evidence that relevant people knew of adverse findings or serious hypotheses and acted to conceal, obstruct, discredit or prevent their investigation. Internal correspondence, research protocols, abandoned projects, legal advice, university agreements and responses to Raw Meaty Bones and the periodontal hypothesis may supply that evidence.

The political benefit

Mars's public programmes create several political benefits at once. They make ministers reluctant to challenge a celebrated regional employer and investor. They encourage regulators to treat the company as a source of technical expertise. They permit industry positions to travel through associations and professional bodies. They associate Mars with children, companionship, mental health, sustainability and responsible ownership. They turn scrutiny of industrial pet food into an apparent threat to jobs, science, consumer convenience and valued human-animal relationships.

This is why the issue cannot be reduced to whether a particular politician received a donation. The deeper achievement is structural. Mars becomes embedded in the institutions that would otherwise be expected to question it. The corporation's products, research, social programmes, veterinary ownership and public-policy activity then support one another.

A captured or habituated institution need not receive corrupt instructions. It may defend the established system because its vocabulary, relationships, evidence base and conception of responsible conduct were formed inside that system. Negative feedback is weakened. Disease becomes normal, recurring treatment becomes responsible care, and criticism of the diet is treated as fringe or dangerous.

Questions requiring answers

- Which lobbyists and public affairs firms have represented Mars, its subsidiaries and its trade associations in Australia, Britain and the United States since 1966?
- Which ministers, departments, regulators, parliamentary offices and political advisers met Mars or its representatives, on what dates and concerning which policies?
- What public grants, concessional finance, tax benefits and confidential state assistance have been supplied to Mars pet food and veterinary operations?
- Which Mars employees held governing or committee positions in pet food, veterinary, food, advertising, scientific and animal welfare organisations?
- What psychological, sociological, market and educational research did Mars or PIAS commission, and what commissioning briefs, raw data and unpublished findings survive?
- When did Mars, PIAS, Waltham and associated veterinary researchers first examine the relationship between food form, periodontal disease and systemic illness?
- What decisions were made about investigating, publishing, disputing or omitting that relationship?
- What communications occurred concerning Raw Meaty Bones, the Cybernetic Hypothesis of Periodontal Disease and requests for independent investigation?
- Where are PIAS and PetNet records now held, and what preservation obligations apply to material generated during a fifty-year public influence campaign?

Conclusion

Mars cultivated affection among children and families, authority among veterinarians and scientists, and political capital among governments. Those activities helped create the social demand, professional endorsement and political permission upon which the industrial pet food experiment depended.

Yet the same system failed to investigate, disclose and correct adequately the diet-related suffering occurring in animals' mouths and bodies. The decisive question is therefore no longer merely how Mars sold pet food. It is how an entire society was persuaded, organised and governed so that the experiment could continue, and why the institutions entrusted with negative feedback did not stop it.

The accompanying evidence register separates primary records, corporate statements, institutional material, scholarly references and investigative leads. It should be expanded as further lobbying returns, archived PIAS material, government records and internal documents become available.

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