

Who Writes the Rules for Pets and Pet Food

PIAS, the Australian pet industry coalition and Mars lobbying in the United States

A pet-food company can influence the world in which its products are bought without putting its name on every message. It can fund a public information service, join an industry coalition, support school and health programmes, commission research, promote a definition of “responsible” ownership and lobby over the rules governing its claims. These are decisions made and paid for by identifiable organisations. The documentary record lets us see much of the machinery. It also demands a harder question: whose interests did that machinery serve when animals and owners bore the risks?

Mars funding behind the public information service

A document lodged on the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission public register describes the Petcare Information and Advisory Service Australia Pty Ltd (PIAS) as established in 1966 and says plainly that its funding was provided by Mars Petcare. Its stated charter included original research, information for interested parties, education in responsible ownership and encouragement of pet ownership. “Non-commercial” was the description of the service; it was not a description of its funder’s interest in the market. [1]

The distinction matters. A reader may judge advice from a public-spirited information service differently from advice coming directly from a pet-food manufacturer. PIAS supplied the reassuring voice; Mars supplied the money. The arrangement, openly described in this filing, deserves to be read alongside the research, school material and policy advocacy that PIAS helped carry into Australian public life.

The coalition wrote down its programme

In 2009, The Power of Pets listed PIAS among the members of the Australian Companion Animal Council (ACAC), alongside the Australian Veterinary Association, the Pet Food Industry Association of Australia, animal-health, veterinary-product, pet-industry and kennel organisations. The report did not hide the economic stakes. For 2007 it estimated A\$4.736 billion in Australian pet expenditure: A\$2.020 billion on food, of which A\$1.540 billion was manufactured food, and A\$1.155 billion on veterinary charges. These are expenditure estimates, not profit figures. [2]

The same publication treated smaller homes, changing lifestyles and government rules as threats to pet ownership. It urged attention to the barriers that might reduce the number of pets or limit where they could live. It said governments could hinder or help ownership through access to open space, limits on animals and registration charges. [2]

ACAC then set out how it intended to act: publicise studies and surveys, speak for its version of responsible ownership, answer opponents, take part in legislation, run education and promotional events, and affiliate with kindred organisations. It listed PetPEP among the school programmes and reported representation on the federal Australian Animal Welfare Strategy Committee. [2]

There is nothing accidental about this. The coalition described an organised effort to shape opinion, education and law in a market whose food and veterinary revenue it had just quantified. That is a strong inference from its own document. The document does not establish that every member approved every

activity or that Mars directed ACAC's decisions. It does establish PIAS's membership and the coalition's declared purposes.

Children and trusted institutions carried the message

The Australian Veterinary Association's 2000 annual report says Dr Diane Hopkins obtained PIAS funding to write the original PetPEP school programme in 1991. The AVA adopted it as a national community-relations programme in 1999. Brochures went to 8,500 primary schools; the proposed teaching pattern exposed pupils repeatedly during their primary years. The report also records work with veterinarians, councils, education departments and radio stations. It says the NSW Education Department lifted a ban on PetPEP advertising under direct orders from the Premier after the AVA Board approached him. That is the AVA's contemporaneous account of the intervention; the underlying government correspondence has not been produced here. [3]

The school programme survives. Current AVA training calls PetPEP an investment in "the pet owners of the future" and tells presenters how to use its resources to promote their veterinary practices. Those words put professional market-building beside education in the AVA's own description. The available training page does not establish that Mars funds PetPEP today. [4]

The Royal Children's Hospital offers another revealing example. Its 2009 account states that PIAS provided expert information and funding for the Dogs 'n' Kids material, first introduced in 1997. The hospital was addressing real dog-bite injuries to children, especially the youngest children, and distributed the safety material widely. The point is not that preventing bites was wrong. The point is that a Mars-funded service gained a role in a trusted paediatric channel while the wider programme continued to normalise and facilitate pet ownership. The merits of the safety advice and the commercial interest behind its sponsor both belong in view. [5]

The messages persist after PIAS

Inner West Council's dog-owner page, showing an update date of 7 October 2026, still recommends PIAS's Pets in the City as a guide for prospective and current owners. It also cites The Power of Pets and identifies ACAC as a voice for the pet-care industry. This is a live council endorsement of old industry material. It does not show present-day Mars funding of the council or that council staff knew the provenance. It does show how an earlier campaign can keep working after its sponsor's public-facing service has faded from view. [6]

Mars is still lobbying over the rules

A US Lobbying Disclosure Act report for July to September 2026, posted on 20 October, records US\$220,000 in lobbying expenditure by Mars, Incorporated. Mars reported support for a Pet Food Uniform Regulatory Reform Act and work on FDA ingredient safety, pet-food safety, marketing policy and evidence-based food labelling. The filing names Congress, the FDA, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Office of Management and Budget among the bodies contacted. This amount must not be added to outside firms' fees without checking the accounting. [7]

Mars's 2026 report calls the proposal H.R. 7380, the number used for the 2024 bill. The current 2025 version is H.R. 597. That discrepancy needs an explanation. The introduced text of H.R. 597 would bar states from imposing requirements on pet-food labels, labelling and advertising, while expressly retaining

specified state food-safety oversight. It would permit certain tartar, plaque, breath and urinary-health claims without FDA premarket approval if they are truthful, nonmisleading and adequately substantiated. It also contains provisions on “sometimes present” ingredients and the listing order for ingredients comprising 2 per cent or less. These are proposals, not enacted rules. [8]

The Association of American Feed Control Officials argues that the proposed transfer would remove state review of labels and marketing claims and weaken protection against misleading claims. Supporters argue that national rules would replace inconsistent state requirements and speed innovation. The dispute is therefore over who checks what a pet-food company may tell the public, and when. Mars has a direct commercial stake in that answer. [9]

A history that makes scrutiny essential

There is a concrete reason to insist on independent substantiation. In 2016 the US Federal Trade Commission charged that Mars Petcare made false or unsupported longevity claims for Eukanuba and falsely represented the strength of the supporting study. Mars settled through a final consent order requiring reliable evidence for future pet-food health claims and restricting misrepresentation of studies. The settlement was not a judicial finding that the whole Mars portfolio causes disease. It is an official record of a formal challenge to one Mars pet-food health campaign and an enforceable order governing future claims. [10]

Against that history, a proposal to alter the review of pet-food marketing claims cannot be waved away as mere housekeeping. The public needs to know precisely what Mars asked legislators and agencies to change, why it asked, what evidence it supplied, and which state checks would remain. The records should be open to animal-welfare, consumer-protection and independent scientific scrutiny.

The question that cannot be outsourced to the industry

The documented sequence is stark: Mars funded PIAS; PIAS joined a coalition that openly promoted pet ownership through research, schools and legislation; PIAS-funded material entered respected professional and health institutions; some of that material still appears in council advice; and Mars now reports lobbying over the regulatory treatment of pet-food claims. These documents span different countries and decades. They demonstrate a recurring method and overlapping interests, not a proven continuous command structure.

The unresolved moral question is bigger than whether the paperwork was properly filed. If a company helps create demand for animals and processed food, and if the animals then suffer preventable disease while owners pay for food and treatment, public-benefit language cannot settle the account. Nor can a claim of “responsible ownership” transfer all responsibility to families whose choices have been shaped by the industry itself. The burden should fall on those with the research budgets, product data and marketing records to disclose what they knew about harm, what comparisons they avoided and why the campaign continued.

Publish the documents. Identify the funders and decision makers. Test the claims against independent evidence, including the neglected questions of dental disease, diet and lifetime health. Let the public, regulators and courts decide the consequences from a complete record.

Primary documents and source notes

- 1 [ACCC public register filing, 2013, PIAS entry and Mars funding](#)
- 2 [Australian Companion Animal Council, The Power of Pets, 2009, pp 1, 7, 12–13](#)
- 3 [Australian Veterinary Association, Annual Report 2000, pp 37–40](#)
- 4 [AVA PetPEP presenter training page, accessed 23 October 2026](#)
- 5 [Royal Children's Hospital, Helping dogs n kids get along, 2 December 2009](#)
- 6 [Inner West Council, Being a responsible dog owner, page dated 7 October 2026](#)
- 7 [Mars, Incorporated, US LD 2 report for Q3 2026, filed 20 October 2026](#)
- 8 [US House of Representatives, H.R. 597, introduced 21 January 2025, sections 3\(b\), 3\(e\)–\(g\)](#)
- 9 [Association of American Feed Control Officials, concerns about H.R. 597](#)
- 10 [Federal Trade Commission, final Eukanuba consent order announcement, 13 December 2016](#)