Image courtesy Beagle Freedom Aust.

The case for an independent 'Liberty' movement in Australia supported by research institutions

A more sustainable and ethical approach to managing non-human animals in research

By Paula Wallace – July 2016

Abstract

It's estimated that there are thousands if not millions of non-human animals used for scientific purposes in Australia that could safely live their natural life spans following their use in research but for the majority, where death is not the end point of research itself, euthanasia is the current practice.

While there is insufficient data to enable a sound statistical analysis of animal-based research activities in Australia and the institutions involved, there is ample evidence to predicate the need for a rehoming alternative for the animals that are considered by some to be a critical input to exploratory/experimental activities such as basic/fundamental science, human and animal health research, product and toxicity testing and agricultural research.

By supporting and/or investing in alternative outcomes for these animals, the institutions* that are responsible for these animals; the animals themselves; and broader society will benefit in a number of ways.

This paper introduces the term Liberty movement to describe the global emergence of sanctuaries or specialist centres, designed to home and support animals post-research, which do not currently exist in Australia. While there is small-scale rehoming taking place here, there are neither industry/government-supported or dedicated facilities.

The advantages of supporting and/or investing in an independently-operated Liberty or sanctuary movement to institutions that are engaged in – through administering, conducting, funding or supporting – animal-based research, are well-founded and numerous. They range from competitive advantage and better risk management, to an increased capacity to meet government recommendations and global trends.

The benefits of a Liberty movement to animals used for scientific purposes are clear and obvious: they will have the opportunity to live out their natural life spans, as well as experience an environment different from that of the institutional context, free from scientific intervention, where the care and services are available to enable them to lead an enriching existence.

Although rehoming sanctuaries or centres will only be able to care for a fraction of the animals used for scientific purposes in Australia, they will play an important role in placing greater awareness and value on the lives of animals; and in assisting research institutions to create internal culture change and better align their activities with public and stakeholder values, international trends and government recommendations.

* While the organisations engaged with animal-based research activities in Australia - through administering, conducting, funding or supporting such activities - may vary in terms of their purpose, structure, governance and function, the term research institution is used in the context of this paper to include primarily: universities; government agencies; companies; and biomedical research entities. The paper highlights, where relevant, the benefits and drivers for involvement in a Liberty movement, where they differ between different types of research institutions.

The Liberty movement: an 'ACE' for research institutions

'ACE' is the acronym derived from the expected benefits to research institutions of supporting and/or investing in a Liberty movement. *Engagement may be in the form of introducing animals to a Liberty Centre for rehoming and/or through financial support and strategic partnership*.

The benefits of supporting and/or investing in a Liberty movement to research institutions that are engaged with animal-based research – through administering, conducting, funding or supporting – can be broadly characterised as follows:

1. Achieve organisational advantage by adopting a sustainable and ethical position on animal treatment that reflects stakeholder and public values, and minimises risk.

2. Contribute to Australia being a leader in biotechnology and life sciences by developing world-class practices in all aspects of animal-based research.

3. Enable the organisation to better align with government recommendations in relation to rehoming animals, through development of facilities and resources.

Each of these benefits will be discussed in the sections that follow, which also attempt to identify the type and number of animals that may be suitable for rehoming at Liberty Centres; and to contextualise the concept of a Liberty movement within historic discussions on animal ethics in research.

The rehoming opportunity

The latest available figures, for 2014, show that the percentage of animals used for non-observational[1] procedures in Australia, involving varying levels of invasiveness and challenge but not resulting in death was 31% (1.62 million animals) from a total of 5,195,329[2] used for scientific purposes. This is based on data from only four States of Australia but includes three of the largest user States of NSW, Victoria and Western Australia. In theory, it is animals from this group that could potentially be available, but not necessarily suitable, for rehabilitation and rehoming. This includes 525,981 animals from Victoria and 811,499 animals from NSW[3].

Of the total for the four states recorded, across all types of research including observational studies, the largest group were rats and mice representing 41% (2.1 million animals); followed by fish, amphibians and other aquatic animals at 21% (1.1 million animals); as well as 676,066 native mammals, 6,613 dogs, 2,183 cats, and 202 primates.[4]

There were a further 15% (790,686 animals) involved in genetic modification, which are being excluded from this paper as their rehoming would require permanent and specialist facilities to be provided for their ongoing care according to Australian regulations.[5]

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[1] Animals involved in observational studies are not included where they are considered non-invasive as they are mostly conducted with free-living or sanctuary populations
[2] http://www.humaneresearch.org.au/statistics/statistics_2014
[3] http://www.humaneresearch.org.au/statistics/statistics_2014
[4] http://www.humaneresearch.org.au/statistics/statistics_2014
[5] http://www.humaneresearch.org.au/statistics/statistics_2014

While the vast majority of animals used in research are mice and rats, and many of them do have the potential to be rehomed, they are a special case that requires careful consideration and the development of a responsible, long-term strategy that assesses their potential quality of life post-research. This is due to their large numbers; the expectation that they will generate less demand for rehoming from the general public should that be considered an option; and the specific needs of the mostly male rodents.

National statistics do not categorise animal species against type or purpose of procedure, however the NSW government does provide this information which is significant given the State is the largest user of animals in research in Australia representing 57% of the animals recorded across the four reporting States.

What the latest figures (2013-14) from NSW indicate is that there were large numbers of farm animals such as poultry, pigs, sheep and cattle being used for research purposes in NSW in a variety of procedures. Aside from the largest groups - rats, mice, amphibians and aquatic species - there were a number of animals that may be suitable for rehoming as shown in Figure 1. These included captive native and exotic birds (1,210), cats (179), dogs (1,760), ferrets (34), goats (919), guinea pigs (749), horses (691), primates (22) and rabbits (1,633)[6]. There were also 4,262 native mammals, 5,029 reptiles and 72 exotic zoo animals, some of which could possibly be rehomed at existing sanctuaries.

Many guinea pigs used for scientific purposes would be suitable for rehoming in Australia every year.

[6] Animal Research Review Panel Annual Report 2013-2014, NSW Department of Primary Industries

Figure 1

NSW animal use in research in 2013-14 - by animal type, research category and procedure categories 1, 3, 4, 5, 6 & 7 only

Type of animal/Research category	Education	Research - Human or Animal Biology	Research - Human or Animal Health & Welfare	Research - Animal Management or Production	Production of Biological Products	Diagnostic Procedures	Regulatory Product Testing	TOTAL for each animal type
Amphibians	518	28809	59					29386
Aquatic	3725	15506	40825	2071		300		62427
Birds - Exotic captive	2		11					13
Birds - Exotic wild		74						74
Birds - native captive	212	660	244	81				1197
Birds - native wild	6141	40024	66					46231
Birds - other	33							33
Cats	70				1		108	179
Cattle	4487	1363		6637	55		74	12616
Dogs	667	548		278	59		208	1760
Domestic mammals - other	54			27				81
Exotic feral	82	2115	50					2247
Exotic zoo		33	39					72
Ferrets	34							34
Goats	26			888	5			919
Guinea Pigs	82	193	380				94	749
Horses	501	143		18	23		6	691
Mice	1179	63986	63835	9	45	60	876	129990
Native mammals	2021	1142	1067	32				4262
Pigs	837	53		12774				13664
Poultry	1362	20	2615	171277	12008	45		187327
Primates		14	8					22
Rabbits	65	347	52	74	570		525	1633
Rats	448	14700	3787		76	82	657	19750
Reptiles	435	4013	40	541				5029
Sheep	8793	1267		32965	57	61	6573	49716
TOTAL for each research category	31774	175010	113078	227672	12899	548	9121	**570102**

NOTES
Data includes procedure categories: 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 only. It excludes procedure categories 2, 8 & 9 which involve death of the animal or production of genetically modified animals
Data excludes animals used for the purposes of stock breeding; stock maintenance; and environmental study
Descriptions of procedure categories:
1. Observation with minor interference - included in table
2. Animal unconscious without recovery - not included in table
3. Minor conscious intervention - included in table
4. Minor surgery with recovery - included in table
5. Major surgery with recovery - included in table
6. Minor physiological challenge - included in table
7. Major physiological challenge - included in table
8. Death as an endpoint - not included in table
9. Production of genetically modified animals - not included in table
Source: Animal Research Review Panel Annual Report 2013-2014, NSW Department of Primary Industries, 2014

Licenced facilities

Based on information provided in 2016 by governments in NSW, Queensland, Western Australia and Tasmania[7], the breakdown of licenced research institutions is shown in Figure 2.

Of these licenced research institutions, only 6% were publicly listed and less than half of them with the Australian Securities Exchange (ASX); a further 11% were university owned or operated; 13% were not-for-profit or community- owned; 13%

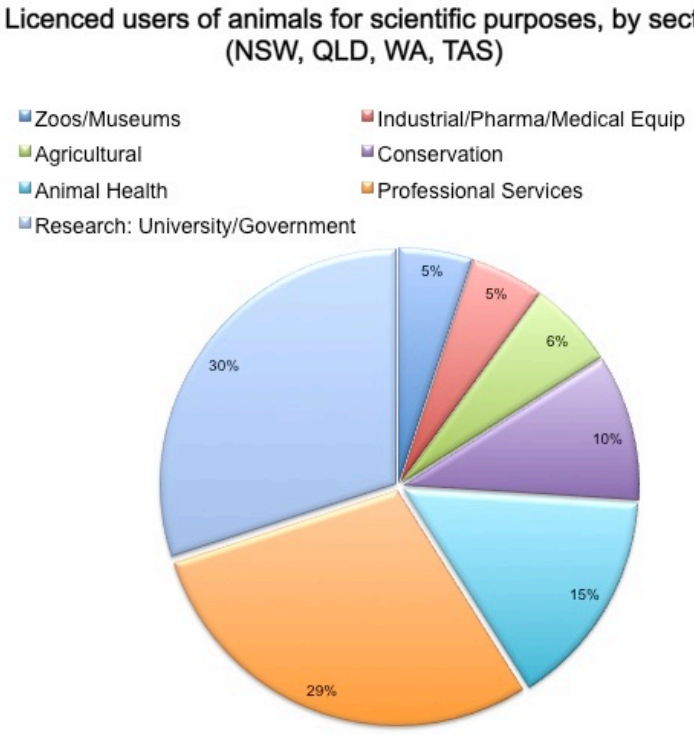
[7] Information from various sources, supplied by Humane Research Australia, 2016

were government owned or operated; and the remainder (57%) were privately owned or employee-owned.[8]

While this provides some indication of the share of animal-based research conducted in different sectors, it does not allow insight into individual animals and their involvement. It is also complicated by the fact that a significant proportion of licenced facilities (30% or more) are likely to be conducting field-based research on free-living or sanctuary populations which are not relevant to this paper.

The fact that information is not readily available from all states also alters the analysis as Victoria for instance leads Australia's biotechnology sector, with particular strengths in the fields of medicine and agriculture. Victoria is home to about 150 biotechnology companies, as well as 13 major medical research institutes, 10 teaching hospitals conducting significant research, and nine universities. Victorian companies make up 68% of the aggregate value of Australia's top 20 listed biotechnology companies, including Australia's largest, Commonwealth Serum Laboratories (CSL).

Figure 2: (information sourced from Humane Research Australia)



Research conducted by ozsheba - shareholder engagement on behalf of animals – in 2014, surveyed 117 ASX-listed companies in the categories of pharmaceuticals, biotechnology, life sciences, healthcare and household and personal products. Of the 39 companies that responded, 22 advised that they "do not – directly or indirectly – use animals as part of their research for the benefit of humans"[9]. A policy of non-disclosure was indicated by a further three companies, and the remainder said they comply with regulatory requirements for animal research – which means animals are likely or definitely used by 44% of the companies that replied.

[8] Figures do not include any licences held by primary and secondary education sector as they are not relevant to this paper

[9] https://ozsheba.wordpress.com/pharma-and-biotech-companies/

A bigger picture

In order to accurately assess the availability/suitability of animals used for scientific purposes for rehoming, it is necessary to have nationally consistent datasets that provide information on:

- details of licenced facilities including the number and type of animals used for research purposes;
- the types of procedures the animals are involved with – actual, not intended, procedures – and the impact of procedures including the incidence of death;
- information from meetings of animals ethics committees on their decisions especially around the fate of animals at the conclusion of research;
- the projects funded by the National Health & Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and the Australian Research Council (ARC) that involve animal-based research.

The rehoming opportunity: in summary

- More than 1.62 million captive animals used for scientific purposes (in 2014) Australia-wide, would have theoretically been available, but not necessarily suitable, for rehoming.

- In NSW there are a number of species that could potentially be considered for rehoming such as farm animals, cats, dogs, ferrets, goats, guinea pigs, rabbits and primates, to name a few – potentially more than 570,000 in total.

- Of facilities licenced to use animals for scientific purposes in four states of Australia, a significant proportion are universities, research institutes and government agencies, a trend which is likely to be reflected nationally.

- Much of the basic science conducted in Australia is supported by taxpayer-funded grants through the NHMRC and ARC, some of which involves animals. Universities were the primary recipients of current funding (more than 65% from the NHMRC and 100% from ARC), with the remainder going to research institutes and government agencies.

- Although biotechnology and pharmaceutical/healthcare companies represent only a small portion of the facilities licenced to use animals for scientific purposes, figures are not available from Victoria, a centre of research in Australia where institutions receive more than 45% of NHMRC funding.

- Biotechnology and pharmaceutical/healthcare companies are a diverse group in Australia that engages with animal-based research either directly or indirectly in Australia and overseas, but the scale of their involvement is difficult to ascertain without more information.

A more sustainable and ethical approach

It's hard to argue against the more compassionate treatment of animals, especially those who have been used in scientific exploration/experimentation. Not to mention the reputational benefits that can be gained by research institutions adopting a more ethical approach that considers options other than euthanasia, or further research, for animals at the conclusion of studies.

Nevertheless, from an organisational perspective, the rationale for supporting and/or investing in an initiative such as a Liberty Centre can be found within established frameworks of sustainability and global socio-political movements.

Irrespective of different organisational approaches to sustainability, a more ethical approach to the management of animals post-research offers value and benefits broadly in the areas of:

- reputational and competitive advantage;
- improved stakeholder and public engagement;
- harmonisation with global trends; and
- alignment with government recommendations.

All of these benefits can generate significant and measurable value not only in better financial performance but in attracting the best people and stimulating investment and partnerships with external organisations.

It has been shown over the past 20 years that, in a competitive environment, a successful way to improve reputation and achieve market differentiation is through integrating sustainability into business[10].

According to research by Deutsche Bank, companies with high ratings for environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors have a lower cost of debt and equity; 89% of the studies reviewed show that companies with high ESG ratings outperform the market in the medium (three to five years) and long (five to 10 years) term[11].

From an investor perspective, ESG issues can relate specifically to socially responsible investment strategies, or more broadly to understanding and identifying material sources of social risk. Recently, investors have become more active in engaging directly with organisations about ESG risks[1213].

In this context, issues related to animals in industry are starting to appear on the sustainability agenda.[14] They have become the subject of new assessment tools for investors that connect ESG performance with corporate performance – namely the Business Benchmark for Animal Welfare (BBFAW) and the Farm Animal Investment Risk & Return (FAIRR).

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[10] https://www.bcg.com/documents/file32201.pdf
[11] https://www.google.com/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8
[12] http://accsr.com.au/what-is-csr/
[13] http://www.ey.com/AU/en/Newsroom/News-releases/news-EY-investors-warn-non-financial-disclosures-are-inadequate
[14] http://accsr.com.au/news/animal-welfare-and-responsible-procurement/

A report released earlier this year quoted the International Finance Corporation thus:

> *In the case of animal welfare, failure to keep pace with changing consumer expectations and market opportunities could put companies and their investors at a competitive disadvantage in an increasingly global marketplace*[15].

It's clear that research institutions that support and/or invest in a Liberty movement can demonstrate that they are more ethical in regard to their treatment of animals and are better managing potential social risks, than those who are not.

Such risks currently lie in current practices around stakeholder and public engagement on the issue of animals in research on two counts: firstly, the low level of engagement by research institutions; and secondly the influence of engagement on any subsequent sustainability initiatives and/or reporting.

Beyond the 'Code'

It can be argued that the animal-based research sector currently does not have a credible community-wide 'licence to operate' in Australia. A 2013 opinion poll[16] commissioned by Humane Research Australia and carried out by Nexus Research, found that 57% of respondents were not even aware animals are used in experimental research in Australia; and only 13% of respondents said that they would donate to a health or medical research charity if they knew it was funding animal experiments.

This lack of public awareness coupled with low levels of disclosure and reporting on animal-based activities, much of which are funded by taxpayers, means that many Australians have not be able to formulate informed views on the matter.

Public engagement in regard to animal-based research is minimal if non-existent amongst Australian research institutions, with few responding favourably to requests for information; or developing policies for their use of animals beyond minimum compliance with the national Code: the *Australian code of practice for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes*.

For instance, more than 60% of pharmaceutical companies do not disclose whether they have taken any measures to ensure or improve animal welfare during animal testing[17].

But as we have seen in other industries where animals are part of the supply chain, reliance on a company's compliance with Australian regulation has not been sufficient to protect it from the impact of changes in public opinion and government policy[18]. Recent high profile examples include live export and the greyhound racing industry in NSW. It's worth noting, that for the first time the Coalition Government announced prior to the recent Election (2016), that if it was re-elected it would ban the sale of new cosmetic products in Australia that have been tested on animals[19].

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[15] http://www.fairr.org/wpcontent/uploads/FAIRR_Report_Factory_Farming_Assessing_Investment_Risks.pdf

[16] http://www.humaneresearch.org.au/interview/media-release-australians-say-no-to-animal-experiments

[17] http://www.sustainalytics.com/webinar-pharmaceuticals-sector-report-questions-and-answers

[18] http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2013/s3753039.htm

[19] https://au.be.yahoo.com/beauty/a/31758242/buying-cruelty-free-cosmetics-is-set-to-get-a-whole-lot-easier/#page1

Some would argue that many of the state-based laws that govern the use of animals in research, teaching and product testing, are not sufficient to drive change within research institutions. Most regulations require adherence to the national Code and the use of animal ethics committees. The Code recommends adoption of the 3Rs – to reduce, refine and replace the use of animals in research – and also rehoming where appropriate although the latter is not enforced.

While a Liberty movement does not engage in the debate on the ethics of animal-based research itself, the involvement of research institutions will require them, to some extent, to re-evaluate practices around public and stakeholder engagement.

It can be difficult to obtain information from research institutions in Australia in regard to their use of animals.

It also presents an unique opportunity for research institutions to proactively address risks associated with the lack of public accountability[20] and develop sound consultation and communication processes that can be integrated into sustainability initiatives and reporting.

As research on sustainability reporting among multinational companies in the chemical and pharmaceutical sectors in Europe found, without a robust stakeholder dialogue, linked to sound governance structures, it's "difficult to see how reports can ever reflect all issues of importance". Such discussion should also discover "issues which would not otherwise be reported on"[21].

Universities are not exempt from this discussion, as they are beginning to produce sustainability frameworks and reporting mechanisms, and operate in increasingly global and competitive markets.

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[20] https://theconversation.com/the-elusive-ethics-of-animal-ethics-committees-10056

[21] Carol A. Adams, (2002) "Internal organisational factors influencing corporate social and ethical reporting: Beyond current theorising", Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal, Vol.15 Iss: 2, pp.223-250 DOI. Accessed on 18.7.16 via: http://drcaroladams.net/internal-organisational-factors-influencing-corporate-social-and-ethical-reporting/

The first sustainability report by any university, which was externally assured and compliant with the Global Reporting Initiative, was released by LaTrobe University in 2011. In addition to environmental performance and targets, it discussed community engagement work and listed one of its stakeholder groups as "future generations and society at large":

> *Universities have material direct and indirect social, environmental and economic impacts through the research we do, through the experience and education we provide future leaders and parents and through the way in which we engage with communities, government, business and our broader society.*

There is an acceptance from the scientific community that confidence in its research rests on it embracing an "open approach and taking part in an ongoing conversation about why and how animals are used in research" [22].

The life science sector in the UK believes that as a world leader in research it has an obligation to demonstrate continuing and high standards of animal welfare[23]. Furthermore, to gain the public's trust it must be "open, transparent, and accountable"[24] for the research it conducts, funds or supports.

In 2012 the sector launched an engagement initiative - that has now attracted more than 100 signatories - to sign a Declaration on Openness on Animal Research. The resulting Concordat, released in 2014, states a primary aim of "culture change within the life-science sector, and a resulting shift to greater societal understanding of why and how research institutions use animals in science"[25].

Encouragingly, the concerns often cited by the animal-based research community in Australia around greater transparency and broader public engagement – of impacts to funding, safety, security and reputation – have not be realised in other parts of the world where industry and governments have embraced greater openness in relation to animals in research.

Universities internationally are embracing greater openness in communication about their use of animals in research.

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[22] www.understandinganimalresearch.org.uk/policy/concordat-on-openness-on-animal-research/
[23] www.understandinganimalresearch.org.uk/policy/concordat-on-openness-on-animal-research/
[24] www.understandinganimalresearch.org.uk/policy/concordat-on-openness-on-animal-research/
[25] http://www.understandinganimalresearch.org.uk/files/9214/4319/6363/UAR_Concordat_Report_2015.pdf

Global trends

The Johns Hopkins Center for Alternatives to Animal Testing was founded back in 1981 with a three year, $1 million grant from the Cosmetic, Toiletry and Fragrance Association. The kind of leadership shown by industry players in supporting the Center, has not only led to a massive reduction in product testing on animals globally but was instrumental in securing the public's support and therefore the industry's future.

There are now numerous international examples of mostly voluntary initiatives that:

- make direct investment in developing alternatives to animal-based research, also known as replacement science;
- account for and report the use of animals in research;
- improve stakeholder and public discussion on animal-based research;
- provide ethical options for animals post-research; and
- develop tools to enable the exchange knowledge and research.

Despite the fact that Australia used around 6.99 million animals for scientific purposes in 2014, a number that has been increasing annually since 2004[26], research institutions and policy makers are yet to align with these global trends.

Support of a Liberty movement gives Australian research institutions the opportunity to demonstrate a more sustainable and ethical approach to end-of-research management of animals. However, for Australia to continue its ascendancy in the world biotechnology[27] ranks it is necessary that it keep pace with global standards including efforts to reduce the number of animals used in research.

Unlike other governments around the world that directly fund replacement science, Australia has only one dedicated program that is administered and funded by the charity Medical Advances Without Animals Trust[28].

The global trend towards rehoming is gathering momentum with sanctuaries and government policy being created to see the transition of animals from research facilities to "retirement" as opposed to euthanasia.

In May 2014, Minnesota became the first state in the US and first political body in the world to mandate that laboratory dogs and cats be adopted when the research is completed. If a dog or cat is used in a taxpayer funded research experiment and is healthy at its end, the organisation must offer them up for public adoption through a rescue organisation like Beagle Freedom Project.

Rehoming is permissible under numerous laws that regulate animal use in Europe, including European Directive 2010/63/EU, with provisos to ensure that rehoming is in each animal's best interests.

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[26] http://www.humaneresearch.org.au/statistics/

[27] http://www.saworldview.com/scorecard/2015-scientific-american-worldview-overall-scores/

[28] http://www.mawa-trust.org.au/

The partly government-funded Chimp Haven in the USA provides an enriching 'retirement' for primates that were used in government testing facilities. Image courtesy of Chimp Haven USA

In November last year, it was reported[29] that the chimpanzees still used by the United States' National Institutes of Health for animal testing would soon be sent to sanctuaries for their "retirement" as the US governmental medical research agency ceases its chimp program altogether. Upon retirement, the chimps will be sent to Chimp Haven – a partly government-funded facility in Louisiana that currently houses more than 200 chimps. There are also a number of other independently operated facilities for research animal rehoming in the US and Canada.

If Australia wishes to be considered a world-class centre of research, specifically in biotechnology and life sciences, it needs to align its approach to global leaders in government and research that are embracing greater openness, public engagement, reduction in the use of animals and ethical options for animals post-research.

Aligning with government

The argument that industry's support of a Liberty movement would enable it to better align with government recommendations in relation to rehoming animals, through developing appropriate facilities and resources, is a compelling one.

[29] http://edition.cnn.com/2015/11/19/health/nih-chimpanzee-research-announcement/index.html

The national Code states that opportunities to rehome animals should be considered wherever possible. This is at odds with its *Guidelines on the care of dogs used for scientific purposes,* which states:

> *The adoption and rehoming of dogs used for scientific purposes is not endorsed as general good practice because the risk of irresponsible animal ownership may create new animal welfare problems.*[30]

In response to requests made by not-for-profit organisation Humane Research Australia, the NHMRC agreed it was "timely to consider the currency of the Guidelines that were developed in 2009"[31]. It could not be precise about the timing although it will occur within the NHMRC's 2015-2018 triennium.

The removal of this conflict between recommendations will foster effective communication between research and rehoming facilities to give cats and dogs an alternative to euthanasia.

One of three factors to be considered in regard to "when NHMRC reviews its guidelines"[32] is whether other similar guidelines (national and international) already exist regarding the topic in question.

Legislative changes in other parts of the world have resulted in the development of a sanctuary movement in recent years, most notably in the US and Europe. (see section entitled "Global trends")

In Australia, there is some evidence of small-scale rehoming[33] [34], which has been successful in assisting individual animals to achieve a good quality of life. For the remainder of animals it is likely that some are used for further research or moved to other facilities; and many are euthanised.

Small-scale rehoming of research animals demonstrates that it can be successful. Image courtesy Beagle Freedom Australia.

[30] https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines-publications/ea25
[31] Correspondence from NHMRC to Humane Research Australia – November-December 2015
[32] Correspondence from NHMRC to Humane Research Australia – November-December 2015
[33] http://beaglefreedomaustralia.org/
[34] https://www.facebook.com/Research-Animal-Rehoming-Service-240239582852629/

Only by achieving adequate scale can a Liberty movement provide the specialist services required to support animals from institutional settings and accommodate the largest possible number of animals. Thereby meeting the Australian Code to rehome research animals “wherever possible” in a safe and responsible way. This will require the support and cooperation of industry and government. Such strategic partnerships also allow for the exchange of information and shared resources where necessary, to develop solutions that meet the specific needs of animals following research activities.

Conclusion

With a high rate of animal usage for scientific purposes and low levels of public awareness and community engagement by research institutions, Australian industry, government and centres of research, will be required to take a more proactive and sustainable approach to animal-based research if it is to keep pace with global leaders in biotechnology and life sciences. Together, they have a great opportunity to develop frameworks that foster a more ethical approach to animals post-research that also reflect community views and respond to investor requirements.

The business case for corporate disclosure on sustainability issues has been established. The evidence base specific to animal welfare is less developed, however the growing awareness within the financial sector of the problems associated with factory farming demonstrates the risks and opportunities for those organisations that have chosen to proactively engage on the issue.

Coupled with the fact that Australian government guidelines recommend the rehoming of animals wherever possible, and there are large numbers of animals currently being euthanised at the conclusion of research work, a Liberty or sanctuary movement clearly offers a more sustainable approach. With the emergence of this movement in the US and Europe already underway, with the support of government in some cases, it is in Australia’s interest to consider adding to its commitment to the 3Rs, a fourth ‘R’ for rehabilitation and rehoming. Such a commitment will enable not only more mature public and stakeholder engagement, but immeasurably better outcomes for the many animals will go on to achieve great quality of life after having been used in scientific research.

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