

Animal Welfare Policy and Positions Statement 2020



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ANIMAL CARE AUSTRALIA

Animal Welfare Policy & Positions Statement

This document sets out the policies and position statements of Animal Care Australia Incorporated. It is intended that this document will operate as a living document, which will be improved upon as policy is updated.

We encourage all members to suggest edits and additions, with a view to clarifying policy and to improve the administration of the organisation.

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Contents

Introduction 4

What is Animal Welfare? 5

What is Animal Rights? 6

Enforcement of Animal Welfare Laws 7

Pet and Companion Animals 8

 Breeding of pets and companion animals8

 Responsible Breeders Policy8

 Responsible Breeders:9

 What is a sound temperament and body?9

 De-sexing9

 Commercial Breeding and ‘Pet-factories’10

 Companion Animal ‘Shows, Expos and Competitions’11

 Recreational Carriage Driving11

 Equestrian Activities12

 Dog Sporting Events12

Not for profit organisations tasked with animal welfare law compliance13

 Council Shelters and Pounds13

Exhibited Animals15

 Zoos and Wildlife Parks15

 16

 Marine Parks & Aquariums16

 Mobile Educators and Petting Zoos16

 Circus17

Animals In Research and Scientific Use18

Animals and Environmental Impacts19

 TNR – Trap, Neuter & Release19

 Biological control19

 Hunting19



Introduction

Animal Care Australia (ACA) was founded in early 2018 to represent the interests of animal keepers and breeders throughout Australia. ACA was established as an organisation where the real animal welfare experts, those who keep, care for and breed animals would lobby for real and improved animal welfare. With extreme animal rights and animal liberationist ideologies influencing government legislation, regulation and policy at our expense and to the detriment of our animals and pets, it has become necessary to provide government with a balancing voice.

Just over 60% of Australian households own pets. It is estimated more than 24 million pets are kept in the care of our community.

Originally founded to speak on behalf of owners of pet and companion animals, Animal Care Australia quickly recognised there is a need to expand our purview to include all animals held in ‘captive’ care with the exception of commercial livestock. The association has a strong committee composed of representatives for each major animal group – dogs, cats, birds, horses, reptiles, hobby farm animals, small mammals, native mammals and exhibited animals.

Animal Care Australia’s position is to promote welfare education over regulation. Our goal is to promote and encourage high standards in all interactions with the animals in our care, to encourage responsible pet ownership, and the respectful treatment of all animals in our community.

We support and consult in the continued development of animal welfare law at all levels of government, including federal, state and local government.

As a society we have a responsibility to provide care and protection for all animals living within our care.

For the purpose of this document all legislated Acts of federal and state parliament, associated regulations, policies, standards and guidelines, codes of practice, local government laws, etc. that influence or deal directly with matters of animal care and welfare will be referred to hereafter in this document as “animal welfare laws”.

What is Animal Welfare?

Animal welfare refers to the state of the animal.

Ideas about animal welfare began in ancient civilisations and exist in many religions and cultures today. Many countries incorporate some elements of animal protection in their laws.

Protecting an animal's welfare means providing for its physical and mental needs. This includes animal care, animal husbandry, and the humane treatment of the animal.

Achieving good animal welfare relies on providing animals:

1. Freedom from hunger or thirst, by providing access to fresh water and an appropriate diet;
2. Freedom from fear and distress, through appropriate treatment and surroundings;
3. Freedom from discomfort, by providing appropriate environments in which to live;
4. Freedom from pain, injury or disease, by prevention and rapid diagnosis and treatment;
5. Freedom to express natural behaviour, by providing appropriate space, facilities, and social interactions with members of their own species.

Signs that an animal has a good state of welfare can include longevity, having low levels of disease, displaying normal behaviour, and reproducing normally.

Concerns about animal welfare are normally based on the idea that we should take steps to maximise the well-being of animals whenever and however we interact with them. This includes those we keep as pets, all animals in the wild, those we include for entertainment or research, and those that we breed for food.

Animal Care Australia recognises there are circumstances where the best welfare outcome for an animal is death. Animal Care Australia supports the use of humane euthanasia where it is deemed an animal should no longer be made to suffer, or where it is impossible to secure a responsible and healthy living outcome.

✓ **ACA supports animal welfare**

What is Animal Rights?

It is Peter Singer's work that has underpinned the Animal Rights movement since the 1970s. Singer, a professor of bioethics at Princeton and the University of Melbourne, is the author of the controversial book *Animal Liberation*, which asserts that animals' interests should be given equal weight to those of humans. The book drew criticism upon its release in 1975 and remains controversial to this day.

Animal rights advocates believe humans should not make use of, own or benefit from animals. They strive for the immediate abolition of animal exploitation in any form.

Advocates of animal rights oppose the owning or keeping of all animals in captivity, including for food, entertainment, research, companionship, conservation or any other reason.

Some Animal Rights advocates, such as Ingrid Newkirk of People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) believe immediate abolition is simply unrealistic. Instead, these advocates support the pursuit of incremental welfare reform as a means to eventually abolishing all animals in captivity. They endorse animal welfare because it facilitates a "springboard into animal rights."

Animal Rights advocates use Animal Welfare to garner support for their beliefs. Their aim is to end the ownership and keeping of all animals in captivity.

Consequences of an Animal Rights philosophy include

- × No experiments on animals.
- × No breeding and killing animals for food, clothes or medicine.
- × No use of working animals – no guide dogs, no police horses, etc
- × No selective breeding for any reason other than the benefit of the animal.
- × No hunting.
- × No zoos, or use of animals in entertainment.
- × No pets or companion animals.
- × No sport involving animals.
- × No competitive animal competitions.

✓ **ACA opposes animal rights**

Enforcement of Animal Welfare Laws

With such a large number of people and animals living together and despite regulations and legislation being implemented, it is unfortunate that in some circumstances the welfare and care of animals falls below the standards and needs that our animals deserve requiring welfare laws to be reviewed.

Animal welfare laws at all levels of government are largely outdated.

1. ACA supports the rigorous review of animal welfare laws.
2. ACA, as the peak body representing animal keepers and breeders will continue to ensure ACA is central to the review of all animal welfare laws.
3. ACA supports and encourages government to legislate the formation of consultative groups that include ACA and other major animal welfare stakeholders.

Animal welfare law making has evolved in recent decades from a user driven to a department driven process.

1. ACA supports a user driven animal welfare law development process. Those who keep and breed animals are the experts.
2. Bureaucracies should be advisors and managers of the animal welfare law development process, not the dictators of what should be law.
3. Animal welfare law should be supportive of the keeping of animals in our community, acknowledging the benefits for people in terms of empathy for animals, overall health benefits for the community and sustainable outcomes for the animals.

There is insufficient funding to ensure compliance with animal welfare laws, and this is unlikely to change in the near future.

1. Not-for-profit (NFP) organisations such as the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) in each state and Animal Welfare League (AWL) are well placed to perform cost effective compliance and enforcement, however animal welfare laws and government must ensure the organisations are accountable and transparent.
2. Education of the general public is in most cases - a more economical means of improving animal welfare outcomes given limited funding. Animal Care Australia member clubs are well placed to assist in educating.
3. The current focus on reacting to reported infractions whilst most infractions go unreported is an inefficient use of resources. Extraordinary resources are often directed at single cases. Animal Care Australia encourages a review of resource policy to better target resources to improve animal welfare outcomes strategically.

Pet and Companion Animals

Pet and Companion animals covers a broad range of species including:

- Birds – including poultry and waterfowl – both native and exotics
- Dogs
- Cats
- Reptiles & amphibians
- Fish – tropical, fresh-water, and ocean-dwelling – both native and exotics
- Horses – including ponies & donkeys – although legislative differences impact their definition as a companion animal or as livestock
- Native mammals – native mammals are kept as pets in most States – the species permitted to be kept varies between States
- Small mammals – rabbits, ferrets, rats, mice, guinea pigs, etc
- Hobby farm & pet livestock – including livestock animals as well as alpacas, camels, etc kept as pets

ACA considers all species above to be domesticated animals. These animals have been continually bred in the care of their owners for many decades and should not be considered or confused with similar wild animal counterparts.

Breeding of pets and companion animals

Animal Care Australia does not support restriction on the breeding of companion animals. Animal Care Australia encourages responsible breeding and responsible ownership over restrictive breeding legislation.

There is a recognised acknowledgement that restrictive breeding also restricts genetic quality within breeds and currently many pure-breeds are being severely impacted by shrinking genetic diversity.

Responsible Breeders Policy

A 'Responsible Breeder' is responsible for the healthy wellbeing & upbringing of their pets by following best practices, animal welfare standards and including a varied healthy diet appropriate to the species.

Animal Care Australia believes that non-pedigree breeders should follow the same level of care and consideration, as those of pedigree breeders. Animal Care Australia supports a positive approach to all inter-breed crosses and genetically diverse and purebred pets.

Responsible breeders strive to improve their expertise in a range of areas including:

- Feeding and nutrition
- Housing and enclosure requirements
- Husbandry and cleanliness
- Breeding requirements of their species
- Basic genetics
- Disease control and understanding of health requirements.
- Hereditary problems within the breed/species.

Responsible Breeders:

- Generally plan ahead and aim to find good homes for the animals they breed
- Provide a high standard of care and living conditions for all of their animals
- Are genuinely concerned about the welfare of their animals for their entire lives
- Are open to questions and are willing to provide some background or history of the animals, including support and information about the upkeep to potential new owners
- Make sure the buyer will suit the animal and the animal will suit the buyer
- Breed to produce happy and healthy pets
- Comply with all animal welfare laws within their State/Territory.

Healthy animals that are sound in temperament and body are the aim of all responsible breeders. The more we know of all the factors affecting our breeding stock before breeding, the better equipped we will be to find solutions to potential problems. Responsible owners and breeders will make honest attempts to decrease the incidence of any problems.

What is a sound temperament and body?

For physical soundness, is the animal able to cope with the demands of ordinary life? Does it have a good temperament or mental soundness? Different temperaments are required for different home environments and areas of activity. Some pets are more suited in larger families with children whilst others are more suited to owners living alone. Some animals require a high exercise regime whilst others are more suited to quieter living.

Before considering breeding, you should always:

- Assess the strength of the animal, its genetic make-up, etc
- Check your capacity to look-after and house any young until new and suitable homes can be found
- Check if there is actually a need for those animals (a shortage of that species or an over-abundance)
- Ensure the animals involved are of an appropriate age.
- Females of every species should only produce a certain number of young per season. It is vital that females be allowed to recover and have breaks from pregnancy. Check Codes of Practice or best practice with Societies & Clubs. This will help maintain a healthy animal that will then produce healthy young.

✓ **ACA supports responsible breeding**

De-sexing

Companion Animal Acts in each State require the registration for breeders of dogs and cats, including the de-sexing of dogs and cats sold through pet shops, or re-homed. Animal Care Australia supports this especially while feral dog and cat populations continue to escalate and impact our native wildlife.

Animal Care Australia does not support mandatory de-sexing of all companion animals owned by members of the public for the following reasons:

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- It is impossible to enforce. Government agencies struggle with significant compliance issues and resources and community education is more economically viable
 - There would be a massive increase in numbers surrendered and abandoned due to the inability of the community to afford the veterinary costs associated.

Animal Care Australia encourages State Governments and Local Councils to expand on and provide funding for de-sexing programs, in particular, education on the benefits of de-sexing cats and dogs. Accountable reporting of statistics assessing the success of local de-sexing initiatives in reducing shelter numbers and kill rates is required.

✓ **ACA does not support mandatory de-sexing of all companion animals**

Commercial Breeding and ‘Pet-factories’

Animal Care Australia does not distinguish between ‘commercial breeding’ and ‘pet-factories’, instead supporting all breeders who continue to meet welfare standards of the animals being bred in accordance with animal welfare laws within their States and Territories.

Discouraging over-breeding and ensuring genetic integrity takes higher precedence over demanding restrictions on numbers able to be bred.

Animal Care Australia supports limiting the number of times a female animal can be bred within each season, and within appropriate age brackets.

Maintaining the health of female animals is paramount to ensuring healthy young.

✓ **ACA supports breeders who operate under adequate conditions that meet the animals’ behavioural, social and/or physiological needs.**

The public need to understand and support breeders who prioritise animal welfare. Responsible breeding does not just include keeping animals fed & watered, it includes the level of social interaction and behavioural traits a young animal learns prior to finding its new ‘forever home’.

Potential owners should investigate the source of the animal they are seeking to purchase. Where possible visit the place where the animal is bred, ask questions about diet, exercise, enrichment, social interaction. Ask to sight documentation such as vaccination and vet visit records. If you don’t know where your new family member was bred, how can you possibly know what conditions they or their mum have been living in?

✓ **ACA supports new owners thoroughly understanding the animals they seek to purchase**

Companion Animal ‘Shows, Expos and Competitions’

There are many social animal groups and organisations that hold 'shows, expos and competitions' across a wide range of species. Groups and organisations should instil and implement internal codes of practice for the holding of these events. These codes of practice must ensure strong welfare standards are met which include:

- the use of holding & exhibiting (display) cages designed for minimum stress and providing easy access to feed and water.
- animals exhibited outdoors may be exposed to heat or cold, so must be provided with suitable shelter and protection from extreme conditions.
- display areas should provide a space where animals exhibiting symptoms of stress can be immediately removed from public view.
- limits on numbers of animals permitted per cage to ensure no over-crowding or potential fighting.
- display cages must be able to be secured to prevent the accidental release/escape.
- animals that may pose a potential risk to the public due to possible biting or are venomous (such as some reptiles, arachnids & other invertebrates) must have protective area of fencing or defined boundaries ensuring a safe viewable distance for the public.
- if there is a need for animals to be transferred from one cage to another – an enclosed and sealable area should be provided by the organisers to prevent the risk of escape.

✓ **ACA supports companion animal ‘Shows, Expos, competitions and ‘agility’ events.**

Social animal groups and organisations hold additional events that enhance interaction and allow the animals to display their skills while exercising. These include horse riding events, dog sport activities, training activities and more.

Unfounded concerns from Animal Rights Extremists (ARE’s) have been raised in regards to the following:

Recreational Carriage Driving

This activity is being forced out of parks and other suitable public spaces with constant rule changes contrary to public wishes. Mini horses in particular spend their lives kept in a smaller yard instead of larger paddocks, therefore driving is a great activity for them. If trained correctly these horses and ponies love this activity and it is good exercise for them.

✓ **ACA supports recreational carriage driving**

Equestrian Activities

Horses and ponies may engage in a wide variety of equestrian activities. Competitive sports can range from club level gymkhanas, to endurance events, showing and horse agility, up to the elite levels of dressage, show jumping and reining. Non-competitive activities can include trail riding, trick training and liberty.

Animal Care Australia supports owners who ensure their horses and ponies are appropriately educated, and are fit enough to comfortably participate in the activities asked of them, with comfortable, well-fitting equipment, and horse friendly accommodations to live in.

✓ **ACA supports equestrian activities**

Dog Sporting Events

Many dog breeds are utilised in different activities such as fly-ball and other competitive sports. As long as the appropriate breeds are utilised within the appropriate events, and high welfare standards during training, participating in the event and care at home, are maintained Animal Care Australia has no objection to these events continuing.

✓ **ACA supports dog sporting events**

Not for profit organisations tasked with animal welfare law compliance

RSPCA, Animal Welfare League and other rescue groups are usually non-government funded or receive minimal government funding and rely on charitable fundraising to operate.

Animal Care Australia supports the current charitable organisations maintaining their roles in the enforcement and education for the prevention of cruelty to animals.

Animal Care Australia makes the following recommendations and encourages these to be applied nationally where appropriate including individual State/territories:

1. Charitable organisations are to be more accountable and transparent in their actions and investigations.
2. Animal Care Australia recommends the accountability of the organisations be overseen by the Ombudsman's Office or equivalent.
3. Animal Care Australia recommends a review of the powers for enforcement – on the basis of law and the protection of the presumption of innocence until proven guilty. Animals are being seized on the presumption of guilt – this is not in the animal's best interest.
4. Animal Care Australia recommends the prosecutorial stage of an investigation be transferred to the Department of Public Prosecutions (DPP) within each state/territory.
5. Animal Care Australia supports the need for more sustainable funding – but does not support this process being a fully government funded organisation as this is contradictory to the term 'independent'.
6. Animal Care Australia does not support charitable organisations having exemption from the provision of the Government Information (Public Access) Acts or Freedom of Information Acts.
7. Animal Care Australia recommends a stronger focus on welfare education over prosecution within the current review of all Acts overseeing the prevention of cruelty to animals.
8. Animal Care Australia recommends streamlining prevention of cruelty Acts with a focus on improved understanding of standards & guidelines by owners and enforcement officers to guarantee best and improved animal welfare outcomes for all animals.

Council Shelters and Pounds

Local Council pounds provide temporary care and protection for animals requiring housing or to be returned to their homes or, if unclaimed and where appropriate, efforts are made to re-home animals.

Shelters and pounds struggle to cope with large numbers of abandoned animals. To assist in reducing the numbers ACA strongly encourages Local Councils to educate the community to encourage better outcomes.

Methods to be considered include:

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- Encourage responsible breeding – ACA can provide a Responsible Breeders Policy to assist in this process.
 - Encourage de-sexing. Potentially including a free de-sexing voucher to encourage buyers to have their animals de-sexed. The cost covered by Local Councils when breeders register with Council. Registered breeders are provided with the voucher
 - Encourage responsible selling, including having a checklist of criteria for new owners.
 - Encourage re-homing - an online marketplace for pets that need re-homing, may cover the costs
 - Encourage rescue organisations and fostering.
 - Encourage responsible pet ownership via accessible online education and incentives

Far greater emphasis and consideration should be provided on holding periods, and on the waiving of fees in order to encourage and promote their reclaiming.

High fees, fines and other such persecutory methods only serve to punish the animals, particularly when surrendered or where a financial hardship environment is created within their homes due to owners' desperation to secure their return.

Animals assessed as suitable for rehoming should be microchipped, vaccinated and de-sexed before release from the facilities.

Animal Care Australia would like to see more data recorded and released providing information such as ages, breeds, and origin of animals within the care of shelters, pounds and not-for-profit organisations in the hope of gaining a better understanding of abandoned animals' origins and developing and improving education programs to combat this issue.

✓ **ACA supports education initiatives that reduce the numbers of abandoned animals**

Exhibited Animals

The Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines for Exhibited Animals have been endorsed (April 2019) by the Agriculture Ministers (AGMIN) and are regulated into law by State and Territory governments. These outline strict requirements that ensure the animals' welfare requirements are met by licensed exhibitors.

Animal Care Australia recognises the need for separation of exhibited animals and animals used for entertainment purposes.

Examples of exhibited animals include:

- ❖ Zoos and wildlife parks
- ❖ Marine parks
- ❖ Mobile education displays
- ❖ Circus

✓ **ACA supports the above exhibited animal groups**

Animal Rights Extremists (ARE's) utilise the term "Animals in Entertainment" which refers to any animal(s) used to act, perform, fight and/or kill for the enjoyment of humans. Some examples of animals for entertainment in Australia include:

- ❖ Rodeos
- ❖ Horse racing
- ❖ Jumps racing
- ❖ greyhound racing

✓ **ACA does not represent the above groups**

Animal Care Australia supports the continuance and timely review of all animal welfare laws to protect and ensure the welfare needs of animals are met.

Animal Care Australia will strive to ensure we are included in all consultation processes during reviews.

Zoos and Wildlife Parks

Australian zoos and wildlife parks have evolved quite rapidly from the days of small concrete and steel cages to enclosures that replicate natural environments. Husbandry and enrichment have kept pace and been the driving force behind this evolution.

Today zoos and wildlife parks predominantly include:

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- education
 - breeding of threatened species,
 - rescue and rehabilitation programs and
 - serve as a permanent home for animals where release has been deemed impossible.

They are vital for education, research for conservation purposes, and accordingly must adhere to strict guidelines and legislation regarding all animal behaviours, enclosures and most importantly the welfare of the animals.

✓ **ACA supports zoos and wildlife parks**

Marine Parks & Aquariums

Australian marine parks & aquariums have a multitude of different animals including penguins, seal/sea-lion, aquatic animals and in certain cases polar bear and cetaceans (dolphin). A number of these animals are rescued species and the remaining are considered ‘domesticated’ and are no longer taken from the wild (apart from those rescued) and all are deemed unsuitable to be released into the wild.

Marine parks & aquariums are vital for education, research for conservational purposes and act as homes for animals who would otherwise be euthanised. So-called ‘Shows’ are a vital and necessary aspect of the animal’s daily routines, they provide enrichment and are designed to replicate natural behaviours. They are designed to ensure complete muscle exercise and hence maintain body strength and physical well-being.

✓ **ACA supports marine parks & aquariums**

Mobile Educators and Petting Zoos

Mobile educators and petting zoos are required to meet strict guidelines, within each State and Territory especially designed to protect the welfare of animals, particularly during transport. These services are vital to our community for education and to promote conservation. Bringing the ‘farm’ or the ‘bush’ to children, and isolated communities, as well as those who otherwise would never see or understand the nature of how animals exist is important to the very future of animals continuing to exist. To see, touch, and experience an animal in real life far out rates a picture on a computer or television screen.

Animal Care Australia will continue to monitor and consult in ongoing reviews of the ‘animal welfare laws’ which govern these services to ensure welfare needs and standards for the animals are maintained and in doing so, support the continuance of these services.

✓ **ACA supports mobile educators and petting zoos**

Circus

Australian circus have a multitude of different animals including dogs, ponies, horses, goats, pigs, water buffalo, camels, rhesus monkey and big cats.

Animal Care Australia takes particular note that:

- all of these animals are multi-generational born within the circus
- by definition within animal welfare Acts, these animals are all 'domesticated' animals, this includes the 'big cats' and monkeys, etc
- none of the so-called 'wild or exotic' have been taken from the wild, and
- on welfare grounds should never be released back into the wild as suggested by Animal Rights Extremists
- circus animals should remain with their carers where welfare conditions are being maintained.

✓ **ACA supports animals in circus**

Animals In Research and Scientific Use

Animals used in research and for scientific use are governed by laws which oversee the use of animals in research, teaching and product testing in each Australian state. Although there is some variation in the statutory requirements of each state, the Australian Code of Practice for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes, sets out the common framework of guiding principles.

Animal Care Australia believes the current framework and guidelines is effective in supporting establishments, individuals, as well as re-homing facilities to re-home animals after their use in research.

Animal Care Australia makes the following recommendations and encourages the adoption of these recommendations throughout Australia.

These are:

- Animal Care Australia recommends researchers consider rehoming during the planning stages so that animal husbandry throughout the research project prepares animals in advance.
- When rehoming is a likely option then rehoming organisations such as animal keepers associations should be forewarned so they can prepare.
- It is acknowledged that some animals cannot be rehomed as pets however these animals may be better suited to be homed in an exhibition or display environment where they can live and be cared for ethically as well as providing an ongoing educational benefit.
- Animal Protection Acts for exhibited animals provide the appropriate regulations to ensure their ongoing welfare needs are met. Animals used for exhibition and display play a pivotal role in education and creating awareness.
- Animal Care Australia would like to see requirements implemented to ensure the behaviour assessments are completed by individuals skilled with the understanding of and knowledge of the particular individual species of animal which are being assessed. Assurances need to be provided that the assessors have an intimate knowledge of the criteria used as part of the assessment process. This should include expert knowledge of individual species natural behaviour in all aspects, including breed specific behavioural traits of each species.
- Behaviour assessments that have been left to some rescue organisations, have to date utilised unrealistic “behaviour testing” methods which in themselves may cause psychological trauma ultimately resulting in the animals requiring to be euthanised.
- Ensuring appropriate mechanisms to ensure a blanket rehabilitation and behaviour assessment method for all re-homing organisations involved is introduced and assessed by the Department of Primary Industries.
- Assessment methods that do not inflict psychological harm on the animals and the animals are evaluated according to their species and breed specific behaviour traits are a necessary requirement – which is NOT currently being met by all rescue organisations.
- In reference to the term/definition ‘habituation’ and ‘training’ - Those terms need to be clearly defined rather than simply stated as the definition as each word means different things to different

people. Alternatively those topics could be rephrased to include: ‘The use of positive reinforcement for fear free habituation and training is recommended’.

- Animal Care Australia recommends forms of positive reinforcement are adopted where animals are to be rehomed.

Animals and Environmental Impacts

To progress conservation objectives, Animal Care Australia supports humane management of endemic and introduced species, appropriate for the area concerned. Animal Care Australia recognises that the management plan will need to vary based on local needs and species. Animal Care Australia supports removal of animals when conducted by best practice and most humane methods.

Animal Care Australia strongly encourages government and private research institutes to continue researching more humane methods for the control of exotic invasives and feral species with the goal of implementing those methods in the near future.

TNR – Trap, Neuter & Release

In reference to the current use of the ‘TNR’ program for control of ‘cat communities’ and feral cats, Animal Care Australia is awaiting further peer-reviewed Australian-based scientific data/studies before drawing any conclusions to its success or failure as a method of control.

The Australian environment and surrounds are greatly different to those in other parts of the world where the current data is sourced.

Currently a range of control methods is appropriate to ensure the viability of many native threatened species

Biological control

Animal Care Australia supports the use of biological control however vaccines for pets and breeding stock must be approved and made available in advance of the bio-control agent being released. This will ensure pets and breeding stock animals are safe guarded against the effects of the control method and avoid unnecessary illness and deaths.

Hunting

Animal Care Australia supports ethical and sustainable hunting where high animal welfare standards are practiced.