



Animal Care Australia

NEWSLETTER

The Animal Care Expert

Animal welfare by the experts - those who keep, care for
and breed animals



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[Animal Care Australia](#)

“Animal Care Australia acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we reside, and pay our respects to their Elders past and present.”

In this issue



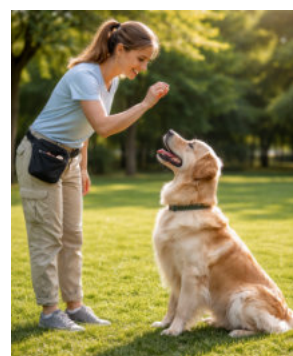
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The Animal Care Expert is expanding.

Invitation: We are inviting you to have your news included in the newsletter. We are opening up the newsletter to our members and supporters. If you would like to have your articles* or even your Club's events included and promoted in ACE, then simply submit them to us via our email address.

The Animal Care Expert Blog:

Our animal care experts' articles and up to date news from Animal Care Australia is here:

animalcareaustralia.org.au/ace-blog/

*Articles printed at the discretion of the editor and/or Committee.



New year statement from the President of Animal Care Australia

By: Michael Donnelly
President

HEADLINE ARTICLE:



Well, it is 2026 already!

2025 was yet another huge year for Animal Care Australia as we continued to respond across the multiple reviews and amendments to animal-based legislation across the country.

In addition to the countless attempts by local councils to limit how your pets can be kept, including restricting numbers with unrealistic and uneducated bias, this year highlighted the strongest influences of animal rights ideologies.

State Governments are bowing to the pressures and in true 'cancel-culture' mindset place restrictions or ban aspects of pet keeping rather than accepting their responsibilities and enforcing the legislation that already exists.

This is highlighted by the Tasmanian Government's intended full ban on greyhounds. I say full ban – because the legislation does not just ban greyhound racing – it bans the import of greyhounds into the State during the phase-in period. So, whether you support the racing or not – the result will be the gradual demise of the greyhound in Tasmania. If breeders have to prove the dogs to be imported are for pet-use only, and subsequently cannot ensure viable genetic diversity, they will either cease breeding completely OR start inter-breeding with weakened genetics ultimately creating even larger animal welfare issues.

In New South Wales, a ban on instant applications for native wildlife licenses has seen an overwhelming and totally unnecessary delay in processing. This includes those doing the right thing and renewing their licenses. What was instant is now taking more than 50 days (if you are lucky). Why is that a concern? It is simple – legally the animals bred by these licensees cannot be sold, cannot be traded and as such must be held for far longer than necessary – creating welfare issues because of forced over-crowding. Let us not forget most reptiles, for example, should not be housed together or require some form of separation, once they start to grow. There has been so much red-tape added to the native wildlife licensing in NSW – it is leading to even greater non-compliance – for what outcome? Only time will tell – but you can be assured it will not be good for some of the animals.

Victoria is by far the worst government for pet keeping. Here is a government that has been so desperate to do deals with other Parties it has thrown pet owners under the bus! Planning laws that restrict all properties to no more than 5 animals without permits. Permits that are applied by overreaching, species biased, and uneducated local councils – that on average cost a pet owner \$300 per year to renew. That is on top of their annual pet registration fees. A Government that has announced further restrictions on native wildlife licenses – again restricting numbers and banning species. Spent millions on a survey that only managed to tell us what we already knew – and with far less accuracy than the nationally recognised pet survey from Animal Medicines Australia. Let's face it, it was never going to be accurate when you only asked questions about one of the many pets kept by the same individual or when those questions wanted to know how often you groomed or walked your pet goldfish!

“

The claim is to improve animal welfare! But that is not true.

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Why are the states doing this? The claim is to improve animal welfare! But that is not true. Not when it includes restrictions on 'colony species' or when the science actually proves animal welfare improvements do not come from number restrictions – but from education and appropriate compliance investigation.

Across the Country we have governments outsourcing the investigations, the rescuing and the caring. Mostly to charitable organisations. Native wildlife that requires rescue or rehabilitation is in the hands of charities and volunteers. Animal welfare legislation compliance is in the hands of charitable organisations. One organisation in particular is constantly in the media because of its unwillingness to actually do its job accompanied by ever increasing louder voices of accusations of intimidation, profiteering off seized animals and more.

Despite all of that – it is cheaper for a government to outsource than own its responsibilities.

Sounds like a war that cannot be won – doesn't it?

Well not if you join Animal Care Australia. Not if you help us to show the politicians that our voices count and they are loud. Loud enough to change who gets a seat in the local council, who gets to govern the state or territory, even who gets to govern the country.

I have been the President of Animal Care Australia since 2019 and over that time I have witnessed far too much complacency, and then when changes occur, far too much complaining and blame. These days there are too many keyboard warriors and critics and not enough willing 'to walk the walk' and put your hand up and be counted. You actually do not even have to leave your laptop. You just need to use the keyboard – spread the word, send letters to local members or Councillors, and most of all join those of us who ARE doing the work. Who ARE making a difference – even if you do not actually see it – because we have headed it off before it gained traction.

With your support Animal Care Australia will continue to advocate for you and your pets and animals. Our priorities will include but are not limited to:

- Improving animal welfare education initiatives, including our own, ensuring everyone is doing their part to reduce and more importantly prevent the suffering of pets and animals
- Seeking the implementation of an Animal Welfare Commissioner across the nation – responsible for overseeing animal welfare improvements, outcomes, compliance, and enforcement. This means government funded compliance and enforcement officers who are held fully accountable by the government and the Parliament and therefore to society.
- Ensuring the needs of companion animals and pets are adequately and responsibly included in animal welfare legislation at all levels of government including the federal government's Animal Welfare Strategy and National Standards.
- Holding all of the charitable organisations and others accountable through government liaison and calling for regulation of those still not yet regulated.

I am sure 2026 will be full of surprises and frustrations and yet again it will include state elections, first in South Australia and then in Victoria. It will continue to be a hard slog but regardless we look forward to advocating for you and protecting the ability of everyone to own a pet. Whether that be one pet or multiple. Animals and particularly pets bring so much into our lives and in return we have the responsibility to ensure their time with us is with a loving and caring home.

Important Pet News

South Australia: Changes to Dog & Cat Management Act



The Dog and Cat Management (Breeder Reforms) Amendment Act 2025, effective from 17 November 2025, introduces major updates to South Australian legislation, including stricter breeder licensing, significantly increased penalties for dog attacks (up to \$100,000 for severe cases), improved enforcement powers, removal of greyhound muzzle laws, and stronger cat management regulations.

Key Legislative Changes (2025–2026):

Breeder Licensing: Replaces the previous registration system with a stricter licensing framework to curb puppy factories, featuring limits on female breeding animals.

Increased Penalties: Dog owners now face up to \$100,000 in fines if their dog causes serious injury or death, with higher penalties for offences involving dangerous or unregistered dogs.

Cat Management: Enhanced powers for councils to manage wandering cats and increased authority to address feral cats.

Greyhound Muzzles: The requirement for retired greyhounds to wear muzzles in public has been removed.

Compliance & Administration: Improved enforcement powers for council officers and the development of an online breeder database.

Future Reforms:

Consultation is ongoing regarding specific standards, guidelines, and fertile female limits for breeders.

The Dog and Cat Management Plan 2025-2029 guides local government, notes the District Council of Mount Remarkable.

These changes aim to improve animal welfare and public safety while strengthening accountability for owners and breeders.

You can review the Act here:

[Dog and Cat Management Act 1995 | South Australian Legislation](#)



By: Kylie Gilbert Dog
Representative

When Good Intentions Aren't Enough: Re-examining Training Ideology, Welfare Outcomes and Rising Shelter Numbers



Across Australia, shelters and pounds are reporting record intake numbers, longer lengths of stay, and increasing euthanasia rates—particularly for adolescent and adult dogs with behavioural challenges. This trend should concern everyone involved in animal care, welfare, breeding, training and policy.

At the same time, the industry has seen a strong and often uncompromising shift toward a purely positive, force-free training ideology, increasingly promoted as the only ethical or acceptable approach. While positive reinforcement is an essential and valuable tool, the growing evidence from shelters, councils, rescue groups and trainers suggests that ideology alone is not solving the problem—and may, in some cases, be contributing to it.

A Growing Gap Between Theory and Reality

Many dogs entering shelters today are not untrained puppies—they are adolescent or adult dogs with established behaviours including

reactivity, poor impulse control, predatory behaviour, or unsafe interactions with people or other animals.

Shelters and rescues report that:

- Dogs are remaining in care longer due to being labelled “needs experienced handler”
- Behaviour plans are slow to produce functional outcomes in time-limited environments

- Some dogs are deemed unrehomable, not due to aggression alone, but due to lack of effective behavioural change
- Staff and volunteers experience high emotional fatigue when dogs fail despite best intentions

When training frameworks are restricted to one methodology, practitioners may be left without sufficient tools to manage real-world risk, public safety obligations, or welfare outcomes—especially under pressure.

The Consequences of Absolutism

A purely positive model, when presented as a moral absolute rather than a professional framework requiring skill, timing, thresholds and context, can lead to:

- Owners being discouraged from seeking help early
- Escalating behaviours that become entrenched
- Public perception that dogs “fail” when training fails
- Increased surrender due to safety, housing, or council compliance issues

This does not reflect a failure of positive reinforcement itself—but rather a failure to acknowledge that one size does not fit all dogs, all environments, or all handlers.

Welfare Is Measured by Outcomes, Not Labels

True animal welfare must consider:

- The dog’s ability to live safely in society
- The human-animal bond
- The dog’s long-term quality of life
- The emotional toll on carers, trainers and shelter staff

When ideology overrides outcome-based decision-making, the result is often increased suffering, not reduced harm.

Balanced, ethical training is not about punishment—it is about:

- Clear communication
- Humane boundaries
- Risk management
- Realistic expectations
- Professional accountability



A Call for Professional, Evidence-Based Practice

We should be advocating for:

- Formal qualifications for trainers and behaviour practitioners
- Evidence-based, regulated practice, not social-media dogma
- Recognition that different dogs require different interventions
- Collaboration between trainers, veterinarians, shelters and regulators
- Policies that prioritise public safety and animal welfare outcomes, not ideology

Moving Forward

Reducing euthanasia and shelter intake requires honest conversations, not fear-based silencing. We must support trainers and carers with full professional toolkits, appropriate education, and the freedom to act ethically and responsibly in complex situations.

If we are serious about saving lives, we must be willing to ask hard questions—not just about how we train dogs, but about whether our current frameworks are truly serving them.

Because welfare is not defined by intent—it is defined by outcome.





Mystery of Ginger, Torties & Calicos

By: Michelle Grayson - Cat Representative



Ginger

Have you ever wondered why there are far more male ginger cats than females or the genetic story behind tortoiseshells and calicos?

After more than a century of curiosity, scientists in the USA and Japan have finally uncovered the genetic secrets behind these classic feline coat colours.

They have confirmed that the vibrant orange coat in cats, ginger, is linked to a gene on the X chromosome, called the Orange (O) gene. Ginger is known as Red.

This discovery supports a theory proposed in 1912 by American geneticist Clarence Cook Little. He suggested that coat colour is tied to the X chromosome which means that male cats (with the X and Y gene) can only be either completely orange or non-orange.

Females (with two X genes) can inherit both forms of the gene, resulting in the unique mixed patterns seen in tortoiseshells and calicos.

So, why are most ginger male?

Since males only need one copy of the orange gene to express the colour they are more likely to be ginger.

Females, on the other hand, require two orange gene copies, which is far less common. This explains why only about 4% of female cats are ginger.

Recent studies have pinpointed the Orange gene's function. A large DNA deletion in the gene alters when and where it activates, producing orange fur. This gene is also involved in hair follicle development, revealing a new biological pathway for pigment production.

In tortoiseshells and calicos, the gene is activated in some areas and not in others, creating their patchwork coats.

Although a very few male tortoiseshells and calicos occur, they typically have an extra X chromosome, which is very rare. This research highlights the complicated genetics behind these much-loved cat colour variations.

For ginger cat fans and tortie admirers, this discovery answers some age-old questions – and opens doors to exciting new scientific exploration.



Tortie



Calico



Native Bird Welfare: Why Good Policy Needs to Listen to Aviculture

By: Sam Davis - Bird Representative

Many Victorian bird keepers will have noticed recent government statements about cracking down on “intensive” wildlife breeding and restricting the size of wildlife collections. These proposals are being framed as animal welfare reforms — something no responsible aviculturist would ever oppose.

But scratch the surface and a more troubling issue appears: these proposals seem to have been developed without meaningful consultation with the very people who have the most experience in bird welfare — aviculturists themselves.

Wildlife law versus welfare law

The proposals arise from the Victorian Government’s response to the [*Independent Review of the Wildlife Act 1975*](#).

That Act exists to protect wildlife in the wild: conserving species, preventing extinction, and regulating human interaction with native animals.

It was never designed to be an animal welfare statute.

That role is already filled by the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 (POCTA)*, administered by Animal Welfare Victoria. POCTA applies to all birds — native and non-native — and is supported by detailed Codes of Practice covering housing, care, and husbandry.

In short, Victoria already has a functioning, enforceable welfare framework. The question is not whether welfare should be regulated, but whether wildlife law is the right place to do it.

A worrying lack of consultation

One of the most concerning aspects of the current proposal is that representative avicultural bodies were not involved in shaping the recommendations now being justified on “welfare” grounds.

Organisations such as Animal Care Australia, the Victorian Avicultural Council, the Avicultural Society of Australia, the National Finch and Softbill Association, Mornington Peninsula Avicultural Society and others represent thousands of experienced keepers across Victoria and nationally. These groups work daily with welfare standards, education, codes of practice, and compliance.

Yet they had no meaningful role in the Review that has led to proposed restrictions on breeding and collection size.

Good welfare policy depends on practical expertise. Excluding those with decades of hands-on experience risks policy being shaped by assumptions rather than evidence.

Bigger does not mean worse

Another problematic assumption is that larger collections or higher levels of breeding are inherently linked to poor welfare.

Anyone who keeps knows this doesn't reflect reality.

Birds do not breed successfully, display natural behaviours, or maintain condition in poor welfare environments. Aviculture is outcome-driven: healthy birds, stable behaviour, and successful breeding are clear indicators that welfare standards are being met.

In practice, aviculturists with larger collections are usually highly experienced specialists, deeply embedded in club networks, operating under formal and informal codes of practice, and subject to greater scrutiny, not less.

Experience from other animal sectors also shows that blunt, numbers-based regulation can backfire — pushing activity into smaller, harder-to-monitor settings where welfare oversight is weaker.

Aviculture already delivers welfare outcomes

Australian aviculture has a long history of responsible self-regulation. Clubs and federations promote best practice, educate members, and enforce standards at events and sales.

Victoria already recognises this through mechanisms such as the Declared Bird Organisation system, which allows bird sales to operate under agreed welfare frameworks. That recognition exists because aviculture has demonstrated it can manage welfare responsibly.

Captive breeding of native birds also delivers broader benefits: maintaining bloodlines, supporting conservation outcomes, and reducing pressure on wild populations.

Getting reform right

No aviculturist disputes the importance of animal welfare. What is being questioned is the wisdom of regulating welfare through wildlife legislation, targeting native bird keepers specifically, and doing so without proper consultation with representative bodies.

If welfare standards need strengthening, POCTA is the correct tool. It applies equally to all birds, focuses on outcomes, and already has enforcement mechanisms in place.

Good policy comes from evidence, expertise, and engagement. For the sake of both birds and the people who care for them, aviculture deserves a seat at the table — not to resist welfare reform, but to help get it right. It is therefore reasonable to ask why such far-reaching recommendations have been made in the absence of supporting evidence. Perhaps this reflects the growing influence of animal-rights ideologies that seek to end all forms of captive animal keeping, regardless of welfare outcomes or conservation benefits.

Good welfare policy depends on practical expertise. Excluding those with decades of hands-on experience risks policy being shaped by assumptions rather than evidence.

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NSW adopted rescue pets \$0 registration fee – there is a catch!



By: Tracey Dierikx -
Exhibited Animals
Representative

I recently adopted a large breed pup (Great Dane cross) from a NSW approved and registered rescue. Her name is Rain, and I fostered her mum and 8 other siblings from when they were <1 day old.



Photo – 16 week old Rain at the dog park making friends.

Having been involved with a few rescues as a foster carer over the past 20+ years, I'm a massive advocate for desexing dogs that one doesn't intend to breed from. I do however also support ethical registered breeders of quality purebreds, unlike many involved in the rescue industry.

Now, as Rain is going to be a very large girl once fully grown (50kg+), the vet has issued her with a desexing deferral/exemption certificate. This certificate defers her desexing until she is 18 months old, and has been issued because the negative long term health implications of early-age desexing for her breed type far outweigh the positives.

For further explanation and the Australian Veterinary Association's stance on early desexing, please click this link... <https://www.ava.com.au/policy-advocacy/policies/companion-animals-health/desexing-surgical-sterilisation-of-companion-animals/>

In NSW, Council registration for desexed rescue pets is \$0, BUT that apparently only applies if the pet is desexed BEFORE it leaves the rescue. Juvenile pets (pups and kittens) adopted with a desexing exemption do not qualify for the \$0 registration fee until the desexing exemption is fulfilled (and the pet is desexed by the expiry date on the exemption). This means that anyone adopting a larger breed pup with such an exemption is liable to pay for registration before the dog reaches the age of 12 weeks (in NSW).

The registration fee payable for a pup with an exemption is at the desexed dog rate, honouring the exemption certificate until such time as the dog is desexed.

This fee is \$80, or \$35 for valid concession card holders, and will supposedly be refunded once the dog is desexed – effectively honouring the \$0 registration for a rescue pet, albeit in a very roundabout fashion.

One would surmise that the NSW Pet Registry database would flag if/when a dog has not been desexed by the exemption expiry date, so that they can chase owners up for the extra undesexed dog fees. Why can't rescue pet \$0 registration also be tied to the exemption expiry flagging? If the owner doesn't comply, they can then be chased for all the registration fees due at that point. Makes much more sense than making you pay up front on the promise that the fee will be refunded once the exemption is fulfilled. I'm not holding my breath that a refund will be automatic though... I'll most likely have to run around chasing it if I want the money back.

This is the silliness of enacting blanket legislation without considering the "unforeseen" consequences.

I have written to both local and State government representatives about this matter. Will this problem be rectified? Only time will tell.

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for pet owners and keeping in Australia.**

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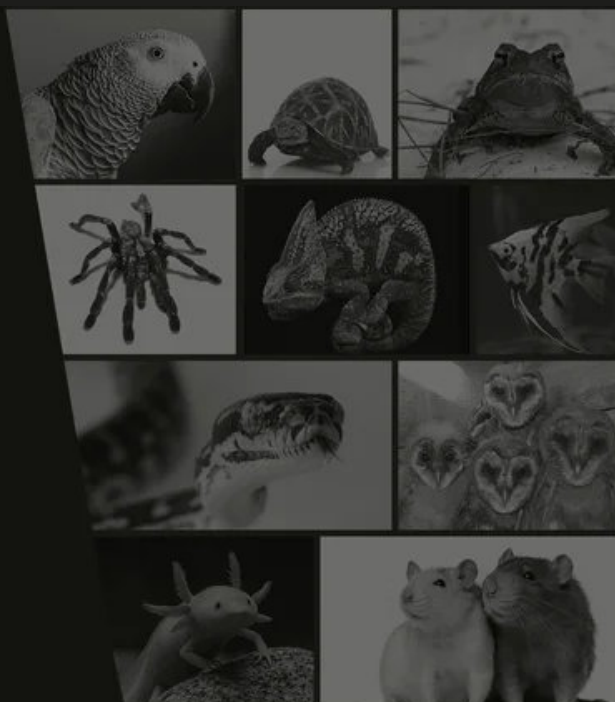
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DON'T PET ME

A documentary film by

Responsible
Reptile
Keeping
WORLDWIDE



- Share the video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZnGgCXF-BM>
- Sign the positive list petition - <https://responsiblereptilekeeping.org/positive-list-petition?>
- Join Animal Care Australia today. You could also join RRK

The Scottish SPCA is urging the Scottish Government to introduce a pet 'permitted' or positive list – a new law that would ban most pet animals.

The RRK film, DON'T PET ME, examines what these bans mean in practice, including warnings from animal-care professionals about harming animal welfare, underground keeping, reduced veterinary access, added strain on rescue services, and increased illegal wildlife trade.

Featuring:

- Tony Wigley (RRK, The Pet Charity, REPTA) on why positive lists fail in practice.
- Svein Fosså (European Pet Organization, NZB) on Norway's 1977 reptile and amphibian ban and what followed.
- Dr Martin Singheiser (BNA) on the lack of evidence behind positive lists.
- Scottish breeders and keepers Chris Hogg and Lisa Birrell, responding to claims in the campaign document, which appear to link low incomes and neurodivergence to poor welfare.

Should Scotland impose a positive-list ban, or enforce existing laws and improve standards through keeper education?

Together we can make a difference.

Since COVID, our cat population has exploded. There's a fix, but we're ignoring it.

By: Dr Tanya Phillips - Veterinary Representative

Originally published in the Sydney Morning Herald - 1st February 2026

Australia has welcomed about 1.5 million extra pet cats since COVID. They were perfect isolation companions: independent, affectionate, low-maintenance. While those additions to households may sound heartwarming, a few years later, looking a little closer – as a veterinarian, lifelong cat carer, and representative of Animal Care Australia – what I'm seeing isn't so comforting.

Alongside the surge in ownership is a rise in stray and anxious cats, and those unsettled by post-pandemic changes at home. Their anxiety, depression or behaviour shifts are often dismissed, but the increase is obvious in clinics and communities.

A change in behaviour might be more than your cat "just being a cat", says Dr Tanya Phillips. It might be a sign of emotional distress, anxiety or depression.

Most owners want to do the right thing, but confusing behaviour is often misread. Some cats are surrendered; others are left to roam in the hope they "settle down". And this has led to more unregistered, not-desexed and anxious cats roaming across Sydney and the east coast.

It has evolved into a significant welfare challenge. During lockdowns, cats filled an emotional gap. Now, their owners' longer work hours and time away have returned. For animals, that change can be overwhelming. I see it every week in the clinic. A cat that hides under the bed, stops eating, or lashes out is rarely "just being a cat". These are early signs of emotional distress, anxiety or depression.

While roaming pet cats do hunt, the bigger ecological impact comes from feral cats, not owned pets. Estimates often combine the two groups, which inflates the numbers and can blur the real welfare issue behind roaming behaviour.

In Greater Sydney, roaming pet cats are estimated to kill about 66 million native animals each year, although this figure is debated because many calculations assume all pet cats roam and hunt, which is not the case. National kill estimates in the billions refer primarily to feral, free-living cats rather than household pets.

Before it's an environmental issue, it's a welfare one. Roaming cats are usually distressed cats, and every stray reflects a broken connection between human stress and animal wellbeing.

Rescue and foster networks across NSW are full. Shelters are taking in surrendered pandemic pets and litters from roaming cats that are not desexed. Councils are stretched, and vets are managing the medical and behaviour cases that leave many families feeling they have failed their animals.

A recent [NSW Legislative Council inquiry into cat management](#) recognised

overpopulation as “clear and pressing” yet stopped short of recommending containment laws. Welfare groups, vets and local governments called this a missed opportunity, and I agree.

We already know humane solutions make a real difference. [Across 11 NSW councils](#), desexing more than 2700 cats and microchipping 1700 reduced roaming populations by half and lowered complaints by 40 per cent. These programs work because they involve targeted, on-the-ground support, rather than assumptions about how all cats behave.

Where education and affordable desexing are available, cats and communities do better.

The emotional connection between humans and their pets is a two-way street and can be underestimated; cats read the room far more deeply than most people realise. Feline depression shows up quietly in the cats that stop grooming, hide more, withdraw from affection or simply fade into the background. Cats mirror the emotional landscape, and now life looks different. Burnout, financial strain and long work hours all affect the way we care for animals who rely on routine and predictability.

If we treated feline mental health as a legitimate welfare concern instead of a quirky footnote, we could prevent many of the behavioural problems that lead to surrender or abandonment.

This crisis is not unsolvable, but we can't adopt our way out of it. It requires coordination between government, vets, councils and communities – a

unified, evidence based approach that tackles both welfare and environmental impacts. Some steps are simple: keep cats indoors or in enclosed outdoor spaces; provide enrichment, play and predictability; desex early; build routines that work for people and pets; seek help when behaviour changes.

The care gap widened during the pandemic and has not been properly addressed since.

Containment laws work overseas. Large-scale desexing campaigns work here. What's missing is political will.

Those 1.5 million extra cats were meant to be companions. They still can be.



“ Those 1.5 million extra cats were meant to be companions. They still can be.

”

Who is responsible for improving horse welfare standards: clubs or members?



By: Karri Nadazdy - Horse & Livestock Representative

I recently attended a popular online horse fair. Its set up as 2 days of videos by instructors and horse trainers from around the world that you can watch in your own time. The topics vary from rider fitness, solving horse behaviour issues, fitness training your horse and training techniques.

The thing I have found interesting in recent years of watching the Fair, is how the types of videos have changed. It used to be primarily western and natural horsemanship style trainers, with lots of training videos on making horses obedient under saddle, riding arena patterns and getting competition ready.

More recently, I see more content from European trainers, many using positive reinforcement, focussed on relationship building and working with the horse being happy and content in their work.

This is one microcosm, but it made me aware of a changing trend I see occurring more broadly in the horse world. It's a really positive change, and it's being driven from the bottom up, rather than from influence from equestrian organisations on their members, who tend to lag behind community opinion, and social licence to operate.

Horse welfare in competition and training is becoming a higher priority to horse owners. Whether their horse is happy in his environment, and work life is more important to horse owners than it used to be. The attitude of "well, I pay for his feed and board, so he owes it to me to ride him how I like" is falling out of the vernacular. We see the rise in popularity of ideas taken from zoo management principles, like enrichment and trickle feeding to keep horses happier on small acreages or restricted grazing.



There is more awareness of Pain Signals and not using equipment that causes pain or hides problems. Trainers are becoming more aware of when horses are expressing discomfort or pain, and not just being treated as bad mannered or needing correcting. The more advanced trainers are teaching their students to recognise more subtle signals from horses and focus on consent and building a willing partnership with horses who are engaged and want to participate, rather than being forced to.

While most animal clubs are trying to educate their members on higher welfare and help raise everyone up to better standards, in horse communities, it's usually the members trying to raise the club standards, and being dissatisfied with the accepted standards at events.

A good example of this is the FEI: Fédération équestre internationale (or International

Federation for Equestrian Sports) that oversee Olympic equestrian sports.

Rollkur (or hyperflexion of the horse's neck) is a training method to bend a horse's chin to his chest while riding until the horse's breathing and blood flow to his head is restricted to make the less severe, acceptable bend of the neck appear easier when they enter the arena. Top Olympians have been filmed using this technique in the warm up arena, and stewards have turned a blind eye. Member and public pressure to ban the practice, resulted in the FEI introducing new rules to combat rollkur. At Paris 2024, the FEI builds higher barriers to restrict the public from seeing into the warm up arena, and riders who were filmed and reported to the FEI faced no consequences. The rules are in place to placate the public, but the practice continues, at the expense of the horses. And by allowing the practice, it is encouraged to continue. Lower level competitors see that they have no chance to compete fairly, so they either start doing it themselves or stop competing. It is not unusual to see riders doing this at Pony Club and adult riding clubs, and no one says anything. It's become the norm, and at the lower levels, it doesn't even occur to them to hide it.



Other similar rules have been poorly enforced, such as the Blood Rule. Any blood on a horse should result in disqualification. But it just doesn't happen, or the competitor gets a slap on the wrist without it affect their results, or placing.

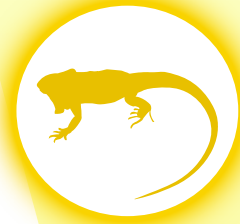
This issue is not unique to the FEI, it's a common problem, not just in Australia. The specific issues vary by region and sport, such as excessive whipping in horse racing.

If organisations have a duty of care to their members as well as to the animals in their organisations, I would say even more so. They should be leading the way on higher welfare, and the top competitors should be demonstrating how easy it is to put the horse's welfare first, not being helped to hide their shameful actions. It's not good enough to introduce rules that are simply ignored. We need better role models.

Members often speak to each other about problem riders, but are afraid to make complaints to their club committees. But we need to hold our clubs to higher standards. Clubs need to stop ostracising the whistle blowers. We need to do it for the horses, together. We need to step up and be the role models that we are lacking.

When I see a traditionally old school western online fair taking up the banner for better horse welfare and it being so warmly embraced, I know we can do it here in Australia too.

The Benefits of UV and Keeping Reptiles Outdoors



By: Joanne Payne - Reptile & Amphibian Representative

For many reptile keepers, there comes a time when we start to wonder: *How can I safely keep my reptile outside?* A visit to the zoo often sparks the idea. Seeing reptiles thriving in open, naturalistic outdoor enclosures makes us consider how we might replicate something similar at home—while still maintaining the highest animal welfare.

One of the greatest benefits of outdoor keeping is access to natural sunlight. While artificial UV lighting has improved dramatically over the years, nothing truly compares to the full spectrum of natural sunlight.

For species such as monitors and skinks in particular, exposure to natural UV can support:

- Healthy vitamin D3 synthesis
- Improved calcium metabolism
- Stronger bone development
- Enhanced appetite and activity levels
- Natural basking and behavioural expression



Providing natural sunlight is widely regarded as best practice where it can be done safely and responsibly.

Is Your Species Suitable for Outdoor Keeping?

Before moving any reptile outdoors, research is essential. A key question to ask is:

Is this species naturally found in my local climate?

If your reptile occurs naturally in your region, outdoor housing may be relatively straightforward. However, even native species may require additional considerations. If your climate experiences cold winters or unpredictable weather, you may need to provide:

- A heated hide
- Insulated shelter
- Additional basking areas for cooler days



- A suitable brumation space

Some reptiles can be kept outdoors during the warmer months but must be brought inside over winter, unless you can provide appropriate brumation conditions.

Providing Shade and Thermal Choice

While access to sunlight is beneficial, reptiles must always have the ability to escape the heat. Overheating can be fatal.

Every outdoor enclosure must provide shaded areas. This can be achieved through:

- Natural cover such as shrubs, bushes, or small trees
- Logs and rock structures
- Man-made shade cloth or roofing panels

The goal is to create a temperature gradient, allowing your reptile to thermoregulate naturally—basking when needed and retreating to cooler zones when required.

Security and Predator Protection

Outdoor enclosures must be secure. Consider:

- Is the enclosure escape-proof?
- Can neighbourhood cats access it?
- Are there predatory birds in your area?
- Can rodents dig underneath?

Fully enclosed structures are often the safest option, particularly in suburban environments. Mesh roofing, dig-proof barriers, and secure locking systems are critical components of responsible outdoor housing.

For keepers unable to construct a permanent enclosure, temporary outdoor pens can be used during supervised periods. These allow reptiles to benefit from natural sunlight while still maintaining control and safety.

Research and Community Support

Keeping reptiles outdoors can be incredibly rewarding. Watching natural behaviours emerge—true basking, exploration, interaction with live

plants—adds a whole new dimension to reptile keeping. However, outdoor housing requires careful planning and thorough research.

Speak with experienced keepers who have successfully housed your species outdoors. Join your local reptile society—these groups are a wealth of practical knowledge and first-hand experience. Learning from others can help you avoid costly mistakes and ensure your reptile's welfare remains the top priority.

In short, outdoor reptile keeping can provide a more natural and enriching environment—but only when done thoughtfully, safely, and with proper preparation.

A Spotlight on ... Michael Donnelly

President and Native Mammal Representative

Michael, have native mammals always fascinated you?

Animals have always been something I have had a strong interest in. Right from when I was about two years of age my father had canaries. As I grew that also grew into more aviaries with a variety of finches, quail, parrots and softbills.

Almost every school holidays we would be travelling and where ever it was possible that would include wildlife parks or zoos. We would also do a lot of 'spotting' especially around the Oberon area in NSW. So possums, kangaroos and wombats would be animals I would see in their natural habitats on a very regular basis.

How did you come to join Animal Care Australia?

I am a founder of Animal Care Australia. In 2018 I was the Secretary for the Herpetocultural Cooperative of NSW. It was founded because I believed there needed to be a joint response from the NSW reptile groups to some proposed legislative changes that were going to make it very difficult for people to keep and own pets. At the time, I had contacted the President of the Canary and Caged Bird Federation of Australia to see what they were doing about it, and he informed me that there had been no response from the reptile groups.

It soon became apparent that we needed to get all pet groups together and so a Symposium was held from which Animal Care Australia was founded. I was appointed as the Reptile Representative on the first Committee.

In 2019, I was appointed as the Public Officer of the Native Mammal Society of NSW, as we saw an opportunity to have the ability of expanding the list of native mammals that could be kept on license in NSW. With that, I requested a native mammal position be added to the Animal Care Australia Committee and was successful. I moved across into that position and have continued to hold it.

In late 2019, the then President of Animal Care Australia resigned amid some turmoil within the Committee and several committee members expressed their concerns with staying on the committee. I decided that it was important for Animal Care Australia to continue rather than fold - which looked highly likely at the time - so I nominated myself at the elections and was successful. That was a difficult period of time with a couple of representatives still resigning but 90% of the team had stayed on. I was determined that we would not only survive but we would thrive - and we have.

We appointed new representatives and added along the way additional species representatives.

What have you focused on so far?

That's a big question. What I was determined to do was to get Animal Care Australia known by all the relevant Ministers and government departments across Australia.

When I became President, many of the Committee felt that there had been a lot of missed opportunities and slow reactionary times to different issues. So I immediately commenced the development of policies and position statements, including a Code of Ethics for the organisation. This was to create a more solid foundation for Animal Care Australia to build upon.

We went about responding to everything pet related across the country and we haven't stopped.

Our focus has been three-fold. One, to be recognised as the peak animal welfare organisation that actually represents pet owners. Two, to improve animal welfare outcomes across the nation in order to reduce and prevent the suffering of

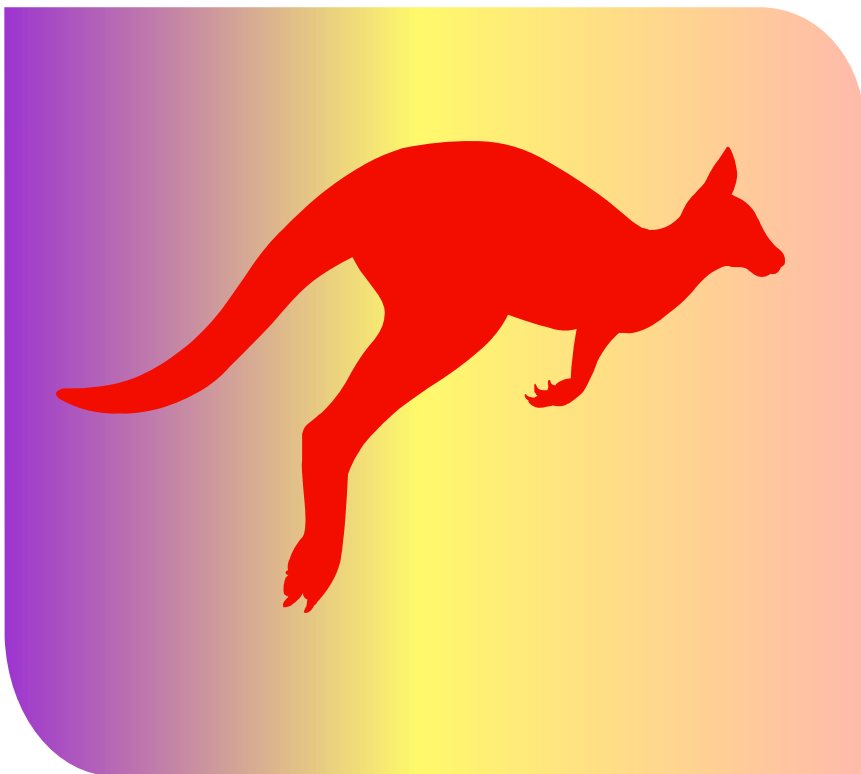
animals. Three, to ensure everyone, but particularly the different levels of government, understood and became aware of the difference between animal welfare and animal rights.

It sounds like you were achieving quite a bit during that time. What's next for you?

Haha. I'm not sure. At this point I still have another 18 months or so of my current term as President. The past 8 (ish) years has taken its toll on my health - both physical and mental.

Right now I don't know what is next.

Ideally I would like to see Australians being able to keep more native mammals as pets.



Of course, that needs to be under licensing, codes of practice and responsible pet ownership. We are losing far too much habitat and our zoos and wildlife parks are essentially full.

Responsible private keeping of some native mammals has the ability of being a genetic and species saviour. This has happened with some reptiles and birds held in private hands and in some native mammals too - those especially in South Australia.

Governments take the word of animal rights before looking properly at how many species could be saved if they just stepped up and permitted responsible ownership. Simply because a small hand full of individuals show they are irresponsible, should not be the deciding factor prohibiting others from proving responsible care and keeping of our natives cannot be achieved.

That said, what impact do you hope to leave in the pet community?

Animal welfare is not animal rights and I want that message relayed around this country. I would love to see the complacency of pet owners who don't think there will come a day when keeping pets will be banned or just too regulated to manage. If keeping pets is diminished and replaced with AI or films, then it is too late. The community need to understand that we all must fight to keep our pets – to keep our Australian way of life – to ensure our children and their children know what it's like to keep a guinea pig, bearded dragon, parrot, goldfish, pony or a cat and dog.

Also, if something happened tomorrow that meant I couldn't continue in this role, I want people to have been inspired to keep fighting. To stand up for themselves, their children and their animal family members. Politicians only listen to the loud voices and to those that make their point known. The radicalism in today's society must be overwhelmed and placed back into its ideological boxes where it belongs.

Do you have any pets at home today?

I have been downsizing my aviaries and reptile collections. I still own a number of what are referred to as 'softbills' (ie: wrens, honeyeaters, etc) and have moved a good number of reptiles on to new homes.

Late last year my best friend (dog) passed and recently I got a new little friend who is keeping me well and truly on my toes. I had forgotten how cute and demanding a puppy can be.

Do you have time for any other hobbies or interests?

I love the theatre, musicals and movies, so I do tend to see whatever is on at the time.

My days are otherwise tied up with doing something that keeps Animal Care Australia going.





Life stages of cats - kittens

By: Michelle Grayson - Cat Representative

A kitten's growth in the first 12 months is extraordinary.

Being patient with a kitten isn't just "nice"—it's essential for their development, emotional wellbeing, behaviour, and your long-term relationship with them.

Kittens are babies, and patience is the foundation of everything they learn about being safe, confident, and trusting.



0–2 Weeks: Newborn Stage

What to expect:

- Eyes closed (open around 7–10 days)
- Ears folded (hearing develops ~2 weeks)
- Sleeps most of the day
- Needs mum for warmth and feeding
- Cannot regulate body temperature.

2–4 Weeks: Baby Stage

What to expect:

- Eyes fully open (blue)
- Starting to wobble-walk
- Baby teeth appear
- Begins grooming and social reactions
- Start socialisation: gentle handling, soft sounds, toys
- Introduce litter box training.





4–8 Weeks: Socialisation Explosion

What to expect:

- Running, climbing, playing
- Learning boundaries from mum and littermates
- Strong curiosity and confidence
- Transition to wet kitten food begins
- Provide shallow water dish
- Encourage gentle play
- Vaccines start around 6–8 weeks
- Keep indoors only — too vulnerable to roam

8–12 Weeks: Leaving Mum & Growing Fast

- What to expect
- Very active bursts of play
- Kitten learns bite inhibition
- Sleeps 16–20 hours a day
- Strong personality starts showing
- Adoption age is ideally 10–12 weeks
- 1st and 2nd vaccinations





- Regular deworming and flea prevention
- Start scratching posts, structured play, carrier training

3–4 Months

What to expect:

- Rapid growth phase & should be eating 3 - 4 meals per day
- More coordinated jumping/climbing
- Teething begins → chewing behaviour
- Offer chew toys
- Keep cords and toxic plants away
- Continue kitten food (high protein & fat)

4–6 Months: Teenager Emerges

What to expect:

- Big appetite
- Huge energy spikes (“zoomies”)
- Increasing independence
- Sexual maturity starts (time to desex if not already done)
- Maintain routine play to prevent “naughty” behaviour
- Solidify good habits (litter, scratching, meal timing)

6–9 Months

What to expect:

- Looks like a small adult but still VERY kitten-like mentally
- More predictable routines
- Strong social bonds with humans
- Could test limits (climbing, knocking things down)

- Keep consistent rules
- Introduce new environments slowly
- Larger or sturdier climbing furniture may be needed

9–12 Months: Young Adult

What to expect:

- Physical growth slows & should be on 2 - 3 meals per day
- Behaviour becomes calmer (depending on breed)
- Reaches adult size (some breeds later)
- Peak learning ability
- Switch to adult food around 12 months (or 18 months for large breeds like Maine Coons)
- Annual health check & vaccinations
- Keep enrichment high: puzzle feeders, cat trees, play sessions

Kitten Behaviour: What's Normal?

- Zoomies
- Pouncing and biting during play
- Sudden naps
- Clumsy jumping
- Vocalising
- Kneading
- Curiosity about everything
- Occasional “naughtiness” — climbing curtains, chewing cords, etc.



Red Flags Requiring a Vet

- Lethargy or hiding
- Poor appetite
- Diarrhoea/vomiting more than once
- Laboured breathing
- Limping

- Sneezing + runny eyes (common in shelter kittens)
- Bloating belly (worms)

Top Essentials for a Kitten

- Litter tray (1 per cat + 1 extra)
- Scratch posts + trees
- Toys (rotate weekly)
- Kitten-safe plants only
- Soft bedding
- Carrier
- Flea/worming schedule
- Vet plan for desexing





Pets In Autumn



Here are a few things to remember to keep your pets happy and healthy throughout Autumn.

Arthritis & Joint Health

Cooler weather makes Arthritis and joint issues much more painful for your pets. If you have an older dog showing symptoms of these issues it is best to get it checked and managed before winter sets in.

Grapes

Grapes are in season in Autumn, however whilst they are nice for us to enjoy, they are toxic to dogs. If eaten, grapes can cause renal failure and make your dog very sick, so keep them away at all times.

Flea & Tick Control

Year-round flea and tick control is imperative to prevent outbreaks and keep you pet happy and healthy. Check them regularly and if your pet shows symptoms get vet checked.

Shrubbery/brush

Your aviary birds would appreciate fresh thick shrubbery (brush) added

in order to help build nest sites and protect from the colder winds.

Brumation

Several species of reptile will start heralding into brumation over the coming months. (Brumation is a natural process that allows healthy reptiles to handle stressful environmental conditions such as cold temperatures, drought, and/or extended periods of extreme heat.)

Background image designed by starline / [Freepik](#)

Autumn also includes Easter, which can be a dangerous time for pets.

Some things to think about:

- **Is buying a pet rabbit or chicken really the right Easter gift for your child?**
- **Have you considered what could make your pet sick?**
- **Do you know when/if your regular vet clinic is open over the Easter period?**
- **Do you know where the after hours vets are located?**

Easter Eggs & Egg Hunt

If you are planning an Easter egg hunt, make sure your pets not have access and count to make sure all eggs are before allowing your pet back into the hunt area.

Many pets will eat the hidden treasures and unfortunately the theobromine & caffeine found in chocolate can make your pet very sick.

Foil Wrapping

Not only is the chocolate egg dangerous, the foil wrapping they come in can also pose a problem. Some pets may eat the wrapping, which can become a dangerous intestinal obstruction.

Hot Cross Buns

Hot Cross Buns are delicious and no Easter would be quite right without them. However, as they contain sultanas, avoid feeding them to your

pets. Unfortunately Sultanas, Grapes and Raisins contain an unknown toxin that can cause kidney failure in some dogs. This fortunately has rarely been seen in Australia.

Easter Lily

These pretty flowers are often included in floral arrangements. The Easter lily can cause renal failure in cats if chewed or pollen is licked from their fur after brushing against the flowers (all parts of the plant are toxic).

Sugar Free Lollies

Xylitol the artificial sweetener found in many chewing gums and sugar free lollies is toxic even in small doses to companion pets. Ensure that you know the ingredients in any lollies around the house, and most importantly keep them out of your pet's reach.

Easter Grass

The paper or cellophane nesting material that comes in many Easter baskets poses a problem if swallowed. These could cause a linear foreign body, resulting in intestinal trauma or intestinal intussusception (a condition where the intestine telescopes in on itself).

When to see your vet

If your pet has chewed, swallowed or potentially chewed/swallowed any of the above, it is vital your pet is seen by a veterinarian immediately.

You should take your pet to the vet if he/she is unwell. Don't wait for your regular clinic to re-open as even a delay of 24 hours could put your pet's life at risk.

Poisons Helpline: 1300 869 738 <https://www.animalpoisons.com.au/>



Response to Glenelg Shire Council's draft Domestic Animal Management Plan

Animal Care Australia DOES NOT SUPPORT the sole use of surveys as a means of consultation.

Animal Care Australia commend Council on:

- ✓ Returning strays directly to owners whenever possible – many other councils have a “First ride home free” program where registered strays are returned free the first time they are picked up.
- ✗ A limit of only 6 ‘rodents’ we assume refers to rats/mice, 30 small birds, and the limit of only 6 reptiles is NOT SUPPORTED by Animal Care Australia as this contradicts the animal welfare needs of the individual species – in particular rodents where there are multiple species of rodents kept as pets.

Animal Care Australia had significant feedback on many aspects of the DAMP. Read more in our submission on our website:



Response to Central Coast City Council's draft Keeping of Animals Policy

Animal Care Australia stated the Policy is confusing for the average reader.

Animal Care Australia reminded Council that animal welfare is NOT about numbers and should not be assessed by numbers. Poor welfare can be found in cases where 1 animal is being kept OR where 10 animals are kept.

Restrictions – even guidelines - based on the number of animals on a property is not supported by Animal Care Australia without full consideration of the animal welfare impacts on the individual species – even when zoned as residential.

Animal Care Australia provided significant additional feedback. Read our full submission here:



Read more: <https://www.animalcareaustralia.org.au/aca-library/>



Response to Darebin City Council's draft Domestic Animal Management Plan

Animal Care Australia commended Council on:

- ✓ Level of requirements and training to qualify as an authorised officer
- ✓ A dedicated Facebook page for Animal Facility
- ✓ Having 84Y agreements in place and the animal facility partnership with rescue groups for neonate kitten foster care
- ✓ Domestic Violence support initiatives for pets caught up in those situations

Importantly Animal Care Australia does not support the animal number restrictions (without a permit) on the keeping of birds, small mammals, and reptiles.

Animal Care Australia provided significant additional feedback. ogs, reptiles and small mammals.

You can read our full correspondence on our website or click the icon below:



Response to Hindmarsh Shire Council's draft Domestic Animal Management Plan

Animal Care Australia commend Council on:

- ✓ New off-lead dog park established in Nhill in 2024.
- ✓ Impounded dogs 2024/25 = 7 – 0 euthanised – unclaimed rehomed via rescue.
- ✓ Initiatives to conduct info sessions with community groups and educational facilities.
- ✓ Looking into communication with foster care networks and rescue groups.
- ✓ Promoting desexing.
- ✗ A limit of only 6 rodents and only 6 reptiles is NOT SUPPORTED by Animal Care Australia as this contradicts the animal welfare needs of the individual species – in particular rodents when there are multiple species of rodents kept as pets.

You can read our full response on our website or click the icon below:



Response to Mildura City Council's draft Domestic Animal Management Plan.

Animal Care Australia DOES NOT SUPPORT the sole use of surveys as a means of consultation.

Animal Care Australia questioned why statistics for impounded cats only specify "domestic" cats? Does Council recognise its responsibility to recognise ALL cats under what is supported in Victoria's Cat Management Strategy.

Animal Care Australia has major concerns with the following:

"If a member of the public contacts Council to pick up a stray dog, the animal must be kept secured on either a leash or in an enclosed space or else Council officers may not attend the request"

Why should members of the public contain a wandering unknown dog before officers will attend? This poses significant risk to those residents if the dog in question is not amenable to being contained by them?

Animal Care Australia does not support the number restrictions on guinea pigs and rabbits being kept as pets.

You can read our full response on our website or click the icon below:





Advocating for you!

Response to South Australia Breeder Reforms: Standards and Guidelines, Limits and Regulations for dog and cat breeders.

In order to support the intent of the reforms while reducing unintended negative impacts, the following refinements are recommended:

1. Introduce a tiered compliance model based on scale and risk.
2. Adopt outcome-based standards where possible.
3. Clarify definitions relating to home-based breeding.
4. Support transparency in health testing without penalising disclosure.
5. Provide clear, published criteria for Board decisions.
6. Ensure proportionate enforcement focused on welfare outcomes.

You can read our full response on our website or click the icon below:



Response to the draft Dangerous Animal Guideline - Crocodiles as Pets

Animal Care Australia supports the ability for crocodiles to be kept as pets under wildlife licensing and guidelines.

We provided feedback on a range of points, in particular, some aspects of the guideline's enclosure requirements.

You can read our full response on our website or click the icon below:



Read more: <https://www.animalcareaustralia.org.au/aca-library/>

Victorian Government responds to Wildlife Act Review

The Victorian Government responds to Wildlife Act Review with recommendations that will affect native wildlife keepers.

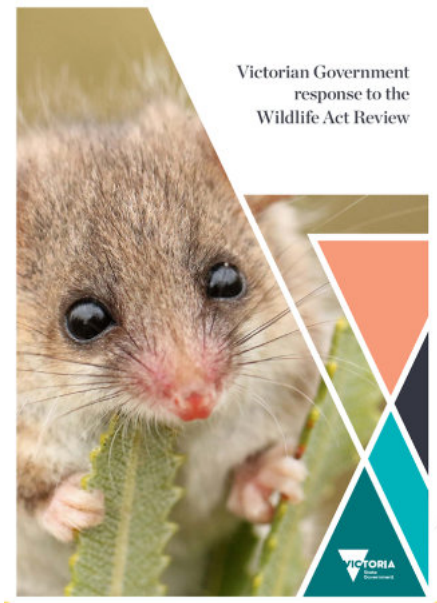
It has only taken the Government four years, but they have finally released their response to the Report into the Review of the Wildlife Act.

While it was good to see the more 'ideological' wishes not supported by the government unfortunately there will be changes to how native wildlife licenses are issued and who can hold a license.

The major implications of the government's supported recommendations will include:

- the development of a Bill to amend the Act, and the preparation of regulations to amend the Wildlife Regulations 2024
- License holders will have to undergo a fit and proper person test
- a new class of licence for the private keeping of dangerous wildlife as pets
- prohibit the keeping of crocodiles as pets
- number restrictions will be implemented

Animal Care Australia has responded to the Minister regarding these changes and has requested a meeting to discuss our concerns.



(Click on report to read it)

You can read our response on our website:



The Animal Care Expert

Watch out for our next issue in
June 2026.

Click to read our [previous issues](#)



Want To Join Our Team?



Fish & Aquatic Species Representative

Experience:

Animal Care Australia is seeking a person who has reasonable advocacy experience and an understanding of the differences between animal rights and animal welfare.

Animal Care Australia is seeking a person who has reasonable experience in the keeping & breeding of fish – tropical, freshwater and marine.

Essential skills:

- Communication skills (oral & written)
- Time management
- Able to work as part of a Team

Desirable – but not essential:

The inclusion of cephalopods in animal welfare legislation will result in Codes of Practice needing to be examined and in some cases to be drafted. Knowledge of keeping these species will be of great benefit.

Having a membership of an Association for the keeping & breeding of fish species or contacts to groups.

Responsibilities include:

- Represent all species specific member organisations to communicate current animal-related community and welfare issues.
- Undertake work including drafting of policy advice, project work of a specialist nature, research and analyse current legislation and policies and prepare associated reports for consideration by our Committee.
- Assist us to work with government, non-government & community stakeholders to ensure policy issues are coordinated and effectively communicated as per community and government expectations.

If you would like to join the Animal Care Australia Team or you know someone who would be ideal for the position please apply via [SEEK Volunteer](#) or email us at: aca@animalcareaustralia.org.au





Animal Care Australia

About Us



Species Representatives:

BIRDS: **Sam Davis**

CATS: **Michelle Grayson**

DOGS: **Kylie Gilbert**

EXHIBITED: **Tracey Dierikx**

FISH: vacant

HORSES: **Karri Nadazdy**

INSECTS: **Michaela Storen**

NATIVES: **Michael Donnelly**

REPTILES: **Joanne Payne**

SMALL MAMMALS: **Rachel Sydenham**

Executive:

PRESIDENT & TREASURER: **Michael Donnelly**

VICE PRESIDENT: **Sam Davis**

SECRETARY & PUBLIC OFFICER:

Michelle Grayson

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