

September 9 2021

Dear Andy Meddick MLC

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Taskforce on Rehoming Pets.

By way of introduction, Humane Research Australia (HRA) is a not-for-profit organisation advocating scientifically valid and humane non-animal methods of research. We assert that there are scientifically valid alternatives to animal experimentation available that are more accurate, human-relevant and ethical.

We join forces with those who share our beliefs, to put an end to animal experimentation in science and education. We do this by spotlighting and scrutinising the use and funding of animal experimentation in Australian universities and research institutions. We do this by calling for transparency, integrity and progressive thinking from researchers, institutions, organisations and governments regarding animal experimentation. We do this by supporting scientists, researchers and organisations who use and develop non-animal alternatives to improve human health.

HRA is not directly involved in the rehoming of dogs and cats in Victoria. Our involvement is focussed upon collaboration in the Right to Release campaign, working closely with Beagle Freedom Australia, and the Animal Justice Party. Additionally, though attempts to increase transparency in animal experimentation and obtain information upon which to base our campaigning activities, we have sought to obtain data on the use of dogs and cats for research purposes in Victoria. Our submission is premised on this experience.

As you will be aware, Animal Welfare Victoria has issued guidelines for licence holders, researchers, teachers and Animal Ethics Committees to consider when rehoming animals after the conclusion of a research or teaching project. These are not mandatory, but we understand that efforts are underway to make rehoming for dogs and cats used for research and teaching mandatory. Clearly, HRA is supportive of this but would like to raise the below points, in anticipation of rehoming becoming a mandatory requirement:

1. There will be an increasing number of dogs and cats able to be rehomed from research facilities
2. There will be additional pressures places upon rehoming organisations to be able to rehome these animals
3. There will be increased public awareness that dogs and cats are being used in research in Victoria.

To ensure the successful rehoming of cats and dogs used in research and teaching, HRA suggests the below:

- The proposed database for pets requiring rehoming should include a category as to source of the animal, to include prior use in research and teaching

- The proposed database of Victorian CFCNS and rescue groups should record whether the CFCN or rescue group has the required specialism in rehoming animals used in research
- If there is insufficient specialism to meet rehoming demand, assistance (financial and resources) should be provided to specialist groups to expand their services, alongside training and support to selected groups currently without the specialism required, to be able to meet increased capacity. We understand that it can take many years for rescue groups to be able to build trust and working relationships with research institutes. This could be jeopardised if new groups break agreed protocols or place animals in unsuitable homes. Therefore, the number of groups able to adopt out animals from this niche background should be restricted with support provided to managing such complex relationships.
- In order for rescue groups and potential adopters/foster carers to be able to meet the often complex needs of dogs and cats used in research, there should be increased transparency as to what the animals were used for, what procedures have been conducted, how the animals have been housed, the conditions etc
- HRA would welcome Animal Welfare Victoria providing a list of license holders using dogs and cats in research and teaching in Australia. This information would facilitate adoptions and surely is a pre-requisite if rehoming becomes a mandatory requirement, to enable their availability to be registered. Currently, this information has been refused to HRA, despite it being available in other Australian states and territories.
- HRA would prefer dogs and cats from research facilities to be placed into foster homes prior to adoption rather than awaiting rehoming at pounds or shelters, as without having had any exposure to a home environment, a period of carefully monitored adjustment is necessary for the benefit of the dogs and cats and their potential owners.
- HRA would like to see training delivered to animal research institutes and AECs to include dog and cat behaviour and environmental enrichment, to increase each animals' chance of successful rehoming. There should be a maximum age by which dogs or cats should be retired from research (suggested at 6 years) and guidance on signs to look out for that an animal is not coping and should therefore be retired early. This would increase chances of adoption as it is more challenging to rehome older dogs and cats. Additionally, there should be greater consideration placed on alternatives to the use of dogs or cats and greater scrutiny of research protocols to provide assurance that alternatives could not be used.
- The composition of AECs which use dogs or cats should include a specialist behaviourist, or at least access to one
- We suggest that research institutes play a greater role in facilitating rehoming. This could be via a financial contribution to enable vet checks or training, provision of vehicles, transportation of animals etc
- The balance of control appears to currently be in the hands of research institutes. Rescue groups are bound to confidentiality agreements and only able to rehome dogs and cats when approved to do so. This would change should rehoming become



mandatory and result in a more balanced partnership with greater transparency expected to result.

Thank you for your consideration of the points raised in HRA's submission.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R. Smith', is displayed on a light-colored rectangular background.

Rachel Smith
Chief Executive Officer HRA