

Animal Care, Ethics and Usage at La Trobe University.

Background

In 2008 the bioSMART Group was commissioned to review the situation in the Central Animal House as a response to a report by the Bureau of Animal Welfare, Victoria, on the status of animals and the conduct of the Animal Ethics Committee (AEC) at La Trobe. The consultancy provided recommendations relating to the governance and structure required for animal management, current and future management of animals and training and education with regard to animal usage.

Following the bioSMART report (henceforward the Marshall Report), and further correspondence from the Bureau of Animal Welfare, Victoria, a *Review of Animal Usage* at La Trobe was commissioned from a panel chaired by Professor Ross Day and which reported on 30 July 2009. The review panel investigated the activities of the AEC, the management of the Central Animal House (CAH), communications between these parties and various stakeholders, record-keeping and training practices involving animals, and interviewed a wide selection of animal users and senior scientists at the University. It also inspected most of the animal holding and experimenting areas across the Bundoora campus.

The Panel found that the status quo with regard to animal usage at La Trobe University was unacceptable and that if the situation remained as it was, La Trobe University would in all probability lose its six animal usage licences. The consequences of such an outcome would likely be devastating for several sectors within the University including areas of research distinction and future development. Strategic research plans would need to be rethought, taking into account the impact on the University's reputation as well as considerable irreparable negative fall-out for staff careers and University revenue.

In light of the findings of the Panel, the University decided that animal usage would continue at La Trobe and that this would entail adoption of best practice as the minimum standard of housing, treatment and care for its animals.

However, the key findings and recommendations of the Animal Usage Review, and of the Marshall Report, were that a major change in both management and culture were required if La Trobe University was to continue using animals in both research and teaching. Both reviews emphasized the need for centralized management and co-ordination of all matters involving animals in research and teaching, and the importance of new initiatives in educating staff and students in regard to the responsible use of animals and the importance of the principles of reduction, replacement and refinement in connection with animal studies. Since the day of receipt of these reviews, the University has been urgently and comprehensively working to change management and culture with many steps completed in August 2009, the month after the Animal Usage Review.

In the month following the handing down of the Review, the Pro Vice Chancellor (Graduate Research) was asked to add animal welfare and ethics matters to his portfolio, and steps were taken to act immediately on the most urgent recommendations of the Review. A brief summary of progress to date on these matters now follows. This takes the form of listing each key recommendation of the Day Review, and then commenting on progress to date in implementing the recommendation.

Animal Usage Review Terms of Reference, Membership and University Response

Terms of Reference for the Review, approved by the Research and Graduate Studies Committee and Academic Board were

1. To analyse current and projected animal use at all University sites with respect to infrastructure, staffing and administration requirements for all aspects of that use.
2. To advise the University on an institutional mechanism that will facilitate implementation of the 3Rs; including planning of research direction with consideration of animal welfare and continuous improvement of practices that impact animal welfare.
3. To review the provision of a University framework for the administration of animal use that safeguards the welfare of animals from acquisition through use to disposal; including the delineation and regulation of responsibilities related to the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986, Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulations 2008, the Australian Code of Practice for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes, the Code of Practice for the Housing and Care of Laboratory Mice, Rats, Guinea Pigs and Rabbits and the Code of Practice for the Use of Animals from Municipal Pounds for Scientific Procedures.
4. To provide direction to the University on appropriate resourcing and policy support for all those tasked with ensuring that the use of animals in research and teaching complies with the relevant legislation.

The panel, consisting of

Professor Ross Day (Chair)
Professor Andrew Brennan, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Graduate Research) (PVC (GR))
Professor Jaye Chin-Dusting, Baker Institute
Mr Jo Culican, University of Queensland
Dr Chris Thurgood, RSPCA,

met from July 21 to 24 2009. Their report was received by the University on July 30 and was considered by the Research and Graduate Studies Committee on July 31, noting that the Vice-Chancellor accepted the Recommendations on behalf of the University on July 30. Research and Graduate Studies Committee and a meeting of all interested staff on August 5 endorsed the actions of the Vice-Chancellor in accepting the recommendations.

The next section details the recommendations and progress in their implementation over the period August to December 2009.

Recommendations and their implementation

R1 That La Trobe University makes a clear decision EITHER to discontinue the use of all animals in teaching and research, OR to continue using animals, recognizing that - in the latter case - there is likely to be at least a doubling of such usage in the short to medium term.

Implementation. La Trobe University has decided to continue the use of animals in research and teaching, making provision for at least a doubling of that use in the short to medium term.

R2 That if the University decides to continue with animal use, then it adopts best practice in the field as its minimal standard.

Implementation. As a step towards achieving best practice, the University has appointed a distinguished and experienced expert, Dr Lyndal Scott, as Chair of the AEC, and has given the AEC authority to establish the best standards in training, researcher supervision and animal management. New members of the AEC will be taking up their roles at the start of 2010. New business processes supported by recently built software are being implemented and users will shortly be able to submit and review their animal ethics on-line.

A central animal service has been established, and the interim director of this is Stephen Marshall, whose wide experience of directing animal services includes the management of very large animal facilities at the University of Western Australia and Monash University. Mr Marshall's appointment runs until June 2010.

A variety of new Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) have been introduced, providing comprehensive cover of many aspects of husbandry, breeding, animal transport among facilities, handling and procedures. These have been based on SOPs previously developed by Dr Scott, and ones previously used by Mr Marshall.

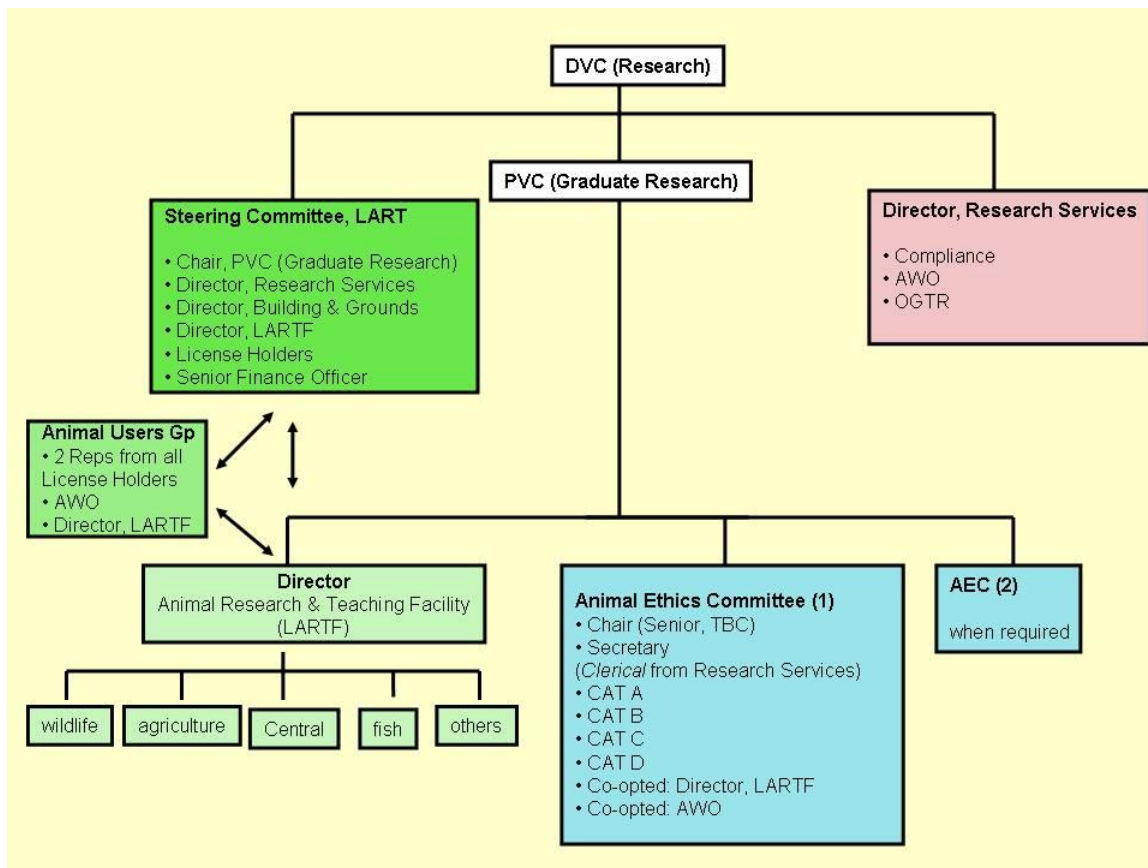
A new animal management record system is being commissioned, and in the meantime, Mr Marshall has put in place a comprehensive record-keeping system to track animals in all La Trobe facilities.

The formerly part-time Animal Welfare Officer (AWO) has now been moved to a full-time position, reporting on all animal welfare and ethics issues to the PVC(GR).

R3 The formation of a centralized animal management service, provisionally called La Trobe University Animal Research and Training Facility (LARTF), so named to indicate a new, different, improved, empowered, well-defined entity, whose director reports to the Pro- Vice Chancellor (Graduate Research).

Implementation. See details of the new animal management structure above. Both Stephen Marshall and Lyndal Scott report directly to the PVC (GR) to ensure that they have the necessary authority to fulfill their respective roles. The PVC(GR) has been given the role of integrating and coordinating the work of the Animal Welfare Officer, the Chair of the AEC and the Director of LARTF, all of whom are now reporting regularly to him, and meeting with him on a regular basis.

The implementation of the new animal service management structure is currently underway, and an Organisational Change Impact Statement (OCIS) is under preparation for release around the end of 2009 with full implementation expected by January 2010. The outline of the structure for management of animal care, ethics and usage is summarized in the following diagram taken from the Animal Usage Review report (accepted in a previous OCIS) :



R4 The formation of a Steering Committee consisting of all License Holders, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), the Director of Research Services, Director of LARTF, the Director of Buildings and Grounds, a Senior Finance Officer and to be Chaired by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Graduate Research). See Appendix 6 for the terms of reference for this committee.

Implementation. The Steering Committee has been established with the following reporting structure, guidelines, composition, membership and terms of reference.

The Steering Committee for the LARTF reports directly to the Planning and Resources Committee through the DVC (Research) and has broad responsibility for strategic planning in respect of animal use. In matters within the terms of reference of the Animal Ethics Committee, LARTF will refer such matters for consideration and recommendation by the Animal Ethics Committee prior to consideration through LARTF and Planning and Resources Committee.

1) Composition of the Committee

- a) Pro Vice-Chancellor (Graduate Research) - Chair
- b) The six Scientific Procedures licence holders for La Trobe University
- c) Chair, Animal Ethics Committee
- d) Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)
- e) A senior member, Finance Division
- f) Director, Building and Grounds
- g) Director, Research Services
- h) Director LARTF

2) Membership

- a) Professor Andrew Brennan, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Graduate Research) - Chair
- b) The six Scientific Procedures licence holders
 - i) Dr Ben Gawne (Environmental Management & Ecology A/W)
 - ii) Prof Nick Hoogenraad (Head of School, Molecular Sciences)
 - iii) Prof Roger Parish (Head of School, Life Sciences)

- iv) Prof Susan Paxton (Head of School, Psychological Sciences)
- v) Dr Douglas Rogers (Head of School, Human Biosciences Sciences)
- vi) A/Prof Phil Suter (Head of Department, Environmental Management & Ecology)
- c) Dr Lyndal Scott (Chair, Animal Ethics Committee)
- d) Prof Tim Brown (Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research))
- e) Mr Oreste Pompetti (Finance & Resources Manager, Research Services)
- f) Mr Barry Inglis (Director, Building and Grounds)
- g) Dr David Phillips (Director, Research Services)
- h) Mr Stephen Marshall (Director LARTF)

3) Term of Office

Two years renewable

4) Terms of Reference

- a) Make recommendations to Planning and Resources Committee on current and future animal usage, based on best practice housing, management and care of animals.
- b) Work with the Director, LARTF, in developing transparent cost-recovery models for the use of animals across all LTU campuses.
- c) Respond promptly to recommendations from the Animal Ethics Committee on strategy and policy for animal use.
- d) Support the Director, LARTF, in all steps necessary to ensure that animal usage and care at the University complies at minimum with best practice in the field.
- e) Receive and recommend to Planning and Resources Committee Strategic Plans for Animal Usage across all LTU campuses.
- f) Receive and endorse Operational Plans for Animal Usage across all LTU campuses.

The Committee has met twice and has endorsed an initial budget of \$2.5 million for investment in improved facilities at the Central Animal House and for other necessary changes. It has established communication lines with the AEC, and has taken advice from the Principal Veterinary Officer of the Bureau of Animal Welfare.

R5 The composition of the AEC to be reviewed and include as well as all the required Category Members, the Director, LARTF, and a Secretary commensurate with the role (ie., at clerical level), and to be chaired by a senior researcher from within or outside the University.

Implementation. See under R2 above. New members of the AEC will be taking up their roles at the start of 2010. These include a new veterinarian (Category A), new senior scientist (Category B), an additional person with demonstrable commitment to animal welfare (Category C) and a new lay member (Category E). The Director of LARTF is also a member of the AEC. The AEC has direct lines of communication to the LARTF steering committee, and the Chair of the AEC as well as the Director LARTF are both members of the Steering Committee.

R6 The composition of the present Animal Users' Groups to be reviewed to ensure the group contains representatives from all license-holding areas, and that its members include the AWO and the Director LARTF.

Implementation. The Animal Users' Group, including the AWO and Director LARTF will be convened early in 2010 and will meet as required thereafter.

R7 As a matter of urgency provide the necessary resources and implement the recommendations involving operational aspects of CAH, many of which have been raised in the Marshall report.

Implementation. A budget variation of \$2.5 million has been prepared for approval by PRC. Items budgeted for will improve cleanliness (new cage washer, sterilizer, etc), set up barriers to control spread of diseases and infections across animal rooms, establish ventilated caging so that clean, rederived animals are kept in a disease-free condition. The budget variation also includes

provision for the necessary administrative assistance required in light of reforms to the AEC and the animal management structures, and also makes provision to bring the neglected agriculture and zoology areas up to a minimally acceptable level. A new floor for the agriculture shearing shed has already been installed, as this was deemed the most urgent of works requiring attention.

R8 There is a clear need to develop a Strategic Plan for Animal Usage at La Trobe University that covers the importance of animal welfare, resource efficiency and future growth.

Implementation. The Strategic Plan's first draft will be circulated at the start of the new semester (March 2010) with the intention of seeking wide feedback from all stakeholders before a final version is released in May.

R9 While a new state of the art, stand alone rodent facility should be a long term goal, to advance the strategic plan in the shorter term, CAH will need more space, refurbishment, effective barriers and operating systems and a substantial investment on independent or exhaust ventilated caging systems (IVC/EVC) and associated equipment.

Implementation. This item is addressed under R7 above. Ventilated cage systems, effective barriers, new washing systems etc will be in place by early 2010 once the \$2.5 million budget variation is passed by PRC. Proper animal transport SOPs are now in force, and a new vehicle for appropriate transport of animals is on order. A new full-time animal technician has been appointed to the Central Animal House, and a review of workflows and position descriptions is underway with the intention of launching a draft organizational change document for wide consultation on the new management structure.

R10 Regular training sessions covering all aspects of research involving animals should be introduced as a matter of urgency with attendance made compulsory (with certification of attendance) for all staff and students without prior experience in research involving animals. Refresher courses will be implemented for existing staff to ensure they are cognizant of current animal use and welfare requirements outlined in the relevant Codes.

Implementation. The new AEC Chair, in collaboration with the AWO, have already devised a two-day training course to be delivered to the first group of staff and students in late February 2010. Members of the AEC have been offered training on their roles by means of a one-day training course to be offered to the University by the Bureau of Animal Welfare in late January 2010. An on-line training module covering legal aspects of animal usage is being developed by the Research Ethics and Integrity unit, for release later this month.

R11 Allocation of a specific budget to be provided by the University for ongoing training and education purposes in animal use and welfare, including skills assessment and refresher training for existing staff, and training for AEC members.

Implementation. A budget of \$50 000 has already been allocated to this purpose and is controlled by the Director, LARTF. The AWO has constructed a skills register, and has already carried out skills assessment, and - where necessary - additional training for staff currently handling or carrying out procedures on animals.