

Openness Agreement on Animal Research and Teaching in Australia

August 2023



The Australian and New Zealand Council for
the Care of Animals in Research and Teaching



Contents

Foreword	3
Introduction	4
Purpose of the Openness Agreement	
Why the Openness Agreement was Developed	
How the Openness Agreement works	
Our Commitments	6
1. We will be open about our involvement in the use of animals	
2. We will enhance our communications with the media and the public about our use of animals	
3. We will be proactive in providing opportunities for the public to find out about research or teaching involving the use of animals	
4. We will report annually on our efforts to improve openness in our use of animals	
Signatories	8
Supporters	9
Further information	10
Acknowledgements	11



Foreword



Studies involving animals comprise an important and remarkably diverse part of Australia's scientific research effort.

These may range from the use of specially bred mice and rats in medical research, through agricultural field trials and research to improve veterinary care, to observational studies aimed at protecting our unique wildlife. Animals are also sometimes used in teaching and in animal testing (that is the use of animals to assess the safety of drugs, vaccines or chemicals), although this only occurs on a small scale in Australia and the use of animals to test cosmetics is banned altogether.

In all cases, animals may only be used if approved in advance by an Animal Ethics Committee, including veterinarians, people with relevant scientific expertise, and people independent of the institution in categories that require a demonstrable commitment to animal welfare and a lack of any involvement in the use of animals in research or teaching. Animal Ethics Committees are just one part of a broader regulatory framework designed to protect animals used in research or teaching and to support ethical decision-making.

Beyond this framework lies a need – and indeed an expectation – for the broader community to be informed about how and why animals are used.

This openness agreement presents an opportunity to support the Australian research community in its endeavours to address that need. When an organisation becomes a Signatory or Supporter of this agreement, it is making a tangible commitment to greater transparency and it is joining a diverse community with a shared interest in public engagement.

I welcome this openness agreement as an initiative in support of thoughtful and informed community discourse on the important and often challenging issues surrounding the use of animals in research and teaching.

Dr Cathy Foley AO PSM
Australia's Chief Scientist



Introduction

Purpose of the Openness Agreement

The purpose of this agreement is to assist Australian organisations that conduct, fund or are otherwise associated with the use of animals in research or teaching to promote openness and support well-informed public discussion.

Why the Openness Agreement was developed

As Signatories and Supporters of this Openness Agreement, we acknowledge that the use of animals in research or teaching is often seen as contentious and that opinions range from many levels of conditional support through to strong opposition.

We respect this diversity of opinion and recognise that it can exist within our own organisations as well as among our supporters and others in the broader community.

Research in which animals are used is also often technically complex and may involve sophisticated technology, complex statistical analysis, international collaboration, and skills that can only be acquired through intense study. This makes it important to ensure that the underlying aims and purpose of animal research are presented clearly.

Another consideration is that the use of animals for research or teaching is regulated under state and territory laws. A national code, which is adopted under laws in all states and territories, sets out the responsibilities of researchers, teachers, animal carers and institutions to ensure that the use of animals is ethical, humane and responsible, and is underpinned by an obligation to respect animals.

The national code also requires application of 'the 3Rs' – that is, wherever possible researchers and teachers must strive for:

Replacement of animals with non-animal alternatives

Reduction in the number of animals used, and

Refinement to minimise harm to animals.

Further information about the regulation of animal research and teaching may be found at anzccart.adelaide.edu.au/openness-agreement

Because of these many factors, and recognising legitimate community expectations for transparency, we believe openness and clarity concerning the use of animals in research or teaching is imperative to enable well-informed public discussion.

This Openness Agreement was therefore developed so Australian organisations that conduct, fund or are otherwise associated with the use of animals in research or teaching can demonstrate their commitment to openness, and can promote awareness of the reasons why animals are used, the benefits derived, the limitations that apply, and the steps taken to minimise harm.



How the Openness Agreement works

Participating in the Openness Agreement is voluntary and independent of regulatory obligations.

Organisations may participate in one of two ways: as Signatories or as Supporters.

Signatories

Any organisation directly involved in the use of animals for research or teaching may become a Signatory. Examples include universities, medical research institutes, manufacturers of medicines or vaccines, and organisations involved in wildlife conservation research.

Signatories must pledge to meet all four commitments in the Openness Agreement. How the commitments are met will differ between organisations, but all organisations must provide a publicly available statement about their involvement in the use of animals in research or teaching, and must submit an annual report on their efforts to demonstrate greater openness. A willingness to respond openly to enquiries about their involvement in the use of animals is also expected.

If an organisation appears unable to meet its commitments, it may be asked to reconsider its position as a Signatory.

Supporters

Supporters are organisations that do not conduct animal research or teaching directly but have indirect involvement in ways such as providing funding, regulatory oversight or serving as professional bodies.

Because Supporters are not directly involved in the use of animals in research or teaching, they might not be able to meet all four commitments in the Openness Agreement. However all Supporters must provide a publicly available statement about their involvement in the use of animals in research or teaching, and must submit an annual report on their efforts to demonstrate greater openness. A willingness to respond openly to enquiries about their involvement in the use of animals is also expected. If an organisation appears unable to meet these obligations, it may be asked to reconsider its position as a Supporter.



Our Commitments

Organisations wishing to become Signatories to the Openness Agreement must meet each of the four commitments. Organisations wishing to become Supporters should demonstrate that they are working to fulfill all four commitments wherever practicable.

The overarching goal of the commitments is for organisations to show ongoing progress towards greater openness. Organisations are free to choose how they do this so the steps taken to fulfil each commitment will vary depending on the organisation's activities and capacity. However, all organisations must provide a publicly available statement giving information about their involvement in the use of animals in research or teaching and must submit an annual report on their efforts to demonstrate greater openness. A template is available to assist with annual reporting although organisations may choose an alternative approach provided it demonstrates evidence of meeting the commitments. A willingness to respond openly to enquiries about their involvement in the use of animals is also expected.



Commitment 1.

We will be open about our involvement in the use of animals in research or teaching.

In working towards this Commitment, we will:

- Aim to ensure our communications provide accurate descriptions about the potential benefits, harms, limitations and ethical considerations regarding our use of animals.
- Take steps to ensure that our staff (and students, where applicable) are aware of our involvement in the use of animals in research or teaching.
- Be prepared to respond to all reasonable enquiries and if there are partnerships with non-signatory organisations or issues of confidentiality or commercial sensitivity, we will be as open as possible while respecting these constraints.



Commitment 2.

We will enhance our communications with the media and the public about our use of animals in research or teaching.

In working towards this Commitment, we will:

- Provide a publicly available statement with information about our involvement in the use of animals in research or teaching. The statement will be unique to our organisation, easily accessible on our website, and available within 12 months of becoming a Signatory or Supporter.
- Include information about our use of animals in research or teaching in communications and media releases when it has played a significant role in an aspect of our work. Where appropriate, this may also include images or video.
- Support discussion of our use of animals in research or teaching with the media and the local or broader communities.
- Provide a point of contact for information about our use of animals in research or teaching.



Commitment 3.

We will be proactive in providing opportunities for the public to find out about research or teaching involving animals.

In working towards this Commitment, we will:

- Consider ways to facilitate public engagement and understanding around the use of animals in research or teaching.
- Include, where relevant, information about the role of animals in research or teaching when participating in talks or public events.
- Contribute to efforts to provide more comprehensive explanations and ensure the accuracy of information regarding the use of animals in research or teaching.



Commitment 4.

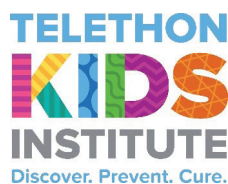
We will report annually on our efforts to improve openness in our use of animals in research or teaching.

In working towards this Commitment:

- We will provide an annual summary to ANZCCART each year highlighting our efforts to meet each of these Commitments and any new initiatives aimed at greater openness.
- We understand that ANZCCART will publish an annual update on progress in openness and no more than three years after its publication, ANZCCART will review the Openness Agreement and its impact in consultation with stakeholders and amend it if necessary.

Signatories

The following organisations were acknowledged as Inaugural Signatories at the launch of the Openness Agreement on 10 August 2023:



Supporters

The following organisations were acknowledged as Inaugural Supporters at the launch of the Openness Agreement on 10 August 2023:



BUILDING
A HEALTHY
AUSTRALIA



Further information

This Openness Agreement is an initiative of the Australian and New Zealand Council for the Care of Animals in Research and Teaching (ANZCCART).

The Openness Agreement is based on the 'Concordat on Openness on Animal Research in the UK' and was developed by a working group convened by ANZCCART. An initial draft was released for public consultation and after review and incorporation of feedback, a revised version was issued for comment to potential Signatories and Supporters. After review and incorporation of further feedback, the finalised version was made available to organisations with an invitation to sign in May 2023.

Membership of the working group comprised representatives from:

- Association of Australian Medical Research Institutes
- Australian and New Zealand Council for the Care of Animals in Research and Teaching
- Australian and New Zealand Laboratory Animal Association
- Australian Research Council
- Australian Society for Medical Research
- Australian Veterinary Association
- Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
- Humane Research Australia
- Medicines Australia
- National Health and Medical Research Council
- RSPCA Australia
- Understanding Animal Research, Oceania
- Universities Australia
- Convenor: Malcolm France

Further information about ANZCCART, the Openness Agreement, and animal research in Australia – including the ethical review process – can be found at **anzccart.adelaide.edu.au**

For enquiries, please contact ANZCCART Australia at **anzccart@adelaide.edu.au**.

Acknowledgements

The assistance of the following organisations in developing this agreement, both of which have led the development of openness agreements in other countries, is gratefully acknowledged:

- **Understanding Animal Research, UK**
- **European Animal Research Association**



Photographic credits:

All images of animals in this document are associated with research or field studies conducted in Australia under the approval of an Animal Ethics Committee.

- Front: Equine field study, Hunter Valley NSW. Brian Fowler
Laboratory mouse (C57BL/6 strain). Marianne Lim
Fitzroy Falls Spiny Crayfish (*Euastacus dharawalus*). Sarah Toole
- P2: Quail eggs in incubator. Christina Cho
Fat-tailed dunnart (*Sminthopsis crassicaudata*). Carlee Mottley
Laboratory rat (Sprague Dawley). Carlee Mottley
Booroolong frog (*Litoria booroolongensis*). Aimee Silla
- P4 White's seahorse (*Hippocampus whitei*), Sydney Harbour. Giglia Beretta
Brahman cow and egret, central Queensland. Noel Sawtell
Guinea pigs rehomed after use in research. Copyright Liberty Foundation Australia (with permission)
- P5 Sheep and alpaca, Adelaide. Ebony King
Platypus. Joanne Connolly
Rat undergoing CT imaging. Sarah Toole
- P11: Greater glider (*Petauroides volans*). Monica Knipler
New Zealand White rabbits
Long-tailed macaque (*Macaca fascicularis*). Cobie Brinkman

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