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# Animal Welfare Science Centre

## Philosophy, priorities & programs



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
MELBOURNE



MONASH University



Department of  
Primary Industries



## Animal Welfare Science Centre

- Established 1997.
- Partnership of:
  - The University of Melbourne
  - Monash University
  - Department of Primary industries (Vic).
- Formal collaboration with:
  - Ohio State University
  - Massey University.
- 17 active scientists, 14 post-graduate students & 8 technical staff.
- 6 international associate scientists in US and NZ



- The Centre was established to provide a focus and direction for the partner organisations' academic and research resources in animal welfare.

## **Governance**

- Centre Board
  - Uni Melb, Monash Uni, DPI (Vic), Independent Chair
- Centre Advisory Committee
  - Welfare groups, Behaviourists, Industry, Universities, Government



## Aims

### To conduct:

- Strategic animal welfare research to resolve major animal welfare issues,
- Student training &
- Targeted industry, public and tertiary education designed to improve animal welfare and productivity and to assure local and international consumers, the public and Governments that the welfare standards for Australian animals are underpinned by sound and well-accepted science.



# Philosophy

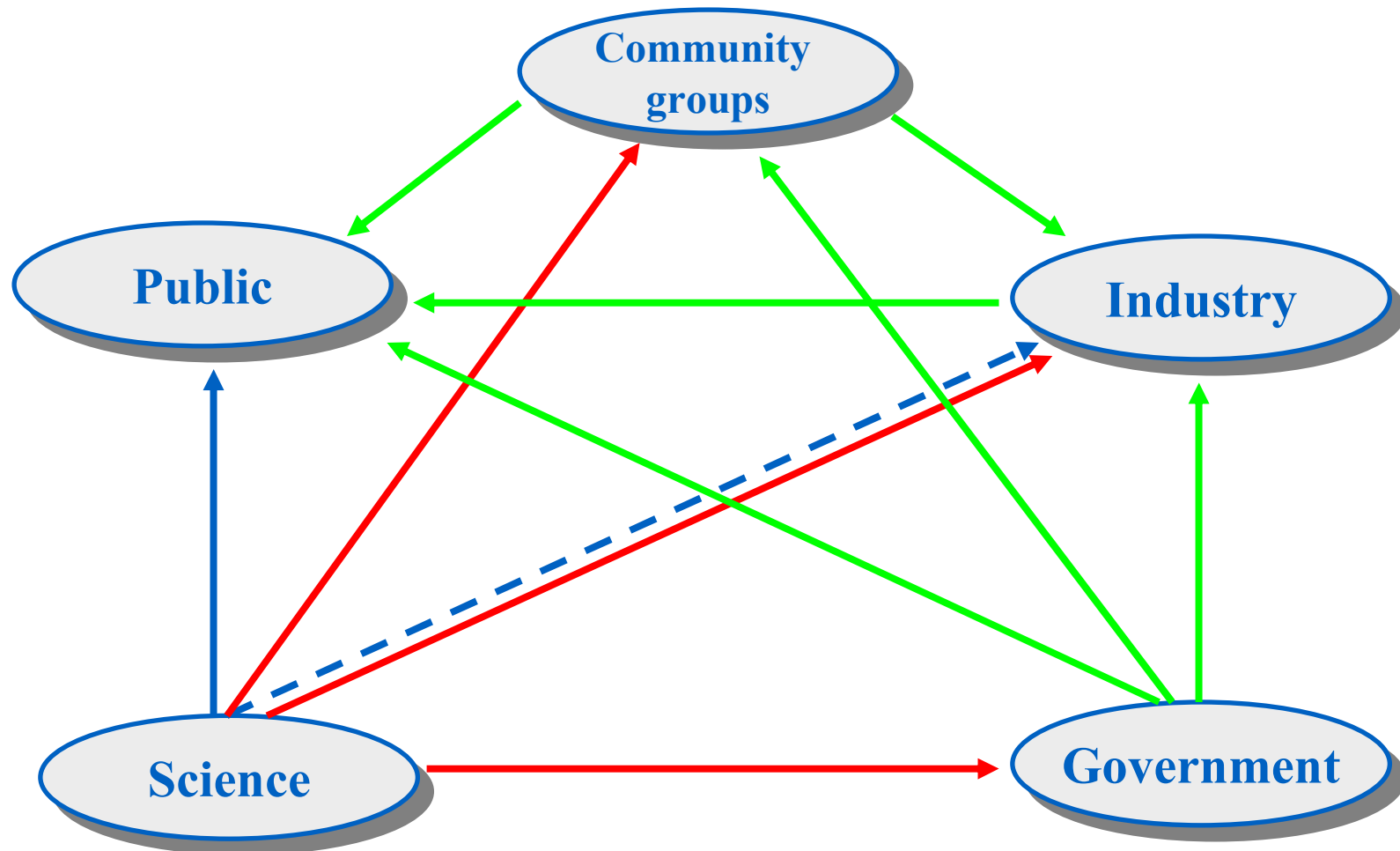
- Science is required to provide sound knowledge that can be used in well-informed debate on the fair and humane treatment of animals.
- Beyond that, science can provide the basis for education and skills training towards more effective and acceptable practices in managing animals under domestic, farming and other conditions.



# Philosophy

**Rational** establishment of animal welfare standards requires critical interdependent **actions**:

1. Understanding **public and consumer attitudes** – will assist in establishing research, education and regulatory policy in animal welfare.
2. Undertaking **research** – will underpinning welfare standards
3. Undertaking **public education** – will awareness of factual information.
4. Undertaking **industry education** – will achieve the desired welfare standards.



← Attitude research

← - - - Welfare research

← Knowledge transfer

← Public & industry ed



## **ANIMAL WELFARE METHODOLOGIES**

Conceptual differences lead to differences in methodology and interpretation. Need to develop broad conceptual agreement within science.

### **Centre RD&E priorities include:**

1. Continue and expand national and international collaborations
2. Remote sensing of animal welfare problems (eg visual imaging)
3. Support industry in the development of industry tools for welfare measurement/compliance.
4. Support industry and government in both industry and public education on the topic of how welfare is assessed.





## **INTENSIVE HOUSING**

Confinement of animals is a controversial issue internationally. Research necessary on the effects of design features (such as space, group size, social and human contact, and furnishings) on the welfare of farm and companion animals, particularly as alternatives or modifications are required to current confinement systems.

### **Centre RD&E priorities include:**

1. Pig and poultry housing, especially space and group size effects on adults.
2. Dogs and cats in shelters, particularly the early housing period.
3. Of lower priority but a likely issue in the future is to develop an understanding of "feed-lotting" lambs and calves.



## **PAINFUL OR AVERSIVE HUSBANDRY**

Surgical procedures, particularly without pain relief, is one of the most prevalent welfare issues identified in various surveys of community groups and industry.

### **Centre RD&E priorities include:**

1. Support others (eg Massey and CSIRO) on research/application to apply new/existing anaesthetics/analgesics, alone or in combination, to provide improved and longer lasting pain relief.
2. Research on alternative procedures.



## TRANSPORT AND SLAUGHTER

Research necessary, particularly on livestock handling during loading/unloading, loading density, journey duration, rest stops and their interactions with present and previous environmental conditions.

The key issue at the slaughter process *per se* is achieving a 100% effective stun. This is an educational issue.

### Centre RD&E priorities include:

1. Support current research groups in their programs on sheep and cattle (UofQ, CSIRO).
2. Research on effects of age, space and duration of transport on bobby calf transport.
3. Support industry in industry education



## **PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS**

Consumer and public attitudes to animal welfare have the potential to dramatically affect the use of animals in society, influencing for better or for worse, the operations of livestock industries, medical research, the management of feral and wild animals and the care of recreational and companion animals.

### **Centre RD&E priorities include:**

1. Develop models for effective public education.
2. Regularly monitor public attitudes and make available to stakeholders for policy development and extending such knowledge to “inform” public attitudes.
3. Research to better understand public attitudes.



## **ANIMAL HANDLER/OWNER TRAINING**

Training of stockpeople and animal carers can improve the welfare of animals during all routine housing and management practices.



## Centre RD&E priorities include:

1. Research on
  - post-farm gate effects of human-animal interactions on animal handling and welfare
  - effects of human-animal interactions in the extensive livestock industries on animal handling and welfare
  - effects of human-animal interactions on companion animal welfare.
2. Support the livestock industries in increasing industry awareness of training opportunities (eg. some specific animal welfare programs but often embedded in other training material).
3. Support livestock industries in increasing training opportunities through development of material and support for industry trainers (eg. Registered Training Organisations, etc.).



## Main Centre programs:

1. Welfare methodology,
2. Housing and husbandry practices and animal welfare,
3. Attitudes to animals and animal welfare, and farmer, consumer and community behaviour, &
4. Tertiary and post-graduate education and training



# Program 1. Welfare methodology

- **Relationships between requirements and animal preferences**
  - Current funding –
    - Victorian Gov Initiative Funding,
    - Poultry CRC, &
    - Aust Pork Limited.
- **Fear / Stress model for beef**
  - Current funding – Beef CRC
- **Machine vision to monitor animal welfare – “proof of concept”**
  - Current funding – Poultry CRC





## **Program 2. Housing & husbandry practices and animal welfare**

- **Welfare implications of alternative mulesing procedures**  
Current funding – Australian Wool Innovation
- **Importance of nests for the welfare of laying hens**  
Current funding – Australian Egg Corporation Limited
- **The effects of group housing during gestation on sow welfare and reproduction**  
Current funding – Aust Pork Limited



## **Program 2. Housing & husbandry practices and animal welfare**

- **Assessment of shelter dog behaviour**  
Current funding – Bureau of Animal Welfare
- **Effects of an enrichment program for kennelled domestic dogs**  
Current funding – Bureau of Animal Welfare
- **Cat welfare in confinement**  
Current funding – Bureau of Animal Welfare



## **Program 3. Attitudes to animals & animal welfare, and farmer, consumer & community behaviour**

- **The welfare of recreational horses in Victoria: the occurrence of and factors associated with horse welfare**  
Current funding – Bureau of Animal Welfare
- **Fear responses in dogs at shelters: Effects of human contact and environmental enrichment**  
Current funding – University of Melbourne



## **Program 3. Attitudes to animals & animal welfare, and farmer, consumer & community behaviour**

- **Minimising Handling Stress - Development of a prototype training package for farmers to improve their human-farm animals relationship**  
Current funding – EU 6<sup>th</sup> Framework Funded
- **Farm Animal Welfare in Ohio: Assessing Public Concern and Implications for the Food Animal Industry**  
Current funding – Ohio Ag R&D Corp



## **Program 4. Tertiary & post-graduate education and training**

- **Education in agriculture: livestock farming, food production and food choices in pre-adolescents**

Current funding –

- William Buckland Foundation &
- Aust Pork Limited



## **Program 4. Tertiary & post-graduate education and training**

- **UofM -**
  - **“Animal Welfare”,**
  - **“Animals in Society” &**
  - **“Applied Animal Behaviour” subjects**
- **OSU –**
  - **Animal Welfare modules**
  - **‘Animals in Society’ Course**
- **14 post-graduate students**