

October 2021

Dear Andy Meddick MLC,

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

A little about us; Beagle Rescue Vic (BRV) was established in 2005, as the years passed, we became very aware of the use of beagles in medical research within Australia. To specifically coordinate the release, rehabilitation and rehoming of these animals, we launched Beagle Freedom Australia (BFA) in 2013.

In conjunction with the launch of BFA, we launched the campaign "Right to Release" which gained traction in 2016 - 2017 when we began a collaboration with Humane Research Australia and Animal Liberation NSW, it has since been picked up by the AJP after meetings and discussions Bruce Poon over the years.

In 2018 we worked in conjunction with Bio-security at DETJR to develop a rehoming guideline document that was then published and sent to all the registered AEC's as a 'best practice' guide to follow. It opened some doors, but it wasn't enough, it is still a voluntary practice.

**How to improve information and advice for scientific organisations and Animal Ethics Committees (AEC) to support the successful rehoming of dogs and cats used in research and teaching.**

There needs to be increased training for staff at facilities and for their AECs. This information and training should be coming from the government via the companies and institutions that hire the AECs.

If release is to become mandatory, then the AECs will need to be liaising regularly with stakeholders, such the rescue organisations involved in the rehoming of the animals.

A governing body that regulates all Animal Ethics Committees would be a valuable investment. The AEC's are, in our experience, are where most of the roadblocks are. Their unwillingness to rehome animals being the number one issue, followed by the lack of transparency. Reporting of statistics and the types of research conducted should be more openly available.

Enrichment education must be provided to the research facilities and their staff. A minimum standard exists but its not enforced or not regulated. It should be the job of the AEC to overlook the enrichment programs and ensure they are being implemented. In many facilities across Victoria, there are no enrichment programs at all. Lack of enrichment leads to behavioural issues such as pica, spinning / circling, chewing bars, barking, fighting, just to name a few. Similarly to the institutionalised dogs seen in intensive breeding farms.

To further develop and implement the successful rehoming of dogs and cats used in research and teaching, Beagle Freedom Australia would like to see the following implemented;

As you're aware the "Right to Release" campaign is a simple no-nonsense bill that would see the mandatory retirement of dogs and cats at the end of their use in research facilities. There are three documents relevant to this issue:

- Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act (Vic) 1986
- Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulations (Vic) 2008
- The Australian Code of Practice for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes 2013

While The Australian Code of Practice for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes addresses the rehoming of animals at point 3.4.2, the other documents do not address it at all. The first step we would like to see is changes to The Australian Code of Practice for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes making rehoming mandatory.

Mandatory rehoming regardless of age, illness or disability.

Mandatory retirement age of 6 -8, or 5 whelping cycles for breeding animals - with release being completely voluntary and with no current or even recommended retirement age, we are seeing first hand, many animals released as geriatrics (10 +), enjoying only a few months of freedom and then passing away. We are also seeing geriatric animals used for breeding. This is no longer permitted in commercial breeding facilities, so why is it permitted in this industry? [REDACTED]

Release to reputable rescue groups only. Rehoming of dogs and cats for a successful and permanent placement is a complex and ongoing responsibility. While there are many willing and capable homes and families out there, not everyone is suited to a dog or cat that has come from a research background. Rescue groups are experienced at finding homes and know exactly what to look for for each individual animal. They provide ongoing support should there be any training or behaviour difficulties for the life of the animal. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] So a database of reputable groups should be made available to research facilities, via the AECs.

Currently, the sensitive nature of each release is imperative to future releases taking place. These relationships can take many years of negotiations to build. Trust and a good working relationship with a facility is the only way to get animals released. If that confidentiality were to be broken in any way, it would shut down further releases and risk the safety of the animals still trapped. Even if rehoming were made mandatory, these agreements would need to be kept in place. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] confidentiality is key and must be adhered to, this is why only reputable rescue groups should be used.

Building a database of reputable groups - currently BFA are one of the only groups rehoming animals from research. BFA would be interested in helping to build a list of reputable groups or develop a code of standards to help groups become qualified to be considered for the rehoming of research animals.

A reputable rescue group must have the following structure in place as a minimum.

- Trained foster carers
- Experienced Veterinary team who know how to assist both medically and behaviourally and who take pride to be involved 24:7
- Rehoming networks and support available for all carers and adoptive families 24 hours a day
- Regular funding for large group releases
- Palliative foster carers with the know-how to care for these animals correctly, both behaviourally and medically.
- Strict policy guidelines for the process of rehoming
- Infrastructure to provide aftercare support for the life of each animal they take in.

Animals from research should not be released to a pound or shelter. While they do great work, they don't run the checks or provide the support that a rescue group or community foster care network (CFCN) can provide. These last for the lifetime of the animal.

Pounds and shelters also use a temperament testing system that is outdated and many institutionalised animals would fail it resulting in their deaths.

Temperament testing within facilities should be conducted by the rescue group and not by the facility staff. Currently they use the same systems as the pounds and shelters so and those guidelines are outdated. Facility staff are not trained or experienced with the rehoming of animals and temperaments can change in different situations, the best qualified people are the ones doing the rehoming.

Transparency between facility and rescue regarding medical procedures, enrichment programs and other relevant information about each animal released. It is vitally important to ensure the ongoing wellbeing, both medical and behaviourally, of each animal. Both during the time they are in care and once adopted.

Facilities should not be permitted to rehome directly. Although this would be difficult too regu-

late, but it often happens We have been contacted by several members of the public seeking our help and support after having adopted an ex-research animal through a work friend/family member etc. Who have been unprepared for the animal they received and who had nowhere else to turn for help - [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] In turn, they get dumped in pounds, they get passed around or they simply get put to sleep for being "too difficult" (specific case studies available on request.

Whilst some groups may see having an ex-laboratory animal as an interesting story or marketing strategy, there is a lot more to these animals than just their story. They are individuals and they deserve a group who understands them and who will do everything possible to ensure their successful integration into family life. They have already been through a system that has failed them. Lets not set them up to fail before they even begin.

BFA has spent the last 7 years securing the successful release of facility animals around Australia, we are set up to facilitate small or large releases, from one facility or from many at once. We have an incredible network of vets, nurses, other rescue groups, foster cares and adoptive homes all waiting for that perfect family member to join them. We thank you for this opportunity and we would love to meet with you to discuss in more depth these points and more. Would be interested in helping to advise, build and implement new systems and/or codes of practice within the industry.

Yours sincerely,



Nikki Steendam  
President - Beagle Freedom Australia