

## CHAPTER 10

### THE USE OF POUND ANIMALS FOR TRAINING AND EXPERIMENTAL PURPOSES

#### Introduction

10.1 The use in experiments of animals, mainly dogs, taken from pounds is an emotive issue in Australia. Public concern has been heightened from time to time by the lack of sensitivity shown by some institutions towards the use and disposal of pound animals.

10.2 In this chapter, the Committee examines the extent of use of pound animals, the arguments for and against such use in teaching and research, and the controls over that use.

#### Extent of Use

10.3 The number of pound animals used in experiments is unknown. Not all institutions use such animals and in South Australia, for example, their use is banned by statute, although the pounds in that State had prohibited the transfer or sale of animals to institutions before legislation was enacted.

10.4 The scale of pound animal use in Sydney is substantially larger than in other cities. Sydney University informed the Committee that in 1987 it used 2,000 pound dogs.<sup>1</sup> Of these approximately 75 per cent were used for teaching in the Veterinary faculty and 25 per cent were used for research.<sup>2</sup>

10.5 The University of Queensland reported that it obtained 11 dogs a week for the 26 teaching weeks in each academic year for the Veterinary School.<sup>3</sup> A number of departments also used dogs for experimental purposes. Between 1980 and 1984 the Department of Physiology and Pharmacology, the largest user of dogs for research purposes on campus, used between two and 21 dogs annually.

10.6 Murdoch University, the only other university with a veterinary school which provided figures, reported that it used 574 dogs in 1986.<sup>4</sup> It did not supply a breakdown between teaching and research but the figures for previous years were:

	<u>Teaching</u>	<u>Research</u>
1980	124	24
1981	182	20
1982	167	85
1983	217	214
1984	113	214

SOURCE: Evidence, pp. S5990, S5992, S5994, S5996, S5998

#### Use of Pound Dogs for Teaching

10.7 A representative of the AVA explained the background to the use of dogs in the training of veterinarians and the changes in practice over the years. Students used to be required to perform surgery on anaesthetised animals and then were responsible for post-operative recovery of those animals. However, today, once the surgical procedure has been done on the anaesthetised animal, most of the animals are euthanased. Some animals are still allowed to recover to enable students to deal with animals coming out of anaesthesia.<sup>5</sup>

10.8 Although it would be possible to restructure veterinary science courses to avoid conducting experiments on pound animals<sup>6</sup>, some witnesses argued that this would lead to a lower standard of training with veterinary students less prepared on graduation to cope with the demands of a veterinary practice.<sup>7</sup>

10.9 Professor Rex of the University of Queensland compared training in the United Kingdom and Australia and pointed out that students in the United Kingdom practised surgery only on cadavers. He went on to say that:

I had no doubt at all that new veterinary graduates in Australia were far more competent than I was when I qualified because they had had the opportunity to do surgical exercise as students on live, anaesthetised dogs which did not recover from anaesthesia and were put to sleep at the end of the day.<sup>8</sup>

10.10 Dr Smith of the AVA conceded that it would be possible to have an internship system for veterinarians but that the extra costs would have to be borne by the community.<sup>9</sup> Witnesses from veterinary faculties generally supported Dr Smith's position and emphasised that the additional costs would have to be met by tertiary funding bodies.

10.11 Another argument put to the Committee against the use of pound animals was that it inculcated in students wrong attitudes about animals; that in effect they are disposable. However, the Committee only received anecdotal evidence on this point. The Committee does not believe that undesirable attitudes would necessarily develop simply because of the source of the animals. The answer to this difficulty would seem to lie at least in part in the hands of the lecturers and the attitudes modelled on and taught by them.

10.12 In essence, the arguments put to the Committee provide support for the use of live animals in the training of veterinarians and do not directly address the issue of the use of pound dogs. It would be possible for institutions to breed dogs for the training of veterinarians. This would, however, be more expensive to do.

#### The Use of Pound Animals for Experimental Purposes

10.13 Apart from philosophical opposition to the use of animals in experiments discussed in earlier chapters of this report, animal welfare organisations have raised specific criticisms of the use of pound animals in experiments.

10.14 It was submitted to the Committee that institutions using such animals benefit from the current lack of control over breeding of companion animals and the resulting population of stray animals.<sup>10</sup> There is a serious problem with the large number of companion animals which are disposed of each year because they are no longer wanted by their owners. That is a separate problem and should not be confused with the question in hand. The prohibition on the use of pound animals for experimentation would have no impact on the companion animal problem.

10.15 A more serious argument advanced against the use of pound animals was that such random source animals may be unsuitable for research purposes on the grounds that they are poor research models because of their unknown genetic and micro-biological backgrounds and the confounding effects of many extraneous variables. Mr J. Adams, Director of Animal Services at Monash University, commented:

I think there is another aspect that should be looked at in respect of pound dogs and the question of quality control in animal experimentation: Scientists have a moral

obligation to ensure that the animals which they put into an experiment are in fact able to yield useful data. In some cases pound dogs are not suitable in that respect.<sup>11</sup>

10.16 Professor J. Egerton of the University of Sydney told the Committee:

In some research projects there may be a question about the use of this heterogeneous group of animals but in some other projects they would be quite suitable. Whether or not they should be used in experimental studies, in controlled research projects, depends very much on the project itself. There would be some research workers who would prefer to have a standardised animal that they could use over and over again if repetition were required. But other people who are looking at other questions might find the heterogeneous group of animals was quite satisfactory.<sup>12</sup>

According to Professor Egerton, the main issue was the variability of response that one would get to any experimental procedure. He stated:

If you had a group of animals, say 10 animals of mixed ages, the response in that group might not really be representative of what would be achieved if the target group for the research had been an older group of animals. It comes down to the question of the variability of response that you would get from this mixed group of animals that might be used in an experimental procedure.<sup>13</sup>

10.17 The wider the variability of response, the larger the number of animals that would be required to assure statistically valid results. In other words, random source dogs should only be used for research purposes where it can be demonstrated that their use would not lead to a greater number of animals being used than would be the case if purpose bred dogs were used.

10.18 ANZFAS expressed concern that pound animals by virtue of their background as companion animals would suffer undue stress and suffering if maintained in a laboratory environment. Undue stress, in the opinion of ANZFAS, not only raises the question of humane treatment but also of the validity of data obtained from experiments conducted on those animals.

These stress related changes alter the data that an experiment will yield and render its validity unreliable.<sup>14</sup>

10.19 This argument might apply to some dogs but not to all, as many dogs which find their way into pounds have been abandoned by their owners. Obviously, experiments which might be affected by abnormal stress caused by the new environment should not be performed on those animals.

10.20 ANZFAS argued that the availability of cheap animals encourages the conduct of experiments which are not properly thought out and the ignoring of possible non-animal alternatives.<sup>15</sup> However, proper evaluation of protocols by ethics committees should ensure the use of non-animal alternatives where it is appropriate. In addition, the costs involved in keeping animals, whether purpose bred or obtained from pounds, is a disincentive to use animals unnecessarily, particularly if the experimenters have to provide for such costs out of their grants.

10.21 The Committee concludes that dogs from pounds may be used in experiments provided that where registered dogs are surrendered to pounds, their owners given written consent to their use by institutions. The Committee accepts the argument that if a dog is used in an experiment from which it will not recover consciousness, there is no difference between euthanasia in a pound and destruction at an institution. If by the use of pound animals, which will be destroyed anyway, there is a reduction in

the destruction of purpose-bred animals, then animal welfare is enhanced overall. This argument is based on the premise that facilities for treatment of the dogs in institutions are of an appropriate standard. This is discussed below.

#### Policies of the Pounds

10.22 State legislation provides minimum holding periods for animals in pounds before action can be taken to dispose of them. In Western Australia the holding period for dogs is 72 hours. In Queensland it is 3 days for unregistered dogs and 6 days for registered dogs. In Victoria the holding period is 8 days but a recently gazetted Code of Practice dealing with the supply of dogs for experimentation requires that if they are supplied for experimental purposes they be held by the institutions to which they are supplied for 21 days before being used. New South Wales requirements call for dogs to be held for 7 days if they are unregistered or carry no identification and 14 days if they do. Dogs which are voluntarily surrendered do not have to be held for a fixed period.

10.23 The Victorian Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 (No.46, 1986) Section 26 (2)(h) prohibited the use of a dog or cat from a municipal pound in a 'scientific procedure'. This however was amended by Section 28 of the Agricultural Acts (Further Amendment) Act (No.68, 1987) which enables such use if in accordance with a code of practice.

10.24 It would be possible under the New South Wales Animal Research Act to regulate the provision of pound animals through the requirement to licence animal suppliers under that Act. The Committee understands that a code of practice dealing with the supply of pound dogs for experimentation and teaching is currently being drafted by the Animal Research Review Panel in New South Wales.

10.25 Some pets which are still wanted by their owners may end up being supplied to experimenters. This may be caused by human error or by events beyond the control of the owner. The likelihood of this occurring depends to a large extent on the length of the holding period at the pound.

10.26 The Committee believes that three days is too short a period for a registered dog to be held before disposal unless that dog is surrendered by its owner to the pound. For a registered dog, the pound should hold it for at least a week. This should give owners enough time to contact the pound to retrieve their dogs.

10.27 It is not always clear to owners who take their dogs to municipal pounds that those animals might be sent to institutions to be used in experiments. Some owners may not want their animals to be used for such a purpose. Those wishes should be respected. Pounds that supply animals to institutions must ensure that all people who deposit animals with them realise that those animals might be used in experiments. There should be signs at the pounds to that effect and owners should also be given a written notice informing them of any such arrangement with an institution.

10.28 Many owners take animals to pounds because they just do not want them any more. However, some owners dispose of animals for other reasons. They may be moving overseas or into a home unit where animals are not allowed to be kept. Although animals may suffer no more in an institution than they do in a pound, there is sometimes a perception on the part of the owners that additional distress will be caused to the animal if it is given to an institution for experimental purposes. Whether such a perception is correct is immaterial. Owners should have the right to choose what happens to their pets.



10.29 The Committee RECOMMENDS that State Governments legislate so that pounds hold dogs for at least seven days before disposing of them to an institution except where a dog is surrendered by its owner.

10.30 The Committee RECOMMENDS that State Governments legislate so that all owners who surrender dogs to pounds be informed in writing of the possible transfer of the animals to a research institution and that pounds obtain the written authorisation of owners to transfer the dogs to an institution.

#### Code of Practice

10.31 The Victorian Government has drawn up a draft code of practice to cover the use of dogs from pounds in institutions. Similar codes should be drawn up in other States where experiments on pound animals are permitted. Alternatively, State and Territory Governments should issue regulations to control the use of pound animals in institutions.

10.32 The draft code of practice provides for a written agreement between the pound and the institutions which is to be signed by either the Mayor or Shire President of the Council administering the pound.

#### Transport of Pound Animals

10.33 The vehicles in which animals are transferred from a pound to an institution must be suitable to carry animals without causing injury or undue stress from extremes of temperature.

### Receipt of Dogs at Institutions

10.34 The procedures and practices for the receipt of dogs from pounds as well as facilities for their housing vary significantly among institutions. Some institutions provide good facilities and the dogs receive appropriate care. Other facilities, such as those at the University of New South Wales, are quite inadequate.

10.35 The Committee believes that clear guidelines must be issued in each State and that they be enforced by government inspectors making random visits to institutions.

10.36 All animals received by an institution from a pound must be given a veterinary inspection within 24 hours of receipt. All animals which are diseased, injured or do not meet experimental specifications must be destroyed by a veterinarian immediately and the bodies disposed of responsibly.

10.37 Dogs must be kept in facilities of an appropriate standard and be given proper care, nutrition and exercise. Any animals showing signs of undue stress must be destroyed immediately.

### Records

10.38 Both the pound and the institution must keep detailed records of the animals transferred to institutions and allow inspectors to examine those records on request.

## The Supply of Cats from Pounds

10.39 Councils in New South Wales and Victoria, at least, have no clear legal basis on which they can take action to impound cats, supply impounded cats to anyone or receive cats surrendered by owners.

10.40 Any action taken with respect to a cat by a council pound could well be the subject of a legal challenge. The Dog Act covers only dogs. While councils have undoubted power under local government legislation to deal with stock it is doubtful if this includes stray cats.

10.41 There are substantial difficulties in establishing ownership of domestic cats. There are no formal schemes for registration of cat ownership. Tagging and identification of cats is at present purely voluntary.

10.42 It is difficult to guarantee that only genuine strays are going to be supplied by pounds to research institutions. This is due to the fact that cats by nature are much more difficult to keep under control.

10.43 There are also no standard holding periods that can be enforced for impounded cats. Cats could be supplied or rehoused before an owner would necessarily begin searching for a missing cat.

10.44 Not all pounds are currently willing to handle cats. Those which do so see it as a community service. The number of cats being supplied by pounds to animal houses from the limited information available to the Committee is therefore relatively small.

10.45 Cat breeding colonies are already in existence in various universities. It would not be difficult to establish a stable source of supply to meet experimental needs.

10.46 The Committee RECOMMENDS that institutions either breed or purchase cats from an institution in which they are bred for experimental purposes and not acquire them from pounds or other non-institutional sources.