

Openness Agreement on the use of animals in research and teaching in New Zealand

Foreword from Professor Juliet Gerrard, The Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor:

Introduction

Why the Openness Agreement was developed

The Australia New Zealand Council for the Care of Animals in Research and Teaching (ANZCCART) is an independent body that was established to provide a focus for consideration of the scientific, ethical and social issues associated with the use of animals in research and teaching. After years of promoting openness in animal research, ANZCCART has taken the lead in developing this Agreement.

New Zealand has long been committed to maintaining and improving high standards of animal welfare as well as undertaking world-leading research and teaching using animals. We recognise that we have an obligation to demonstrate and promote these values, and that to be seen as trustworthy we must be open, transparent, and accountable for the research and teaching that we conduct, fund or support, including when the high standards we strive for are not achieved. Doing more to communicate the context in which animal research and teaching takes place, the work that organisations undertake to incorporate the [3Rs](#) (the Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of animals), the regulations that govern this research, and the systems that are in place to report and rectify poor practice is key.

The signatories to this Agreement are involved in carrying out, funding or supporting the use of animals in research or teaching. The objective of this Agreement is to ensure that the public are well informed about what animal research involves, the role it plays in the overall process of scientific discovery, how such research is regulated in New Zealand, and what researchers and animal care staff do to promote welfare, reduce animal usage and minimise suffering and harm to the animals. In summary, the signatories to this Agreement want people to be better informed about the facts around the use of animals in research or teaching, so that these issues can be discussed and considered from a position of knowledge and understanding.

Further background information is available at the end of this document.

How the Openness Agreement works

This Openness Agreement sets out four Commitments that require signatories to take steps to be more open about the use of animals in research and teaching. By signing the Agreement, these organisations make a public pledge to meet these Commitments. Any organisation involved in carrying out, funding or supporting the use of animals in either research or teaching may sign the Agreement. Signing is voluntary and independent of regulatory obligations.

How each organisation meets these commitments will differ depending on their operation, purpose, capacity and legal obligations. While some signatories already have systems and structures in place to help them to fulfil the Commitments, others may require time to develop these processes. The intention of the Agreement is that all signatories demonstrate ongoing commitment towards greater openness on the use of animals in research and teaching in New Zealand. Signatories will report annually on their progress in each of the Commitments. This information will be made publicly available through a report by ANZCCART.

The Openness Agreement

Commitment 1: We will be clear about why and how we use animals in research and teaching

This Commitment seeks to ensure that all organisations acknowledge, both internally and externally, that they and their members carry out, fund or support the use of animals in research and teaching. It also seeks to ensure that they are open about the use of these animals. All signatories are expected to agree to these basic principles of openness, which underpin the whole of the Agreement.

- When we communicate about the use of animals in research and teaching, we will aim to provide descriptions of the benefits, harms and limitations, and be open about its impact on animal welfare and the ethical considerations involved.
- We will take steps to ensure that staff (and students, where relevant) are aware of our organisation's involvement with and support for the use of animals in research and teaching.
- We will be prepared to provide information explaining our involvement with the use of animals in research and teaching and will be prepared to respond to reasonable enquiries about this. Where there are reasons not to respond to enquiries, we will clearly explain those reasons.

Commitment 2: We will enhance our communications with the media and the public about our use of animals in research and teaching

The purpose of this Commitment is to ensure that relevant details about involvement of signatories in the use of animals in research and teaching are readily accessible by the public. It builds on Commitment 1 by outlining the practical steps that organisations may take to facilitate their communications around the use of animals.

- Within six months of signing the Agreement, we will make a policy statement about the use of animals in research and teaching available on our website. This will provide clear information about the nature of our involvement and its role in the wider context of our research and teaching aims. This statement will also be made available on and linked to the ANZCCART website.
- Where animal research has played a significant role in a scientific advancement and/or product development we will include information about such animal research in relevant communications, including media releases.
- Signatories will encourage researchers to follow and report the use of acknowledged good practice when designing and publishing the results of their animal research (e.g. the principles enshrined in the PREPARE and ARRIVE guidelines).
- We will support and encourage researchers and staff who wish to engage with the media on matters pertaining to the use of animals in research and teaching whenever possible.
- We will identify a point of contact for information about the organisation's involvement in the use of animals in research and teaching and will aim to provide appropriate ambassadors to communicate about relevant topics.
- Signatories will report, and provide evidence, on how they are working to promote better application of the 3Rs (Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of animals in research and teaching).

Commitment 3: We will be proactive in providing opportunities for the public to find out about research and teaching using animals

This Commitment aims to encourage more public discussion in New Zealand about the use of animals in research or teaching. It builds on Commitments 1 and 2 by suggesting how signatories can engage proactively – directly and indirectly – with the public, over and above the provision of information.

- Signatories will consider ways in which they can facilitate activities that will encourage public engagement around the use of animals in scientific, veterinary and medical research and teaching.
- Where relevant, representatives of signatories will include information about the role of animals in any talks or public events they take part in, for example at schools or with the local community.
- We will contribute to efforts to provide more comprehensive explanations of animal use in research and teaching. These explanations could, where appropriate, include images and videos, be stand-alone materials or accompany other communications, such as media releases.
- Signatories are encouraged (but not obliged) to allow access to their facilities for accredited journalists and media organisations, MPs, school, patient and community groups. Such visits allow people either to see, or find out via an article, TV or other type of media, how animals are kept, cared for and used in New Zealand research facilities.

Commitment 4: We will report on progress annually and share our experiences

Monitoring the implementation of the Agreement is important for its success. We want to be able to demonstrate and share how we are being open about animal research and teaching in New Zealand. We will also review the Agreement and its processes to keep them up to date.

- We will report to ANZCCART annually on actions we have taken to fulfil our Commitments and will share our experience of the effectiveness and impact of the strategies we have adopted.
- ANZCCART will publish an annual update on openness progress.
- Three years after publication, we will review this Agreement and its impact and amend the document as necessary.

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Background information on the Openness Agreement

How the Openness Agreement was developed

In 2020, ANZCCART convened a Working Group made up of relevant stakeholders, including: government, industry, research institutes, universities, communications, animal welfare, peak scientific bodies and Māori perspectives on animal research. A process was established that also involved consultation with a wider stakeholder group. This included additional stakeholders from the above groups, as well as media, funding bodies, medical research charities, patient advocacy groups and animal advocacy groups to find out what they anticipated from “openness” and what access to information they hoped the Agreement signatories would provide. This document reflects the outcomes of this process, investigation of openness and transparency agreements and associated processes worldwide, and both formal and informal opinion surveys conducted in and including New Zealand.

Regulation of animal research and teaching in New Zealand

New Zealand, like many countries, uses animals for research and teaching purposes. This use is strictly controlled under the Animal Welfare Act 1999 (specifically, Part 6), and any person or organisation using animals must follow an approved Code of Ethical Conduct (CEC) and comply with the legislation. The CEC allows establishment of an Animal Ethics Committee (AEC) and sets out the policies and procedures that must be followed. Institutions conducting animal research and teaching are bound by these legal and institutional frameworks. All applications to use animals for research and teaching must be considered by an AEC, which adheres to legislative requirements and the approved CEC, including post-approval monitoring. All organisations employ or have access to veterinarians and trained animal care staff to provide day-to-day animal care, health and welfare support.

Under New Zealand regulations, the definition of animal research and teaching is very broad. Some observational and non-invasive studies in areas such as wildlife conservation, agriculture and veterinary care (designed to improve animal welfare) fall under the same regulations as animal research for human health. Even the teaching of animal care technicians, veterinary and veterinary nursing students (e.g. for health checks, proper handling techniques) falls under this legislation. Many animal species are used for research and teaching in New Zealand. Because of New Zealand's agricultural focus, cattle and fish are the most common animals used.

The regulation of research and teaching is largely devolved to individual AECs. An important part of the government's oversight – which also ensures a level of public openness – is the collection and publication of annual statistics on the number of animals used in research and teaching. The purpose of that use, and the impact on those animals (from none to severe), is collected from all organisations where research and teaching using animals takes place.

Another important contributor to oversight, and to the representation of all views, is the National Animal Ethics Advisory Committee (NAEAC) which is the independent advisory committee to the Minister of Agriculture. In addition to advising the Minister, NAEAC advises the government on each application for a CEC and has an important role in providing support and guidance to AECs and contributing to the strategic vision for animal welfare in New Zealand. Its membership is prescribed in law and includes people who bring veterinary, medical, biological, commercial, education, animal advocacy, ethics, environmental/conservation and public views and expertise.

Replacement, Reduction, and Refinement (the 3Rs)

New Zealand encourages the principles of humane experimental techniques when animals are used in research and teaching. The 3Rs must be considered by AECs when they decide whether to approve research projects or teaching protocols.

- *Replacement*
Replace animals with non-living or non-sentient alternatives. For example, by using computer modelling, benchtop / in vitro work, and artificial animals for education.
- *Reduction*
Use as few animals as necessary to achieve the scientific or learning outcome.
- *Refinement*
Refine the way experiments are carried out, and animals are housed, managed and handled, to reduce negative impacts and increase positive welfare. For example, appropriate pain relief, enhanced environmental enrichment and positive reinforcement behavioural training to accomplish tasks.

This means that animals can only be used when there are no reliable or suitable alternatives. Any harm to animals must be minimised and weighed against the potential benefit to humans or other animals.

Scientific advances have changed the use of animals in research. Recent developments let researchers reduce the number of animals used and have helped researchers refine their methods to minimise or eliminate pain and distress. Opportunities for re-homing animals are also available, where appropriate. The 3Rs are also promoted, through yearly awards at various institutions and a biennial implementation award from the government, for research that advances at least one of the three principles.

The status of the Openness Agreement

This Agreement has been developed proactively and is supported by its signatories in addition to their legal and regulatory obligations within New Zealand. Signatories are expected to proactively work towards fulfilling the four Commitments. If an organisation is unable to make any progress, it will be asked to reconsider its position as a signatory to the Agreement.

All signatories agree to take steps to be more open about their use of animals in research and teaching in line with the four Commitments. Exactly how these Commitments are fulfilled will differ between organisations depending upon their operation and purpose, their capacity and their different legal obligations.