

# **ANIMAL ETHICS AND ANIMAL WELFARE WITHIN AN EDUCATION FRAMEWORK: FROM A QUEENSLAND PERSPECTIVE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

For many years animals have been, and still are, an integral and important part of many teaching programs and learning experiences in schools.

Use of animals in schools takes in an extensive and diverse range of activities on school sites such as:

- routine husbandry with animals on school farms for Agricultural Science coursework
- scientific experiments and animal housing for a range of Science and Biology courses
- visiting animals, and
- animals housed for observational and basic husbandry activities to encourage animal welfare attitudes and caring behaviours towards pets and animals generally.

This session will share information on encouraging compliance with the current Animal Care and Protection Act 2001 and the *Australian code of practice for the care and use of animals*, ethical practices with animals on school sites and the use of alternatives to animal use without discouraging schools from including animals in their educational programs.

Much progress has been made over the past six years with animal use in educational institutions – but there is still much to be done. This session will give a brief overview of how educational institutions, in Queensland, are progressing.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Animal Care and Protection Act 2001 and the *Australian code of practice for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes*, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition 2004 are the current legal requirements and the code of practice document that Queensland schools comply with. All teachers have a duty of care to animals on their school sites. The school principal has the ultimate responsibility for the school's animal use activities and ensures that excellent management practices, record keeping and current approval for animal use activities are undertaken. Maintenance of safe and suitable animal housing as well as monitoring of animals on the school sites to ensure the wellbeing and security of all animals is the principal's responsibility. Completing the Annual Animal Use Report and

reporting any Adverse Events involving school animals to the local authorities and the Queensland Schools Animal Ethics Committee (QSAEC) are also the responsibility of school principals.

Queensland schools have used animals on their schools sites for a very long time now. Animal use is not a new classroom or agricultural farm activity. However since 2001, much has happened in Queensland schools especially by putting the procedures for schools to apply to the QSAEC prior to undertaking animal use activities. Dissemination of information and ensuring compliance is not a simple task as there are approximately 1500 schools dispersed throughout the very large state of Queensland. Keeping teachers up-to-date with their legal obligations and developing awareness and understanding of the current animal-use requirements is a difficult and ongoing task. Schools are encouraged to look carefully at their school programs that use animals and, wherever possible, reduce the number of animals used, ensure that all animals are treated humanely and cared for more than adequately and that alternatives to animals are used whenever and wherever possible.

#### **HOW ARE ANIMALS USED WITHIN QUEENSLAND SCHOOLS?**

Every school site is different. Individual schools have a diversity of curriculum requirements as well as a wide variety of teachers, students and school communities with a range of needs and expectations. There is no way that one procedure would suit all.

Generally speaking secondary schools and secondary departments are more likely to have agricultural farm facilities that house and provide routine husbandry for farm animals such as cattle, sheep, goats, horses, alpacas, pigs and poultry. Aquaculture, apiaries and dogs for security are also likely to be found on secondary and some special school sites. These types of animal use activities can range from something small, like having some hens as part of a permaculture garden, to rearing, nutrition trials through to showing and leading stock at local agricultural shows and events.

Secondary schools are more likely to use animals in school laboratories for activities such as dissections, small experiments and observational activities. Environmental Education Centres throughout Queensland, with their expert and highly trained staff, often have reptiles, a variety of aquariums and they may have animal trapping and netting procedures as part of their site's educational programs.

Primary schools are generally more involved with animal welfare, developing caring and responsible attitudes towards pets and animals. Live presentations that use animals need approval from the Queensland Arts Council before entering Queensland schools. Organisations such as the RSPCAQ and other animal welfare organizations have a range of excellent educational programs that incorporate animals and these types of programs, if they suit the needs of the school, may be invited to visit schools to present their programs.

Many schools have poultry, egg incubation activities, aquariums and preserved specimens. Housing of small laboratory animals, classroom pets and aquarium fish and water creatures are found in school sites all over Queensland from Preparatory to Year 12.

In all levels of education discussion on the ethics of using animals in society and in educational institutions is encouraged. Some schools have developed a philosophy that covers the use of animals on their school site. Students who choose not to undertake educational activities that involve animals have the right to not participate and teachers must supply alternative educational materials to ensure that student's studies are not disadvantaged.

So from this brief overview it should be obvious that the range and diversity of animals that may be and are currently used in Queensland schools, some in quite complicated management structures with a range of equipment and facilities, presents a complex set of issues for the educational institutions involved.

**WHAT PROCEDURES HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED TO ENABLE QUEENSLAND SCHOOLS TO USE ANIMALS WITH ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS ON THEIR SCHOOL SITES?**

At the end of 2003 the Queensland Schools Animal Ethics Committee (QSAEC) was formed and supported by Education Queensland, Queensland Catholic Education Commission and, what is now, Independent Schools Queensland Inc. A Memorandum of Understanding was agreed to by these educational sectors to support the QSAEC and to work in their own schools to encourage teachers and school communities to gain an understanding of their legal obligations and to work with the QSAEC. Education Queensland employed a Senior Education Officer to look after Animal Ethics for all Queensland schools.

The members of the QSAEC comply with the Code categories and have representatives of the major educational sectors as well. Over the past four years a great deal of effort has been put into developing application forms and procedures, developing Standard Operating Procedures and creating a website for teachers and students to obtain information, advice and ideas of how animals may be used on school sites. A comprehensive site inspection form, a range of species-specific information segments and ideas for record keeping are readily available on the Animal Ethics website.

The QSAEC and the Animal Ethics Officer have relied heavily on the expertise of the DPI&FQ staff members and the Environmental Protection Agency as well as developing important links with ANZCCART, the RSPCAQ, Animals Australia, AgForce, RNA Showgrounds and a range of animal welfare organizations. The expertise present in the membership of the Queensland Schools Animal Ethics Committee has been avidly used.

**SOME OF THE TASKS OF THE ANIMAL ETHICS OFFICER**

The main task of the Animal Ethics Officer is to ensure that the QSAEC meetings are held and run efficiently. All applications are sent to the Animal Ethics Officer who assists where necessary with the preparation of each application and then distributes all applications to the QSAEC members ahead of the meeting time. Once the QSAEC has come to a consensus about each application the Animal Ethics Officer informs the applicants of the outcomes. Successful applicants are sent the approval documentation.

For applications that need amendment or are rejected the Animal Ethics Officer works individually with those schools to ensure the actions required by the QSAEC are undertaken.

Unexpected and Adverse events from schools are reported and complaints and enquiries from schools and the general public are dealt with by the Animal Ethics Officer.

As can be seen already, the tasks undertaken by the Animal Ethics Officer are central to the efficient and effective functioning of many aspects of animal use in schools. There is a need to streamline areas of this job to enable teachers to access information, ideas and documentation, mostly done on the Animal Ethics website, but there is also a real need to have someone to directly answer and, if required, investigate questions and issues as they arise.

The Queensland Animal Ethics Officer also is responsible for working with Education Queensland schools in whatever way is required. The Annual Animal Use Report required by the end of Term One annually has to be collated and sent to the DPI&FQ. As a member of the Science Curriculum team at Education House tasks for the Animal Ethics Officer arise from time to time with the Science, Agricultural Science and Environmental Education areas of the curriculum. Networking with a wide range of government agencies, businesses and corporate organizations as well as community interest groups, locally, state-wide, interstate and internationally is an important function of this position.

Keeping up to date with animal use issues and relevant research findings is another ongoing task. Disseminating information out and receiving feedback from a range of teacher organizations (eg Science Teachers Association of Queensland, Agricultural Science Teachers Association of Queensland and Environmental and Outdoor Education Centres) is another important task.

Encouraging awareness of animal use requirements, legal obligations and professional development opportunities for teachers and students is a growing area of the Animal Ethics Officer's job. Website development is important, and much has been done in this

area, but there is also a growing need to gather teachers together to undertake hands on training, awareness and networking programs throughout the state.

### **ENCOURAGING THE ETHICAL PERSPECTIVES**

One of the really important aspects of animal use in Queensland schools is to not only encouraging teachers to reduce, where practicable, the number of animals used in their teaching programs but to encourage the use of alternatives whenever practicable. For example, if schools undertake dissection activities they are encouraged to take a whole school view of these activities and check that students passing through the school only use real animals when they can best benefit from that, say in Years 11 and/or 12 Biology programs. There is likely to be very little benefit from students undertaking multiple toad dissections as they pass through the lower year levels if they are unlikely to be heading towards science-related further studies. Generally speaking, alternatives to using animals in the laboratory and scientific areas are encouraged for Years 8 to 10 levels and then in the Senior area of secondary education where the students may have some idea of where they are heading with their studies, then use of real animals may be an option.

Work is underway by the Learning Federation to develop a virtual rat dissection program that will be accessible by all schools hopefully in the near future. The efforts undertaken by Cynthia Burnett, Animals Australia, in the area of finding and initiating alternatives to using animals has been of wonderful assistance in this.

Ethical use of animals in schools with regard to replace, reduce and refine still has a long way to go. But the journey has begun, and in four years, the distance we have come is obvious.

Teacher training is another area for the inclusion of ethical animal use procedures, Animal Welfare knowledge and understandings, duty of care requirements as well as workplace health & safety.

### **THERE IS STILL MUCH TO BE DONE!**

Another looming issue in the Agricultural Science area of education is the present and future shortage of trained and experienced Agricultural Science teachers in schools. The Australia-wide initiative to Promote Agriculture in Schools is still surging ahead to ensure that government authorities are aware of this issue and what impacts there will be upon primary industries, in both agriculture and horticulture, in the not too distant future. With the aging demographic that Australia, like other developed and developing countries faces, there are a number of issues such as loss of knowledge and experience in the teaching profession in the Science and Agricultural Science areas and the shortage of skilled teachers training to come into these areas. Also student uptake of Science and Agricultural Science subjects is declining. These are growing concerns in educational sectors that need to be addressed.

Developing an effective and workable procedure to monitor animal-use facilities and housing in Queensland schools is a very difficult compliance requirement that must be addressed. A number of initiatives have been discussed in Queensland, but the lack of financial resources and trained personnel are issues that presently hold back progress in this area.

Perhaps a national sharing of animal-use procedures from an educational perspective may reduce the impacts of isolating tangential development in Australian States and Territories. This is not to say that every aspect of animal-use procedures would be possible to be endorsed Australia-wide but there is a lot of material already available that could easily be adopted throughout all States and Territories. The inefficiency and time-wasting of reinventing should not be required as there are a number of important areas that State educational systems could already agree to share. Consistency across States and Territories would save a lot of work and reduce confusion for teachers who venture across state borders. Consistency with State legislation is another issue for state educational authorities.

## CONCLUSION

This brief outline of Animal Ethics and Animal Welfare within an Education Framework from a Queensland perspective gives a very small insight into some of the aspects and issues being worked on by the Queensland Schools Animal Ethics Committee. Often we work in isolation with challenging issues and it is really useful to be able to link up with the knowledge and expertise of participants attending this Humane Education Symposium.

As we are on this learning experience together, please feel free to link up. Use our materials, suggest changes and ideas, network, ask questions and share. We have a long way to go. We do not know all the answers. Working together is sensible. The long term benefits will be for everyone but especially for animals.

### **Q – Delegate:**

*Do you only work two days a week?*

In September 2006, I gave up a really fabulous job here teaching at the Toohey Forest Environmental Education Centre, three days a week, and also working two days a week in Education House on Animal Ethics. I gave up that job because I was asked to come in to Education House to work on Animal Ethics full-time. I have worked full-time and flat out in there until August, and now I am two days a week. I am looking after all the Queensland schools, two days a week.

### **Q – Delegate:**

*Has the Queensland Schools Animal Ethics Committee been externally reviewed?*

Yes.

### **Q – Delegate:**

*How have you coped with recommendations from that review, in terms of resourcing? I'm on the WA Schools Animal Ethics Committee; I'm thinking of our Executive Officer, whose workload is absolutely enormous, and it greatly concerns me that there isn't recognition of that. And therefore, allocation of adequate resources to allow the job to be done in the manner that it should be done.*

We were audited by the DPI&F and we got a report from them in February last year, and as a result of that, in September last year, I was offered full-time work, because we had major non-compliance, secondary non-compliance and minor non-compliance.

I have worked – and not just me, but lots of people have worked very hard to work on those issues, and we have not completed the tasks. Now, two days a week, I can't see that we can do anything much outside of keeping the QSAEC going. But the next audit will probably say major non-compliance, and then someone will be employed again. Until the authorities realise that animal use in schools is a really important aspect of education, I don't think things will change too much.

**Q – Delegate:**

**Kellie Ireland (Director of Education, RSPCA Queensland):**

Note: At the time these comments were made Education Qld had just significantly cut the hours allocated to the role of the Animal Ethics Officer and the RSPCA Qld were greatly disappointed. The RSPCA Qld sent a letter to Education Queensland to that effect. The RSPCA Qld felt it showed a distinct lack of priority for the role of the committee and the importance of animal welfare and animal ethics in Queensland Schools. Beryl Roberts mentioned her disappointment in the changed circumstances and she had the RSPCA Qld's support. The comments below were in support of the committee and it's continued role in the Qld Education system. The QSAEC is still operating and is working very hard. The comments below are not a reflection on the wonderful Education Queensland staff who facilitate the QSAEC under very challenging circumstances but more a plea to ensure that animal ethics committees all over Australia are supported in what is a huge and difficult task.

I'm Kellie, from the RSPCA Queensland. I manage our Education Department and sit on this Committee (QSAEC) with Beryl, and I want to congratulate everyone here, because I think the more importance we place on animal ethics and on values education, the more we will see these issues recognised in our schools and universities. We, the RSPCA Qld were – and can I say this? – shocked and horrified by the fact that the Committee (QSAEC) weren't given appropriate support.

There are many people concerned; it's not just our organisation (the RSPCA Qld). It's not just Beryl. There is also a number of schools, the Animal Welfare League, the DPI and F in fact lots of groups that have given hours and hours and hours of time over the last few years, to get our committee (the QSAEC) to a point where it's actually starting to make a difference to the animals in schools in a really positive way and working proactively with schools. You know, Agricultural schools, everyone, to make sure we can look after the animals as best we can.

And the decision recently (by Education Qld to cut funding and hours for the Animal Ethics Officer) was just really disappointing. We felt it put us right back. And anything we can do to improve the recognition that ethics needs to be out there (taken seriously) is important. Not just out there for people like us, i.e. those who are already aware of the need for it (I'm preaching to the choir here), but people who just want recognition in schools that animals are sentient, they have value. We need to consider it (ethics) in any decision we're making.

So, if anything, I would implore you to go away from this symposium and push for ethics (animal ethics) to be recognised and valued in your States, in your area. Because it's not just impacting on what we're doing in Queensland - we all need that help (i.e. the support of the state education body and the recognition that animal ethics should be a consideration for all schools and educational institutions). We need the time to do it (review ethics applications, visit schools, develop policies etc), and we need the time to do it properly, the expertise. So, thank you very much for noticing. We really appreciate it. And thank you everyone for being here, because the more people that recognise it and can push for animal ethics not only in Queensland, but in your

own States as well, it's going to make a direct difference to the animals in schools, and there are a lot of them.

*Q – Delegate:*

*I look after all schools in New South Wales. I've done this job since 1999, and probably in New South Wales, we had the earliest legislation: the Animal Research Act dates back to 1985. So we've had quite a lot of time and we've learnt, through a lot of hard work, how to manage that legislation in New South Wales schools. Yes, we've survived several inspections by our Department of Primary Industries, and I'm a full-time officer. And basically, it's only by having somebody there and a very supportive curriculum department within the Department of Education that we've been able to bring about those changes. But it's still a huge job, because I have 3,500 schools in New South Wales that I administer, looking after the three school sectors in New South Wales.*

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