Animal Welfare Seminar 2025

Animal ethics and animal welfare: Values informing outcomes

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Seminar program

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RSPCA

ANIMAL ETHICS & ANIMAL WELFARE:
Values informing outcomes
Animal Welfare Seminar 2025
Online | February 19-20

Understanding animal ethics – foundations, principles and context
Wednesday 19 February 2025 (All times are in AEDT)

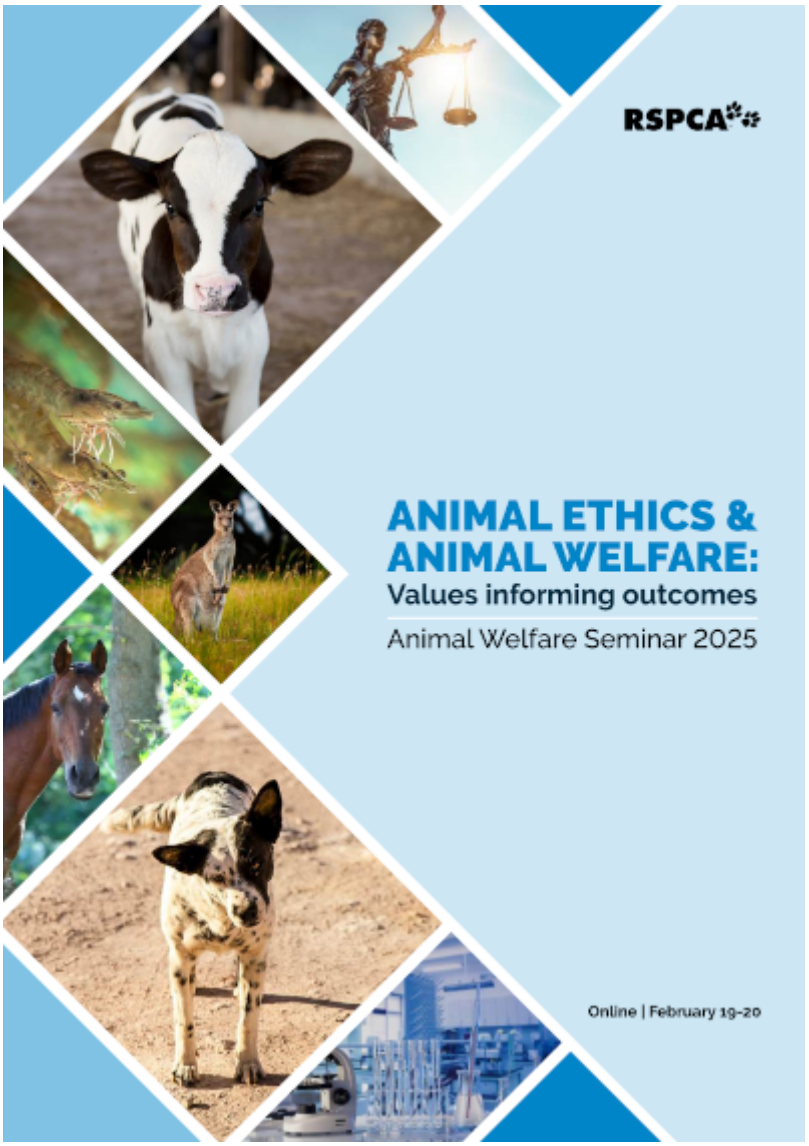
12:00	**Welcome to Day 1** **Official welcome:** Richard Mussell Chief Executive Officer, RSPCA Australia **Chair:** Dr Suzanne Fowler Chief Science Officer, RSPCA Australia
12:15	**A short history of animal ethics** **Speaker:** Prof David Fraser University of British Columbia
12:55	**Crossing the divide: The psychology of animal ethics** **Speaker:** Dr Tim Dean The Ethics Centre
13:35	**Camp Dogs: Ethical relationships between western discourses and Aboriginal worldview** **Speaker:** Prof Bindi Bennett Federation University **Speaker:** Dr Clare Archer-Lean University of the Sunshine Coast
14:15	**Break**
14:30	**Is the legal recognition of animal sentience reflective of changing animal ethics?** **Speaker:** Assoc Prof Jane Kotzmann Deakin University
15:10	**How much do people really care about animal welfare?** **Speaker:** Prof Peter Sandøe University of Copenhagen
15:50	**Panel discussion:** **Animal ethics – where to from here?** Panel: Day 1 Speakers
16:30	**Close**

Applied animal ethics – ethical aspects of animal welfare problems
Thursday 20 February 2025 (All times are in AEDT)

12:00	**Welcome to Day 2** **Chair:** Dr Suzanne Fowler Chief Science Officer, RSPCA Australia
12:10	**Ethics, efficacy, and decision-making in animal research** **Speaker:** Prof Lawrence Hansen University of California San Diego
12:55	**Ethics versus economics: Early life killing of surplus dairy calves and the Wicked Problem it presents** **Speaker:** Dr Sarah Bolton Greenham/The University of Melbourne
13:35	**Ethics of aquatic invertebrate management and farming** **Speaker:** Dr Sarah Wahltinez Nautilus Collaboration
14:15	**Break**
14:30	**Wild animals, welfare and ethics: Traditional versus compassionate conservation** **Speaker:** Dr Simon Coghlan University of Melbourne
15:10	**There will always be too many: "Overbreeding" of animals in racing industries** **Speaker:** Prof Phil McManus University of Sydney
15:50	**Ethics versus aesthetics: Ethical challenges of human interactions with brachycephalic dogs** **Speaker:** Dr Rowena Packer University of London
16:40	**Close**

Speaker bios

Click the thumbnail below to download the speaker bios (PDF 446KB):



Presentation abstracts

Abstract - Bennett & Archer-Lean

Camp Dogs: Ethical relationships between western discourses and Aboriginal worldview

In this presentation we consider the ways canine existence is often determined by cultural and discursive frames. The ethical considerations of this positioning are no more acute than with the management of dogs within remote and regional Aboriginal communities. Canines have always been integral to Aboriginal social, family, and environmental relationships; however, colonisation brought fundamental changes to these established relationships, with ramifications that have prompted welfare concerns about camp dog populations. We have reviewed existing research discourses and epistemological positioning of the supposed camp dog problem, veterinarian, public health and others. Our work surveys current literature to identify ways forward in facilitating Aboriginal self-determining of camp dog interactions in communities. The work is both anticolonial and focused on relational multispecies justice. From here we have begun interviewing some of the key stakeholders operating at the coal face of animal management in remote and regional Aboriginal communities to see what people need on the ground for effective, anticolonial and ethical practice.

Prof Bindi Bennett
Professorial Research Fellow
Federation University

Clare Archer-Lean
Senior Lecturer in English Literature
University of the Sunshine Coast

Abstract - Bolton

Ethics versus economics: Early life killing of surplus dairy calves and the Wicked Problem it presents

Early life killing of surplus dairy calves (males and females not intended as future milking cows) is commonly identified as being out of step with community values and a threat to the dairy industry's social license to operate. However, implementing alternatives to early life killing that are both socially acceptable and economically viable is a complex challenge that fits many characteristics of a ‘Wicked Problem’. Addressing such complex challenges requires understanding and accounting for the needs of all stakeholders, including those that work in animal agriculture, the public, and the animals themselves. This discussion will describe some of the complex social and economic factors that contribute to how surplus calves are managed and highlight opportunities for working towards sustainable management of these animals in the future.

Dr Sarah Bolton
Greenham/The University of Melbourne

Abstract - Coghlan

Wild animals, welfare and ethics: Traditional versus compassionate conservation

What are our obligations to wild animals, introduced species, and their welfare? Traditional conservation tends to prioritise the protection of wild animal and plant species and environments over the welfare of sentient animals, such as those from introduced and non-native species. Traditional conservationists believe that harming and killing sentient animals that are ecologically damaging is often justified, even when the suffering caused is high and the numbers of animals killed is large. Recently, a movement in conservation biology called 'compassionate conservation' has challenged this traditional practice. Compassionate conservationists argue, controversially, that conservation should abandon strategies that involve deliberate killing and harming and instead find alternative ways of protecting plants and animals. This presentation will discuss the traditional conservation vs. compassionate conservation debate. This will allow us to appreciate some of the difficult issues and topical disagreements related to ethics and welfare in contemporary conservation.

Dr Simon Coghlan
Senior Lecturer in Ethics in the School of Computing and Information Systems
The University of Melbourne.

Abstract - Dean

Crossing the divide: The psychology of animal ethics

This talk will explore the moral psychology of how people come to think about animal ethics, with a focus on people who don't think it is important. It can be difficult to understand and engage with people who hold different ethical views to our own, so this talk will focus on helping you understand multiple perspectives and find ways to bridge the gap and persuade others that animal ethics is important.

Dr Tim Dean
Senior Philosopher and Manos Chair in Ethics
The Ethics Centre

Abstract - Fraser

A short history of animal ethics

How should we treat non-human animals? This question has been answered in many different ways since pre-history. Many indigenous cultures saw animals as equal or superior beings that should be treated with respect. Pastoralist cultures typically saw animals as having been entrusted to people for appropriate care and use. Agrarian cultures tended to see animals as fellow participants in the natural cycles of rural life. Industrial cultures tended to assume that efforts to increase productivity and efficiency would lead to a better life for all. The Romantic Movement, reacting against industrialization, emphasized emotions and valued naturalness as important for a good life.

Since ancient Greece, various formal theories of animal ethics have been promoted. These have based ethical decisions on the consequences of actions, or on adherence to fundamental rights and rules, or on respecting the relationships we have with animals, or on the virtuous intentions of the person, or on the principle of conserving animals and nature.

With the complexity of issues that now arise over the many effects we have on animals, I argue that no single tradition or principle provides adequate guidance, and that a “practical ethic”, based on several different principles provides the best way forward.

Prof David Fraser
Animal Welfare Program
University of British Columbia

Abstract - Hansen

Ethics, efficacy, and decision-making in animal research

Those whose ethics countenance harming animals simply because they taste yummy or because animal research (AR) advances scientific knowledge cannot be logically convinced into thinking otherwise. Some supporters of AR, however, are squeamish about it and condition their endorsement with a “the ends justify the means” morality, believing that vivisection is efficacious in improving human health care. Such conditional supporters of AR might be logically persuaded to oppose it if presented with data proving that most AR does not lead to medical advances. However, most vivisectors don’t care if AR lacks relevance to human health and they will continue harming animals until decisions about animal welfare are taken out of their hands.

All institutional “protections” for animals in research, inadequate as they are, have been forced upon vivisectors from outside the research-industrial complex. American Institutional Animal Care and Use Committees (IACUCs) were mandated by Congress in response to public outrage over animal abuses in AR, but were quickly neutered by stacking the IACUC membership deck with overwhelming majorities of animal researchers; wolves entrusted with guarding sheep. Laws protecting animals from those who profit by harming them have succeeded in the past, and more laws passed by those who care about animals are the only hope for the future.

Dr Lawrence Hansen
School of Medicine
Department of Pathology
Division of Neuropathology
University of California San Diego

Abstract - Kotzmann

Is the legal recognition of animal sentience reflective of changing animal ethics?

Some jurisdictions in Australia have followed, or appear to be following, the legal trend of recognising animal sentience in the law. This talk will explore the extent to which these legal reforms may be considered as attempts to dereify animals and as reflective of changing animal ethics. In this respect, reification refers to the legal treatment of animals as things rather than as living beings with their own personal qualities and individuality. It is contended that, although some provisions recognising animal sentience may be considered minor attempts to dereify animals, sentience provisions in general fail to provide a significant challenge to the legal status of animals as things. Nevertheless, there is some evidence to suggest that public animal ethics are changing.

Assoc Prof Jane Kotzmann
Deakin Law School
Deakin University

Abstract - McManus

There will always be too many: “Overbreeding” of animals in racing industries

The number of thoroughbreds and many other racing animals born each year has declined recently due to concerns about “overbreeding”. This may prevent the birth of some animals with limited chances of winning races but it reinforces the structure of success in racing as being the basis for the breeding industries, which vary significantly depending on the rules of each animal-based industry. The structure of all animal-based racing industries is a pyramid, with many animals at the base and a few elite athletes at the apex, usually for a short period of time. There will always be too many animals bred because structurally not all of them can become champions, or “pay their way”. What happens to those animals that do not get to the track, or are unsuccessful in their racing careers? What future is there for animals that are gelded and cannot be used for breeding? Animals that have a successful racing career may struggle in the breeding industry, where the same competitive logic operates. Given the competitive structure of both the racing and breeding industries, inevitably most animals will still not be successful even when breeding numbers are reduced. Therefore, if animal-based racing industries such as thoroughbred racing are to continue then welfare initiatives such as the holistic education of young horses prior to racing, appropriate care during their racing careers and industry-funded off the track programs to enable horses to enjoy a longer life should be prioritised.

Prof Phil McManus
Professor in Urban and Environmental Geography
University of Sydney

Abstract - Packer

Ethics versus aesthetics: Ethical challenges of human interactions with brachycephalic dogs

Brachycephalic dogs have dramatically increased in popularity over the past decade. Their paradoxical rise is despite the burgeoning veterinary literature documenting the range of common and severe disorders they are affected by, and public education campaigns attempting to reduce their acquisition. This conflict has instigated several legal cases internationally, challenging the legality of breeding, showing and/or owning brachycephalic dogs.

This session will explore the ethics of human interactions with brachycephalic dogs, from multiple stakeholder perspectives including breeders, owners, veterinarians and animal rescue organisations.

Exploring the supply of these challenging breeds, we will consider the ethics of breeding brachycephalics, reflecting on contemporary strategies to improve breed health, including disorder screening, changing breed standards and outcrossing, and their efficacy in protecting canine welfare. Exploring the demand for brachycephalic dogs, we will consider the ethics of owning a brachycephalic dog, reflecting on anthropocentric motivations for their acquisition, and the ethics of acquisition source, including purchasing from breeders and adopting from rescue organizations.

Finally, as veterinarians play a key role in maintaining and improving the health of current brachycephalic dogs, we will consider the ethics of treating brachycephalic-related disorders, including conformation-altering surgery, and reproductive interventions including elective and emergency caesarean sections and assisted reproduction.

Dr Rowena Packer
Senior Lecturer in Companion Animal Behaviour and Welfare Science
Royal Veterinary College, University of London

Abstract - Sandøe

How much do people really care about animal welfare?

In this talk I’ll present two answers to this question. The first is that it depends a lot on who you ask. Empirical studies on animal ethics orientations undertaken in Denmark and other countries in Western Europe show that people’s views on what is owed to animals range from being 100% anthropocentric, according to which only human interests matter, to an animal rights view according to which animals deserve treatment similar to that of humans. The first part of the talk will present these studies, the distribution of views across different groups of people, and how the views found match with positions found in academic animal ethics. The second answer is that in most cases, people display a gap between what, asked in the abstract, they think is owed to animals, and what, in practice, they express through their behaviour as consumers or animal owners. The second part of the talk will discuss this gap between saying and doing when it comes to animal welfare, centred around two cases: consumption of welfare friendly animal products, and the breeding and buying of dogs with extreme conformations.

Prof Peter Sandøe
Department of Veterinary and Animal Sciences and Department of Food and Resource Economics
University of Copenhagen

Abstract - Wahltinez

Ethics of aquatic invertebrate management and farming

Aquatic invertebrate welfare is often overlooked, yet it is an important consideration for the management of free-ranging and farmed animals. While our knowledge of the experience of invertebrates currently lags behind that for terrestrial mammals, there is exciting research evaluating the cognitive capacities of this diverse group of animals with implications for understanding their sentience and ability to perceive pain. This talk will cover some ethical dimensions of invertebrate management, including the challenges with evaluating aquatic invertebrate sentience and pain perception, performing welfare assessments for invertebrates and practical considerations for safeguarding invertebrate welfare. The complex challenges of balancing ecological integrity with human interests will be discussed, using the crown-of-thorns starfish in the Great Barrier Reef as a case study. Additionally, the presentation will discuss animal welfare considerations for farmed crustaceans, focusing on humane slaughter methods. By examining these case studies, this talk aims to stimulate critical thought about the ethics of aquatic invertebrate management and farming, and to promote the development of practical ways to improve invertebrate welfare.

Dr Sarah Wahltinez
Aquatic Animal Welfare Veterinarian
Nautilus Collaboration

Presentation and Q&A videos

Presentation and Q&A videos from the RSPCA Animal Welfare Seminar 2025.

Presentation and Q&A videos

Day One

Day One - Intro / Welcome

https://www.youtube.com/embed/aCgvIqoeBik

A short history of animal ethics - Prof David Fraser

https://www.youtube.com/embed/vSB6HOXJWA8

Crossing the divide: The psychology of animal ethics - Dr Tim Dean

https://www.youtube.com/embed/U48PbcPGahU

Camp Dogs: Ethical relationships between western discourses and Aboriginal worldview - Prof Bindi Bennett & Dr Clare Archer-Lean

https://www.youtube.com/embed/270_lJmdO-8

Is the legal recognition of animal sentience reflective of changing animal ethics? - Assoc Prof Jane Kotzmann

https://www.youtube.com/embed/CQN4isDhtPw

How much do people really care about animal welfare? - Prof Peter Sandøe

https://www.youtube.com/embed/jlQDmOQKBco

Panel discussion: Animal ethics – where to from here?

https://www.youtube.com/embed/56KNhyJJofY

Presentation and Q&A videos

Day Two

Day Two - Intro

https://www.youtube.com/embed/cXcfpREDICs

Ethics, efficacy, and decision-making in animal research - Prof Lawrence Hansen

https://www.youtube.com/embed/QvNe5wFWpTg

Ethics versus economics: Early life killing of surplus dairy calves and the Wicked Problem it presents - Dr Sarah Bolton

https://www.youtube.com/embed/R4JD3wnjnxk

Ethics of aquatic invertebrate management and farming - Dr Sarah Wahltinez

https://www.youtube.com/embed/KL4AWing_hI

Wild animals, welfare and ethics: Traditional versus compassionate conservation - Dr Simon Coghlan

https://www.youtube.com/embed/UITOAh3B3GM

There will always be too many: “Overbreeding” of animals in racing industries - Prof Phil McManus

https://www.youtube.com/embed/nB_hIBuUrNA

Ethics versus aesthetics: Ethical challenges of human interactions with brachycephalic dogs - Dr Rowena Packer

https://www.youtube.com/embed/Yjy4hkqDf8s

Day Two - Close

https://www.youtube.com/embed/W4NRvz_uIp8

Presentation slides

Speaker	Slides
Bindi Bennett & Clare Archer-Lean	Not available.
Sarah Bolton	Sarah Bolton - Ethics versus economics - Early life killing of surplus calves and the wicked problem it presents.pdf
Simon Coghlan	Simon Coghlan - Wild animals, welfare and ethics - Traditional versus compassionate conservation.pdf
Tim Dean	Not available.
David Fraser	David Fraser - A short history of animal ethics.pdf
Lawrence Hansen	Lawrence Hansen - Ethics, Efficacy, and Decision Making in Animal Research.pdf
Jane Kotzmann	Jane Kotzmann - Is the legal recognition of animal sentience reflective of changing animal ethics.pdf
Phil McManus	Phil McManus - There will always be too many - Overbreeding of animals in racing industries.pdf
Rowena Packer	Rowena Packer - Ethics versus aesthetics - Ethical challenges of human interactions with brachycephalic dogs.pdf
Peter Sandøe	Peter Sandoe - How much do people care about animal welfare.pdf
Sarah Wahltinez	Sarah Wahltinez - Ethics of aquatic invertebrate farming.pdf

Further information

> For more information, consult the following articles on the RSPCA Knowledgebase:

- RSPCA Australia purpose, vision, values, principles and objectives
- RSPCA Australia animals charter
- What is good animal welfare?
- Are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander hunters exempt from animal cruelty laws?
- What is animal sentience and why is it important?
- At what stage of development do animals become sentient?
- Position Paper GP1 - Animal Welfare Legislation
- What are the welfare issues with animals used in research?
- How is animal research regulated in Australia?
- What is the Animal Research Openness Agreement and why is it important?
- How many animals are used in research in Australia?
- What are the 3Rs in animal research?
- What is the RSPCA's view of the use of animals in research?
- Why are animals used in research?
- How can I avoid animal testing in the products I purchase?
- What happens to bobby calves?
- Why are calves separated from their mother in the dairy industry?
- How do young calves cope with transport?
- Position Paper B1 - Welfare of bobby calves destined for slaughter
- Do octopi and lobsters feel pain?
- Are squid and octopi protected by animal welfare legislation?
- Are crustaceans protected by animal welfare legislation?
- What is the most humane way to kill crustaceans for human consumption?
- What can be done to improve the welfare of fish and shellfish in restaurant aquaria?
- Can enclosed yabby traps harm animals and are they legal to use?
- Is intensive aquaculture similar to intensive land-based livestock production?
- Do fish feel pain?
- How can habitat loss affect animal welfare?

- What is humane vertebrate pest control?
- How can you measure the humaneness of a pest animal control method?
- How can pest animal control programs be made more humane?
- A national approach towards humane vertebrate pest control
- Is there a need to kill kangaroos or wallabies?
- What is the RSPCA's view on killing sharks to reduce shark incidents?
- How would a national identification registry help improve horse welfare?
- What are the animal welfare issues with Thoroughbred horse racing?
- What are the animal welfare issues associated with horse jumps racing?
- What are the animal welfare issues with greyhound racing?
- Why does the RSPCA oppose the export of racing greyhounds?
- What do I need to consider before adopting an ex-racing greyhound?
- Information Paper - National Horse Identification and Traceability
- The most important participant. A framework for Thoroughbred Welfare
- Epidemiology of horses leaving the racing and breeding industries
- What is Brachycephalic Obstructive Airway Syndrome (BOAS)?
- What do I need to know about Brachycephalic dogs?
- What are the welfare issues associated with narrowed nostrils in dogs (stenotic nares)?
- What is Brachycephalic Ocular Syndrome?
- What are the welfare risks associated with difficulty giving birth in brachycephalic dogs?
- How can owners of dogs with exaggerated physical features help their pets?
- What can breeders do to avoid exaggerated physical features that compromise dog welfare?
- Position Paper A5 - Responsible companion animal breeding
- GP - General Policies
- A - Companion Animals
- B - Farm Animals
- C - Animals in Sport, Entertainment, Performance, Recreation and Work
- D - Animals in Research and Teaching
- E - Wild Animals

Further reading

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- Dean T (2022) Can you be too moral? TEDxSydney
- Dean T (2014) Evolution and moral ecology. PhD thesis, UNSW https://doi.org/10.26190/unsworks/17194
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- Kotzmann J (2023) Sentience and intrinsic worth as a pluralist foundation for fundamental animal rights. Oxford J Legal Stud 43(2):405–428 https://doi.org/10.1093/ojls/gqad003
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Links to other resources

- Animalethics, Faculty of Health and Medical Science, University of Copenhagen
- Animal Management in Rural and Remote Indigenous Communities
- Love is Blind

RSPCA Animal Welfare Course

- Animal Welfare - An Introduction (Online Course)

Science Update

- More information about the RSPCA Australia Science Update newsletter
- Sign up for the RSPCA Australia Science Update, eNews, and more