

Openness Agreement on Animal Research in Australia

Public consultation feedback

Please enter your feedback in the table below and return via email to anzccart@adelaide.edu.au by **Monday 21 March 2022** with the words **“Openness Agreement”** in the subject line.

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Is this feedback on behalf of an individual or institution?	Institution
Date submitted	21 March 2022
General comments	
<p>The animal research industry in Australia is not transparent. Little is known about the industry and its scope of animal usage within the general community. Where there is awareness, serious concerns are held about the scale of animal suffering inherent in the industry. This lack of transparency, together with the devastating impact on animals and the sheer numbers of animals involved, means animal research arguably lacks a social licence to operate in Australia.</p> <p>The ADO would support the initiative to publish and maintain the ‘Openness Agreement on Animal Research in Australia’ (“the Agreement”) as a way to increase awareness of animal research in Australia, provided the Agreement is balanced, accurate and free from industry ‘spin’.</p>	
Introduction	
Section	Comments
<p>“Why the Openness Agreement was developed”</p>	<p>1. <i>“...we acknowledge that the use of animals in research or teaching is often seen as contentious and that...”</i></p> <p>The ADO submits that the words ‘seen as’ in the above text in the opening statement of the Agreement are unnecessary and arguably disparaging.</p> <p>‘Contentious’ simply means ‘controversial’ and either something is controversial (or contentious) or it is not. If in its first sentence the Agreement does not fully accept that animal research <u>is</u> controversial, it will fail in its objective of engaging with a public that is concerned about the very activity it seeks to promote.</p> <p>This kind of language risks suggesting that the entire Agreement is a mere rhetorical exercise as opposed to a genuine attempt to be more open about the use of animals for medical research.</p> <p>The words ‘seen as’ are unnecessary also because the second half of the opening sentence explains the diversity of opinions that, <i>ipso facto</i>, make the issue contentious or controversial.</p>

	<p>Finally, the words ‘seen as’ present concerns held by members of the community about the use of sentient animals in research as a matter of mere perception rather than genuine and valid ethical concerns, and by implication the words minimise or dismiss those concerns.</p> <p>The ADO recommends that the words ‘often seen as’ be removed from the opening sentence so that it states objectively that ‘...we acknowledge that the use of animals in research or teaching is contentious...’</p> <p>2. <i>“This Openness Agreement was therefore developed so organisations that conduct, fund or are otherwise associated with the use of animals in research or teaching can demonstrate a commitment to openness, and can promote awareness of the reasons why animals are used, the benefits derived, the limitations that apply, and the steps taken to minimise harm.”</i></p> <p>The ADO is concerned about the words ‘and the steps taken to minimise harm’.</p> <p>The ADO submits that this statement does not go far enough. The Agreement must refer to all 3Rs here rather than merely allude to the first ‘R’ (‘refine’). The failure by researchers and institutions to focus on reduction and replacement is part of the fundamental problem with animal research in Australia today, and does not comply with the Governing Principles of the animal research Code (as discussed in the Agreement, p1).</p> <p>By alluding only to the ‘refinement’ principle, the Agreement will perpetuate this unacceptable and unethical approach to animal research in Australia.</p> <p>The ADO recommends that this sentence should also refer to the principles of replacement and reduction (rather than merely refinement).</p>
<p><i>“Outline of animal research regulations in Australia”</i></p>	<p><i>In Australia, the use of animals in research and teaching is governed by strict legislation.</i></p> <p>The use of the subjective term ‘strict’ is unnecessary in this sentence. What does it mean? When is legislation not strict? What legislation is it referring to - the various laws in the different jurisdictions? Are they all 'strict'? And 'strict' according to whom? Advocates for alternatives to animals would not find the current regulatory framework to be strict because it allows (literally) countless animals to be used, deliberately made to suffer, and killed every year in Australia. The ADO submits that this is an unsupported and meaningless assertion that could be remedied by removing the word 'strict' and leaving the objective and value-neutral noun ‘legislation’.</p> <p>The ADO recommends that the word ‘strict’ be omitted from this sentence.</p>
<p><i>“How the Openness Agreement works”</i></p>	<p>No comment.</p>

Our Commitments	
<p>Commitment 1. “We will be clear about our involvement in the use of animals in research or teaching.”</p>	<p><i>In striving to meet this Commitment, we will:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ensure our communications on animal research or teaching provide accurate descriptions about the potential benefits, harms and potential limitations of that research or teaching.</i> <p>The ADO supports the commitment in the first dot point.</p> <p>...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Where a Signatory is collaborating on a research project with a non-signatory organisation, be as open as possible while respecting these constraints.</i> <p>What does ‘these constraints’ refer to?</p> <p>It appears to be based on the UK’s <i>Concordat on Openness on Animal Research</i> (“UK Concordat”)¹, but the reference to 'these constraints' has lost its context due to the omission of the reference to 'issues of confidentiality or commercial sensitivity' in the UK version (p6).</p>
<p>Commitment 2. “We will enhance our institution’s communications with the media and the public about our use of animals in research or teaching.”</p>	<p><i>In striving to meet this Commitment, we will:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Include information about our use of animals in research or teaching in communications and media releases when it has played a significant role in an aspect of our work. Where practical, this may also include images or video.</i> <p>The risk with this proposed commitment is that it will create the misleading impression that animal research always leads to positive outcomes, whereas that is not the case. Most animal research is a tiny part in a huge process, the benefits of which are often far from clear or even knowable.</p> <p>The ADO submits that this first dot point should be removed. It is arguably covered by the second dot point, which is more objective and balanced.</p> <p>The ADO recommends that the first dot point be omitted.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Support discussion of our use of animals in research or teaching with the media and the local or broader communities.</i> • <i>Clearly identify a point of contact for information about our organisation’s use of animals in research or teaching.</i> <p>The ADO notes that the following statement of commitment in the UK Concordat (#2) has been omitted from the Australian version:</p> <p>"Signatory universities, pharmaceutical companies, learned societies and research funders will report and/or explain how they are working to promote better application of the 3Rs (Replacement, Refinement and Reduction of animals in research) and will make examples of their progress in the 3Rs publicly available." (p7).</p>

¹ *Concordat on Openness on Animal Research in the UK*, 14 May 2014.

	The ADO recommends that a similar statement be included in the Australian Agreement.
Commitment 3. <i>“We will be proactive in providing opportunities for the public to find out about research or teaching involving animals.”</i>	<p><i>In striving to meet this Commitment, we will:</i></p> <p>...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Respond to all reasonable enquiries about our involvement in animal research. Where there are legitimate reasons why this is not possible, we will explain those reasons openly and respectfully.</i> <p>What constitutes a ‘reasonable’ enquiry? The ADO suggests that this is subjective language that would allow organisations to avoid responding to critical enquiries.</p> <p>The ADO recommends that the words ‘all reasonable’ be omitted from the dot point.</p>
Commitment 4. <i>“We will provide an annual summary of our efforts to improve openness in the use of animals in research or teaching.”</i>	The ADO notes that the draft Australian Agreement does not include an undertaking to review the Agreement within a certain period ('Three years after publication' in the UK Concordat, p9).
Addendum items	
<i>“List of Signatories” and “List of Supporters”</i>	No comment.
<i>“How this Agreement was developed”</i>	No comment.
<i>“Further information”</i>	No comment.
<i>“Acknowledgements”</i>	No comment.
Any other comments	
N/A	