

# Increasing the Transparency of Animal Experimentation: An Australian Perspective

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## 1 Introduction

Transparency involves communicating meaningful information (e.g. data or details of decision-making processes) to audiences, openly and honestly, with the intention of informing, enabling understanding and meeting responsibilities of accountability.

YEATES and REED, 2015, p. 504

It has been argued that citizen stakeholders would be well served by greater transparency. The Transparency Register of the European Union (EU) (2016), for example, states that “Transparency is [...] a key part of encouraging European citizens to participate more actively in the democratic life of the EU”. But why is transparency in non-human animal (hereinafter referred to as animal) research desirable, or indeed vital? Hadley (2012) argues that the public finance much animal research but do not know what impact their taxes and donations have on animals. Furthermore, he suggests that, since “people enjoy the benefits of animal research when they consume pharmaceuticals or undergo surgical procedures that prolong or improve the quality of their lives, it seems reasonable to inform them of the costs to animals for which their consumer choices are to some extent causally responsible” (Hadley, 2012, p. 105). Good governance is another reason for transparency in animal research. Thus, McLeod and Hobson-West suggest that one of the key themes “in the science governance literature is the linking of transparency and public trust (or mistrust)” (2015, p. 792). Varga et al. concur that “more transparency will increase

public confidence in the appropriate conduct and regulation of animal research and therefore help to maintain public acceptance” (2010, p. 500).

Some in the research community have supported increased transparency to improve the public’s understanding of animal research and boost its acceptability. “Underpinning this idea is a belief that animal rights advocates use public ignorance to benefit their cause. Thus, the only way to counter the damage done to the animal research community’s public image is to increase the lay community’s understanding of research practices” (O’Sullivan, 2006, p. 6). In contrast, animal advocates emphasize the importance of public debate and awareness of the reality of research animals to improve animal welfare and to work towards an end of animal experimentation. In general, animal advocates are confident that the more the public knows about animal research, the less it will be willing to sanction it. In their public pronouncements, then, both researchers and animal advocates consider increased transparency to be in their own best interest (O’Sullivan, 2006). The critical issue is what information should be available and given focus.

Most people know nothing or little about animal research. For example, an opinion poll, commissioned by Humane Research Australia (HRA) in 2013, found that 43% of Australians were not aware that animals are used in experimental research in Australia (Humane Research Australia, 2016a). Few people who live in countries where animal experiments occur know much detail about the numbers and species of animals used, the types of procedures they endure, or the pain and suffering involved (Hadley, 2012), as well as the ineffectiveness of using animals as models for humans. The public is interested, however, in these details. A public consultation in the United Kingdom—to which animal activists and scientists were not invited—found public support for openness and interest in a wide range of key information (Ipsos MORI, 2013). Information of interest includes, for example, details about animal use (e.g., organizations that use animals, numbers and percentages of animal species used, severity of procedures, how animals are killed, and whether there are non-animal alternatives); information about genetically altered animals; outcomes for animals, such as levels of suffering, with examples and images of typical procedures; more information about alternatives to animal use; and reports on finished projects from an animal welfare point of view. Furthermore, people asserted the animal research sector “should subject itself to external scrutiny by those who have an interest in the animals’ welfare, rather than by those who have a vested financial or scientific interest in the research being carried out” (Ipsos MORI, 2013, p. 37). A later Ipsos MORI poll found that 42% of respondents perceive UK organizations that use animals for research as “secretive” (Clemence and Leaman, 2016, p. 2).