

Code of Ethical Practice

As a rescue, an educational hub and an advocate for animal welfare, Rachie's Retirement Home has a responsibility to ensure the ethical treatment of the animals we serve. Therefore, it is a requirement that we, as well as any animal organisation, individual or business we partner with or endorse, upholds the following code of ethical practice.

Subheadings are for ease of reading, all ethics apply to all parties regardless of status as breeder, rescue, business, organisation etc. unless specified.

1. General ethics:

- a. To provide all animals with care that fully satisfies their needs for adequate and complete nutritional, safe and enriched environments, positive social arrangements, normal behavioural expression, good physical health and mental health. This includes a good colony social structure, adequate and timely medical treatment from an appropriately qualified vet and access to humane euthanasia.
- b. To promote, educate and advocate for responsible, welfare focused, ethical practice in pet ownership, breeding (both for pet and food sources) and rescue (including rehoming and sanctuary services).
- c. To consistently and actively develop one's knowledge of care and husbandry from reliable, evidence-based information.
- d. To have a clear process for full transparency with customers and clients about husbandry practices including; animal housing, euthanasia (criteria and practice) and other relevant protocols (ie purchase, return).
- e. To keep comprehensive records of animals either bred or in care. These records should include (where available) lineage, observed/reported issues, identifying characteristics, age, sex, and sale or adoption records that allow for owner follow up or record tracing if required.
- f. To encourage and facilitate the safe return of any animal sold, given or adopted, for any reason and at any reasonable time.
- g. To never practice husbandry below the minimum standard endorsed by a relevant regulatory body or ethics board. This includes the exclusive use of humane, welfare-focused euthanasia methods, stocking densities, space and enrichment requirements.
- h. To never endorse or practice the wild-release of non-native animals.
- i. To refuse or make an effort to prevent the supply of animals to a party with known animal welfare issues.
- j. To maintain a high standard of interpersonal conduct and refrain from engaging in malicious, illegal, destructive or mean-spirited actions as determined by the RRH management committee or relevant legislation or guidelines.

2. Breeding ethics:

- a. To breed only animals which are sexually mature, in good health, and are free from hereditary defects, genetic predisposition to disease, parasitic infestation, temperaments not suitable as companion animals, behavioural issues, and communicable disease, including animals who consistently produce offspring displaying any of the above.
- b. To take an active role in testing and tracking the temperament and health of animals throughout a full lifespan.
- c. To never breed for an aesthetic trait including coat colour, type or marking, at the expense of selecting for good health and temperament.
- d. Animals are not to knowingly be bred while having a heritable condition which negatively impacts quality of life, including circumstances where siblings displaying a deleterious trait are culled at birth.

Exceptions to this rule are:

- i. where test crosses are used to determine the presence of a trait
 - ii. when a negative trait is proven to be possible to safely breed away from in a target population, AND removal of that trait would benefit the welfare of the pet population, AND the breeder is focusing strongly on removal of that trait, AND no offspring are released to the public or exchanged for money until the trait is fully removed.
 - iii. Where a novel or newly available mutation is not yet fully understood and breeding is needed to determine the characteristics and behaviour of the gene, ONLY if no animals are released to the public during the testing period.
 - iv. Double lethal mutations where the heterozygous individuals do not display deleterious traits may be bred only with strict adherence to a policy of breeding homozygous positive or heterozygous individuals to a homozygous negative individual, such that there is no potential for the double lethal trait to occur.
- e. To be knowledgeable about the causes, effects and treatment of heritable medical and physiological issues common in the species, including susceptibility to mycoplasma, tumours, and hormonal aggression, and to breed away from a predisposition to these conditions.
 - f. Animals that are acquired from international sources without official and documented import and biosecurity processes are to be treated as a biosecurity risk and the relevant authorities are to be contacted. In the event that animals are approved, relevant documentation and proof of screening for all relevant diseases is to be retained and shared wherever animals are distributed. This includes the progeny of such animals, even when bred and distributed within Australia.
 - g. To be knowledgeable about the physiology of the animals being bred, such as the ideal health-based conformation, and at least familiar with the genetic behaviour and associated traits of coat types, colours and markings.

3. Rescue ethics

- a. To never intentionally breed animals to be sold as rescues, this includes breeding to meet a demand for animals or to raise funds, or using the guise of rescue work to distribute animals from one's own breeding program.
- b. To understand the limits of one's resources by not accepting more animals than an individual or organisation has the space, time or financial means to care for long term.
- c. Native animals are not to be cared for without the appropriate training, certification and resources. Natives surrendered to an unqualified rescue organisation should be handed to a wildlife care group or individual that best matches the ethical practice guidelines.
- d. To only advocate for and practice husbandry which meets an animal's social requirements to the fullest. In instances where, for medical or behavioural reasons, an obligate social species must be housed alone long term, it may be done so only when all other avenues are exhausted including surgical intervention and behavioural training. Personal convenience is not considered an acceptable justification for enforced social isolation.

4. Selling ethics:

- a. To screen all potential homes to the best of one's ability to ensure a high standard of welfare, to deny a sale or adoption if the situation is not optimal for the animal.
- b. To make use of application forms and sale/adoption contracts that protect the welfare of the animals into the future.
- c. To not sell live animals underage - 8 weeks for rats, 6 weeks for mice
- d. To sell only healthy animals who are sound in temperament and free from parasites.
- e. In the case where animals are sold with disability, defect or condition, it is only to be done in cases where the animal is experiencing a high quality of life, with full transparency and with the full consent and awareness of the buyer. If selling for show, this includes full transparency about deviations from the local standard.
- f. To never sell a pregnant doe.
- g. To take responsibility for any offspring produced by a doe which was unknowingly pregnant when sold.
- h. To take back or find a home for any animal whose placement is not successful, regardless of length of time or reason. This does not mean the seller must refund - that is up to the individual's policies.
- i. To provide to a purchaser full instructions on feeding, housing, social and medical needs and general care.
- j. To provide the new owner with ongoing support and assistance with problems that may arise.

- k. When selling an animal to a novice breeder or fancier as breeding or show-quality stock, to provide support, advice, education, and guidance to assist them in achieving their goals and learning ethical practice, or to direct them to someone willing to provide mentorship.

5. Food animal ethics:

- a. To ensure that any animal which is to be used as food is humanely euthanized before being fed, either by euthanizing an animal oneself, or being fully confident that the purchaser will euthanize it before using it as a food animal.
- b. To never knowingly sell an animal for resale as a live food animal or endorse the use of rodents as live food.
- c. To not knowingly sell any animal for use as a food animal which has died of disease or unknown causes, is known to carry infection or parasites, has been stored incorrectly or for too long, or may otherwise be known to risk causing harm to the animal to which it is fed.
- d. Animals which are sold after euthanasia are exempt from the policies of sections other than section 5, such as the need for record keeping and sale contracts. HOWEVER, this rule only applies after the death of the animal, and while alive the animal must be treated in a welfare-focused manner regardless of eventual purpose.

6. Community responsibility ethics

- a. If maintaining a position of community influence, such as running any public forum such as social media groups, clubs, and educational websites, ethical practice requires taking the responsibility to uphold a high quality of information for new and inexperienced community members who may be reading. Any community group must have sufficient experienced administration to monitor and curate a community dialogue which is evidence based, welfare focused, and does not promote or provide a platform for misinformation.

7. Nuance

- a. This is an evolving document, and similarly we acknowledge that the best animal owners are the ones who are constantly evolving as well. Therefore:
 - i. Parties who do not fit these criteria due to past actions which have since ceased, but are now seeking affiliation, endorsement or partnership with RRH are invited and encouraged to demonstrate that they have improved their standard of practice.
 - ii. If an individual has good reason and/or evidence based support for additions or amendments to this document, they are invited to contact RRH to discuss. However, exceptions will not be made on an individual basis regardless of circumstances.