Who are the stakeholders in animal welfare?

A stakeholder is considered someone who can affect a decision or is affected by an action (Freeman, 1984). Stakeholders, from an animal welfare perspective, are identified by their interests in animal use or management, be it for food or fibre production, work, science, teaching, entertainment, protection of people, animals or environment. Stakeholders include not only those directly involved, such as farmers, scientists or teachers, but also consumers of animals, or products or services derived from animal use or management. Consumers’ lives are affected, even though they may not be aware of this.

The animals themselves are also stakeholders, since their lives and well-being are affected by, and often depend on, human use or management. However, their lack of choice in participating in decisions that affect them in most instances means that their stake is of a fundamentally different nature to that of humans. At best, it constitutes a mutually beneficial arrangement with humans; at worst, it is one of servitude, cruel treatment, and a short life.

Animal advocates also form a unique group of stakeholders, since they attempt to represent the animals, rather than themselves. They have an important role as opinion leaders in the community, particularly if they have a good understanding of the animal use systems (Ross and Phillips, 2018). More knowledgeable advocates are better able to analyse different animal production systems, to approach those in government and the animal industries about welfare issues, and to discuss them with their friends, work colleagues, and product retailers.

Another important stakeholder group is the non-consumers of the output of animal industries. As our lives are interdependent, all animal use or management has some impact, directly or indirectly, on all living beings. Therefore, those who don’t eat meat, wear wool, follow the sports involving animals, visit zoos, or use medication and cosmetics that have been tested on animals, are still impacted upon by others’ choices and should logically be allowed to have a say in how animals are used and managed. As well, the animal kingdom is everyone’s heritage, and therefore everyone’s responsibility.

Although it is important to recognise all the stakeholders in animal welfare, it is also important to understand that not all have an equal stake. For some stakeholders, there may be marginal benefit, for others it is a matter of life or death.
Stakeholders’ decision-making regarding animals

In relation to ethics, three levels of reasoning for decision-making have been identified:

**Level 1**

Personal Interest Reasoning involves making decisions based on direct consequences for yourself, i.e. obedience toward authority figures to avoid punishment, or acting in a certain way for personal benefit.

**Level 2**

Maintaining Norms Reasoning involves choosing those behaviours accepted by the society in which you live and following rules and laws.

**Level 3**

Principled Reasoning involves making decisions based on universal principles of justice, with compassion and respect for all (Kohlberg, 1984).

The various levels of reasoning may be used at any stage of life. Research has shown that Principled Reasoning is influenced by education which exposes people to different perspectives requiring critical reflection (Rest et al., 1999). It is therefore important to reflect on how the various stakeholder groups make decisions regarding animals from different perspectives, which are also influenced by personal characteristics of people within stakeholder groups.

**A. Industry**

The animal industries include those producing and/or using animals for food and other purposes, and their diverse and extensive ancillary industries. There have been two schools of thought regarding relationships between industries and other stakeholders. The first instrumentalises ethics, with the purpose of business being financial success and engagement in ethics only a subsidiary purpose, e.g. doing some good works with stakeholders. The second is that businesses are a network of relationships, and business’ goals are logically to support all stakeholders’ goals (Noland and Phillips, 2010). Most industries involved in animal use have been instrumentalising ethics by making some concessions to the interests of the animal stakeholders and their advocates for industry interests, i.e. Personal Interest Reasoning. For example, in Australia, following animal advocates’ and the general public’s concerns about training regimes and the extensive killing of greyhounds that are too slow, the greyhound racing industry introduced rehoming programmes for a limited number of greyhounds to enable the continuation of the industry. Similarly, supermarket chains monitor and respond to consumer choices, mirroring trends towards greater concern for animal welfare, to maintain and build their customer base. Such engagement with stakeholders, although apparently a good faith exercise, is affected by the relative power of the parties advancing their interests, along with their rhetorical skill (Noland and Phillips, 2010, p. 42).

Industries that use animals rarely consider them as stakeholders whose interests are just as important as human stakeholders. Animals are usually treated as property, which has been deemed culturally and legally acceptable, with some minimal adaptations required by law to modify some of the cruellest of treatments. Laws relating to animals often represent the lowest
common denominator of social views, as they are subject to vested interests of stakeholders, inherent cultural biases, and are slow to create and adapt. As well, they are hard to apply to the great variety of animal uses extant today. Practices become entrenched, and hard to change because business investment is required to achieve returns over many years. The complex array of associated industries also has interests in maintaining the status quo of animal use to retain livelihoods. Industries continue doing what they know and have skills in, as the costs of retraining and re-equipping to move into more ethical industries is expensive.

Industries are therefore often not transparent about their products’ impacts on animal survival and well-being. Animal industry staff may be required or encouraged to follow an industry directive on animal welfare issues, which may be contrary to their beliefs, but they support it, for fear of reprisals by the company if they do not. Honest reporting of various industries’ impacts on animal survival and well-being may eventually be required, just as cigarette companies are now required to report their products’ impacts on humans.

B. Consumers

In personal decision-making, individuals have the right to choose what they do in relation to their use of animals, providing it is within the law. For those with plenty, these decisions are based not just on survival needs as they are in low-income societies. People can choose, or not choose, to eat and wear animals, to use animals for companionship, hobbies or sport, with species and breed types based on popularity and status, and can kill animals, even cruelly, by a simple classification if we determine they are not aligned with our current view of what we need (e.g. governments’ classifications of animals as feral or pests). While there is a growing number of people in the world who use Principled Reasoning and do not eat or wear animals and their products, who choose to help animals in need and strive for fair treatment of all animals, the majority, at the time of writing, still do use and contribute to animal abuse through their daily choices, demonstrating Personal Interest or Maintaining Norms Reasoning.

Consumers are often unaware or unwilling to admit that they are complicit in the choices made by industries and organisations who breed, rear, and/or kill animals. Principled Reasoning regarding animal products is hindered by consumers’ limited understanding of production systems (Erian and Phillips, 2017). When animal use practices are made explicit through honest information and there are easily accessible alternative choices, consumers have an opportunity to change animal use and end abuse.

However, while honest and accurate labelling is crucial, Personal Interest Reasoning by consumers may still predominate. For example, product quality is often judged more important than humane treatment, even though the two are intrinsically linked. If the quality of meat produced in intensive systems is perceived to be adversely affected by the way animals have been treated, consumers are reluctant to buy it (Schröder and McEachern, 2004).

C. Professionals

Professionals involved in animal industries have the capacity to use Principled Reasoning and guide stakeholders to improve animal welfare. However, they often use Personal Interest and Maintaining Norms Reasoning, which limit or prevent improvements.

Veterinarians and veterinary associations, conscious of conflicts of interest in terms of their public role in helping individual animals whilst employed by industries whose use of animals is often harmful, have often avoided conflict rather than addressing the systemic harms caused by the industries. Although entering their training with a strong affiliation
to animals, as their course progresses veterinarians adopt less benign attitudes to animals, particularly towards livestock (Paul and Podberscek, 2000). This is probably because of the reliance of many veterinarians on servicing the livestock industries, and the influence of lecturers reliant on those industries for their research funding. Students with extensive experience of the livestock industries are less likely to make choices supporting the rights of animals to life and bodily integrity, whereas those with experience of horses and companion animals are more likely (Verrinder and Phillips, 2018). Similarly, veterinary students are more likely than students of the humanities to support euthanasia of healthy animals (Verrinder and Phillips, 2018).

Animal scientists are often expected to use animals for research. Regrettably, many animal welfare scientists are dependent on the very industries that they are investigating for research funding, which influences their assessment of the welfare status of animals within their care (Van der Schott and Phillips, 2013). Some animal welfare scientists have been criticised for the conclusions that they draw about animal welfare issues due to such vested interests (Phillips and Petherick, 2014).

Growth in animal welfare science research has focused on improving animal welfare within the intensive systems, rather than looking at the system itself as an animal welfare issue to be addressed. Buller and Roe (2018) identify animal welfare science as a “peculiar hybrid” of applied ethology, animal production science and preventative veterinary medicine (p. 4). They argue that, due to social interest in food animal welfare, animal welfare scientists have had to constantly reflect on the interrogation and criticism of what may be considered as socially, politically, and ethically acceptable ways in which to treat livestock animals (Buller and Roe, 2018, p. 21).

D. Government and policy makers

Policy makers in democratic governments attempt to include all key stakeholders in decision-making through consultation processes, inviting public submissions and setting up advisory committees to share stakeholder perspectives. Parliamentary committees then weigh stakeholders’ perspectives usually against the costs, in a cost–benefit assessment. Because no clear ethical criteria are used to compare stakeholder perspectives and design a course of action, the most powerful stakeholders are usually the most influential, i.e. governments support those industries which boost the economy in order to be re-elected.

Stakeholders whose interests are less powerful, such as non-human animals and their advocates, may be given token consideration. This leaves animals vulnerable to continued exploitation for economic gain. Unless there is a belief in, and a process to ensure, an ethical approach to animals’ inclusion as stakeholders using Principled Reasoning, the economic and political benefits of maintaining the cultural status quo in the short-term often triumph. Rarely can sufficient weight be brought to the table by those representing the least powerful stakeholders.

E. Animal advocates

Decisions by animal advocates are based on the interests of animals. Because animals are rarely given a fair opportunity to make choices about if and how they are used, animal advocates usually take a principled stance on their behalf, sometimes at the expense of their own employment opportunities and incomes. Because the imbalance of power is so great between stakeholders who are animal users and animals as stakeholders, animal advocates sometimes show less regard
Stakeholder groups and perspectives

for the interests of other stakeholders, and defy laws which enable animals’ interests to remain hidden or ignored, just as other social justice advocates have done to overcome racial and gender discrimination.

**F. People’s personal characteristics**

Within all the above human stakeholder groups, there are variations in perspectives based on gender, age, education, training, and cultural background.

**Gender**

In situations in which women have freedom of expression, they are more likely than men to say that they have positive attitudes towards animals. Women also report that they are more willing to buy welfare-friendly animal products (Erian and Phillips, 2017) and they have less support for contentious welfare practices, such as the live export of animals (Verrinder and Phillips, 2018), compared with men. This can perhaps be explained by women’s traditional role in caring for children being generalised to animals, but it may also be that women are more willing than men to admit that they have these positive attitudes towards animals (Verrinder and Phillips, 2018).

In situations in which women do not have freedom of expression, they are inclined to adopt a more masculine and less benign attitude towards animals (Phillips et al., 2010).

**Age, education, and training**

Consumers often do not have sufficient knowledge of animal production systems to determine whether they are acceptable or not (Erian and Phillips, 2017) and make decisions based on convenience to themselves. However, increased knowledge does not necessarily produce more ethical behaviour. Though understanding increases with age (Erian and Phillips, 2017), in the survey of Erian and Phillips (2017), more knowledgeable consumers reported that they ate more chicken compared with those with less knowledge, despite consumers generally wanting chickens to be treated humanely. This may be because people who are more knowledgeable about the production systems are also more aware of the reported health benefits of eating chicken, compared with red meats and less knowledgeable about non-animal alternatives. More knowledgeable people are also less inclined to provide veterinary care to their pets (Marinelli et al., 2007), perhaps because they have a weaker attachment to them, compared to less well-educated people (Johnson et al., 1992), but also probably because they have the knowledge to manage pets better themselves (Mariti et al., 2012). In support of the former explanation, better-educated people are less inclined to support animals’ rights to life and bodily integrity (Verrinder and Phillips, 2018). Training in moral reasoning is possible, but often does not relate well to the choices made in relation to animal issues, which may be based more on intuition, and therefore resistant to change (Verrinder and Phillips, 2018).

**Cultural differences**

There are regional differences in people’s attitudes towards animals that can largely be explained by their nationality (Phillips et al., 2012). Often these relate to socioeconomic factors. Thus, in the emerging economies of Asia, people are more likely to accept animal practices that would not be normally accepted in Europe (Phillips et al., 2012). Religion also plays an important role and needs to be considered when organising training for stakeholders.
To avoid the inequity and conflicts these differences in perspective within and between stakeholders bring to decision-making, stakeholders need knowledge of the philosophical and scientific foundations of ethics (i.e. what should be done) which justifies ethical sensitivity to all stakeholders’ interests, including all conscious beings, and an ethical decision-making process for achieving ethical outcomes.

**Philosophical and scientific arguments for valuing all stakeholders’ perspectives**

Philosophers for centuries have been theorising about the ethical basis for decision-making and action. Some of these theories were considered at odds with each other, rather than complementary. As described in Chapter 26, deontological ethics is based on each individual’s duty to act according to what can be logically reasoned and universalised. Utilitarianism is based on weighing up harms and benefits to find the greatest good. Virtue ethics focuses on character development. Care ethics focuses on fostering relationships. The first three of these theoretical frameworks suggest ethical decisions can be made individually. The fourth suggests building caring, compassionate relationships is key. However, the other three frameworks provide a basis for choosing between competing interests – fundamental universal principles and virtues are needed, and where conflicts arise, the weighing up of harms and benefits of different actions to minimise harm.

Thanks to the development of neuroscience, the mechanisms of ethics are now being identified and analysed in the common structures of the brains of conscious beings. Our brains and hormones react to situations that impact on our survival and well-being. Through imaging studies that associate responses to moral situations with corresponding areas of the brain, we can now analyse the complexities of moral sensitivity and decision-making.

The same neural circuit governing experience of our own pain also governs anticipation, perception, and imagination of another individual in pain (Decety et al., 2008). This neural network constitutes a physiological mechanism that mobilises the organism to react — with heightened arousal and attention — to threatening situations, providing a strong signal that can promote empathic concern.

Three facets of empathy have been identified from brain images (Decety and Cowell, 2015, p. 4.):

1. Affective sharing – the natural capacity to become emotionally aroused by others’ emotions;
2. Empathic concern – motivation to care for another’s welfare;
3. Perspective taking (or cognitive empathy) – the ability to consciously put oneself into the mind of another individual and imagine what they think or feel.

Each of these emotional, motivational, and cognitive facets of empathy emerges from specific neurobiological processes and reflects evolved functions that allow humans to thrive by detecting and responding to significant social events necessary for surviving, reproducing, and maintaining well-being. Understanding all three components is important as each has a different relationship to morality and is swayed by both social context and interpersonal relationships (Decety and Cowell, 2014, p. 534).
Ethics, therefore, is no longer only based on the musings of philosophers’ or individuals’ opinions of what is right or wrong. Science shows it is grounded in the evolution of sentient beings. Ethics is central to our physical and neurological makeup.

Two common aspects of sentient life create the need for ethical understanding and action:

1. Our inbuilt desire to survive, experience well-being, and avoid suffering;
2. Our interdependence, which has enabled us to respond to and care for others.

Why we must give consideration to animals’ interests

Historically, many philosophers have only included humans in their ethical deliberations, arguing this on the grounds that only humans had consciousness, emotions, feelings, and/or thought. However, in the last few decades, philosophical justification for recognizing animals’ sentience and overcoming speciesism has advanced (Gruen, 2021), along with scientific evidence justifying the inclusion of all sentient beings.

Before neuroimaging was possible, scientists observed the behaviour of other species. Darwin theorized that: “We are impelled to relieve the suffering of others in order to relieve our own painful feelings” and “those communities which included the greatest number of sympathetic members would flourish best; and rear the greatest number of offspring” (Darwin, 1871).

Frans De Waal, a primatologist, states that his research with non-human primates supports the view of Darwin and others that “morality is a direct outgrowth of the social instincts we share with other animals”, where “morality is neither unique to us nor a conscious decision taken at any specific point in time: it is the product of social evolution” (De Waal, 2006, p. 6). Animals have been identified as not only being in the sphere of moral concern, but part of the moral community, relying on cooperation and demonstrating a range of retributive emotions such as resentment and anger, along with pro-social emotions such as empathy, sympathy, and altruism.

Jaques Panksepp, a neuroscientist and psychobiologist who coined the term “affective neuroscience” to mean the study of the neural mechanisms of emotion, stated that:

- The human social brain, as well as all other mammalian brains, is fundamentally built upon ancient emotional and motivational value systems that generate affective states as indicators of potential fitness trajectories.
- Basic affective states – and the neural mechanisms to support them – are homologous in all mammals.

(Panksepp, 1998)

In 2012, a prominent international group of cognitive neuroscientists, neuropharmacologists, neurophysiologists, neuroanatomists, and computational neuroscientists reassessed the neurobiological substrates of conscious experience and related behaviours in human and non-human animals, and made a number of unequivocal observations. including:

- Artificial arousal of the same brain regions generates corresponding behavior and feeling states in both humans and non-human animals
- Neural circuits supporting behavioral/electrophysiological states of attentiveness, sleep and decision-making appear to have arisen in evolution as early as the invertebrate radiation, being evident in insects and cephalopod mollusks (e.g., octopus)
Birds appear to offer, in their behavior, neurophysiology, and neuroanatomy a striking case of parallel evolution of consciousness. Convergent evidence indicates that non-human animals have the neuroanatomical, neurochemical, and neurophysiological substrates of conscious states, along with the capacity to exhibit intentional behaviors. Consequently, the weight of evidence indicates that humans are not unique in possessing the neurological substrates that generate consciousness. Nonhuman animals, including all mammals and birds, and many other creatures, including octopuses, also possess these neurological substrates.

(Lowe, 2012)

Our treatment of animals needs to change to reflect this weight of scientific evidence. Deliberately causing physical or emotional harm to animals is no longer justifiable for human benefit, i.e. in uses of animals for food or entertainment, or in research, or management of animals. As well, animals’ interest in living can no longer be ignored, particularly where animals are killed (after short, restricted lives) for food or medical research. Currently, animals’ lives are only protected if beneficial to humans, e.g. as companions whose lives directly comfort their carers, and some native wild animals whose lives are protected by humans’ concern for sustainability of the environment or aesthetic pleasure. Even then, most people’s demand for their own space, resources, or entertainment is allowed to override these interests.

Albert Schweitzer, a German philosopher, musician, and medical doctor, argued that the basic principle of ethics is devotion to all life in the world resulting from “the reverence felt by my will-to-live for every other will-to-live” (Schweitzer, 1949, p. 325). Noel Preston, an Australian philosopher, argues that we have ethical obligations because our lives take place in a web of interdependent relationships understood in a biocentric (life-centred) rather than an anthropocentric (human-centred) way, i.e. “I am ultimately responsible to all living beings in the cosmos” (Preston, 2001). In his Ethic of Response, he synthesises the four main ethical frameworks, mentioned earlier, as complementary rather than competitive elements. To address the need for “appropriate values and principles” so that the ethic cannot be easily manipulated into relativism and subjectivism, Preston includes three values or principles which are widely endorsed by a range of ethical approaches:

a. The respect for life principle – this extends beyond human beings to other forms of life in our biosphere and, if relevant, the cosmos; such respect is especially considerate of the rights of sensate beings. This principle requires that conflicts involving choices about life (including the initiation and termination, or the environmental threat to earth’s balance of life) are treated with the maximum possible care.

b. The justice principle, i.e. being fair by giving priority to the interests of the most disadvantaged and also future generations.

c. The covenantal integrity principle. This involves truthfulness and honesty in all our relationships, the importance of self-consistency as moral agents, with promises and loyalty serving the purposes of respecting life and seeking justice.

(Preston, 2001, p. 75)

Both philosophy and science provide a unifying justification for being ethically sensitive to all stakeholders’ perspectives, including animals.
Developing ethical sensitivity to stakeholders’ perspectives

We define ethical sensitivity as: “the ability to interpret, through thoughts and feelings, the moral aspect of situations, including the impact of situations and actions and their possible consequences on the lives and well-being of sentient creatures”. Ethical sensitivity has been identified as one of the four main components of moral behaviour along with moral judgement, moral motivation, and moral character (Rest, 1994) and plays a role in the development of moral judgment (Jagger, 2011).

An important part of ethical sensitivity is recognition of emotions, and empathy, which includes emotional sharing. Until recently, empathy was not taken seriously, even regarding humans. Regarding animals, much resistance still exists (de Waal, 2009, p. 90) despite evolutionary evidence that sentient beings, at least all mammals, have the same basic set of emotions (Panksepp, 1998). Moral philosophy has traditionally distinguished cool reasoning, regarded as the source of practical rationality and moral knowledge, from emotions, regarded as an irrational, even distorting, influence on moral judgment (Demaree-Cotton and Kahane, 2019, p. 91). This ignores recent work in moral epistemology. “It has been argued, for example, that emotions are often needed to bring morally relevant features to our attention and may even be necessary for grasping their moral importance” (Demaree-Cotton and Kahane, 2019, p. 91). “Emotional” neural circuits seem to facilitate impartial, altruistic behaviour, with extraordinary altruists having enlarged right amygdala that are more active in response to other people’s emotions, which they are better at identifying (Marsh et al., 2014).

Individuals’ empathy is influenced by experience and learning in morality (Demaree-Cotton and Kahane, 2019, p. 95). Our innate mechanisms for empathy are moulded by the family, society, and culture in which we live and those social groups to which we aspire, leading to implicit bias. In general, males demonstrate empathy less than females (Chakrabarti and Baron-Cohen, 2006, pp 408–409), driven by hormone levels, particularly testosterone and oxytocin (Panksepp and Panksepp, 2013, p. 10).

Adopting the perspective of another, particularly someone from another social group, is cognitively demanding and hence requires additional attentional resources and working memory, and inhibitory control. (Decety and Cowell, 2015, p. 7). Because animals may suffer in a way that we have difficulty understanding, some stakeholders involved in cruel animal practices may have difficulty with empathy towards animals.

However, a structured approach to developing ethical sensitivity is possible. If social prejudice can be learned, then it should be possible to unlearn it, preferably by group activities that have a common goal, drawing upon the contributions of each person, and involving taking the perspective of others (Railton, 2017). Ten elements of ethical sensitivity have been identified:

1. Identification of physical responses of animals and people to the particular situation
2. Identification of emotional responses of animals and people
3. Recognition of own thoughts (perceptions, appraisal, interpretation) of the situation
4. Recognition of own feelings in relation to the observed responses of animals and people
5. Identification of why the issue is an ethical one
6. Recognition of all stakeholders’ perspectives including animals
7. Expression of empathy for others’ perspectives
8. Recognition of moral conflicts
9. Recognition of professional conflicts between legal, organisational and ethical responsibilities
10. Identification of alternative actions and their possible impacts on stakeholders.

(Verrinder et al., 2019, p. 304)

These elements can be developed with instruction and practice (Verrinder et al., 2019, p. 311).

Including stakeholders’ perspectives in decision-making

Despite the scientific evidence that ethics is grounded in our mutual desire for survival and well-being and our interdependence, the belief that ethics is based on opinion and that one person’s view is as equally justifiable as any others’ (ethical relativism) is widespread. Some veterinary ethics textbooks take a pluralist approach offering a range of prominent ethical views regarding how animals can be considered because “professionals must now accept that there are different ethical views, and that his or her own view is not the only one that a person can reasonably hold” (Sandoe and Christiansen, 2008, p. xiii). However, a pluralist approach provides little guidance for professionals or policy makers involved in animal industries who want to address concerns or improve animal welfare. Both ethical relativism and pluralism are confusing and damaging to the ethical decision-making process, as each stakeholder feels entitled to cling to their existing attitudes and behaviours.

Protecting and enhancing survival and well-being are the basis on which to make judgments about what is right or wrong. An ethical decision-making framework therefore must be focussed on enhancing well-being and preventing harm and ensuring all stakeholders’, including animals’, interests are considered fairly. Fairness goes hand in hand with communal survival (de Waal, 2009, p. 187). Many humans and other animals show “inequity aversion”, i.e. are sensitive to injustice and show scorn and anger if offered unfair proposals. The fairest offers occur in societies with the highest levels of cooperation; those in which every family takes care of itself are marked by unfair offers (de Waal, 2009, p. 186/187).

There are many decision-making models available, but few incorporate all the ethical frameworks and principles as complementary elements and provide a means for working towards the most ethical decision based on survival and well-being. Ethical decision-making differs from just using reasoning in decision-making. The most reasonable decision may not be ethical. It may be subject to bias and blind spots, especially when entirely severed from emotional input (Demaree-Cotton and Kahane, 2019, p. 91). Some decision-making models base selection of the best alternative on what most parties are satisfied with. This can lead to an unjust decision for the least powerful party, particularly non-human animals, e.g. animals’ interests in staying alive are more important than consumers’ interests in products not essential to life, and industries’ interests in maximising profit. Mepham’s Ethical Matrix used in bioethics issues allows ethical rating of a particular action choice but doesn’t compare all alternatives (Mepham et al., 2006).

Based on Preston’s Ethic of Response for ethical decision-making (Preston, 2001, pp. 69–88), a template has been developed (Verrinder, 2016) to provide a structure for stakeholders to work together to consider all possible alternative actions, from all stakeholder perspectives, using the main ethical frameworks and principles as sequential and complementary, rather than competitive, elements. See worked example in Appendix A and a blank template in Appendix B for practising this ethical decision-making process.
Stakeholder groups and perspectives

The use of this template in small groups facilitates sharing of thoughts, emotions, and intuitions, and a requirement to come to a the most fitting ethical decision and justify it to the whole group. University students provided with knowledge of moral development and moral principles and the opportunity to engage with others in small groups using this template showed improved moral judgment, which was not achieved by demonstrating use of the template without small group interaction (Verrinder and Phillips, 2015).

Enacting change

A detailed understanding of ethical sensitivity and ethical decision means nothing if not translated into action. Leadership is especially required from professionals who have both knowledge of animals’ sentence and involvement in how animals are cared for in animal use industries, i.e. veterinarians, animal scientists, and their professional associations. By working with stakeholders using ethical sensitivity and ethical decision-making, veterinary and animal science professionals could have a significant impact on eliminating endemic suffering and significantly reducing the numbers of animals killed.

For industry, “good strategy properly understood must encompass what are typically recognized as moral concerns, because the very purpose of the firm and the capitalist system within which it operates is, when viewed rightly, the creation of value for all stakeholders” (Noland and Phillips, 2010, p. 39). The stakeholder interpretation of the firm highlights the need for stakeholder groups to recognise their interdependence, to embrace it, and to work together to meet the changing needs and expectations of each group (Wicks et al., 1994, p. 486). “The strategic direction of the firm should always be thought of and developed in terms of ‘us’ – the interests, desires, and needs of all stakeholder groups rather than a firm charting its path as a lone act” (Wicks et al., 1994, p. 490).

Communicating with stakeholders with ethical sensitivity and use of an ethical decision-making framework provides a process for this change of perspective. For consumers, this will mean more honesty and an opportunity to make more ethical choices. For animal advocates, this will create a greater opportunity for animals’ interests to be met. For governments, legislation development should be easier as it enables governments to resist the demands of the most powerful and develop more ethical policies and actions.

Appendix A – Ethical decision-making using Preston’s ETHIC OF RESPONSE TEMPLATE – JVerrinder©

Worked example: Request to Euthanise a Healthy Dog
A woman brings her lively, five-year-old kelpie/cattle cross dog in to see a veterinarian, Dr Benjamin, for euthanasia. She says she is moving into an apartment with her boyfriend who doesn’t like the dog, and pets aren’t allowed in the apartment building. Besides this, the dog is too active for her and is barking all the time. The veterinarian asks if she has tried to put the dog up for adoption, but she replies that the local pound already has too many working dogs and they would probably euthanise it anyway. She simply wants the dog humanely destroyed and, if the veterinarian doesn’t euthanise it, her boyfriend will shoot it. Dr Benjamin wonders what to do.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAKEHOLDERS</th>
<th>Action: euthanise the dog</th>
<th>Action: veterinarian refuses to euthanise and owner goes elsewhere</th>
<th>Action: veterinarian persuades owner to surrender dog to be rehomed by shelter, rescue group, or vet clinic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Respect life (desire to survive) ✓=Benefits, X=Harms</td>
<td>Respect well-being (capacity to enjoy life, fulfil goals and capabilities) ✓=Benefits, X=Harms</td>
<td>Respect life ✓=Benefits, ✓=Benefits, X=Harms Respect well-being ✓=Benefits, X=Harms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>X loses life</td>
<td>X missed chance to fulfil capacities</td>
<td>X may still lose life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>✓ lives with boyfriend</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boyfriend</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>✓ no annoying dog</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterinarian</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>X upset, loss of integrity</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterinary practice</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>X not meeting Vet Code of Ethics: “Health, welfare &amp; respectful treatment of animal”</td>
<td>✓ not directly affecting the welfare of the dog</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DEONTOLOGICAL ETHICS (1–5)**

1. Duty to respect life and well-being
2. Greatest benefit for all affected
3. Justice as fairness
4. Greatest benefit to the least advantaged
5. Virtue ethics/integrity

**UTILITARIAN ETHICS (1–5)**

1. Greatest benefit for all affected

**JUSTICE AS FAIRNESS (1–5)**

1. Greatest benefit to the least advantaged

**VIRTUE ETHICS/INTEGRITY (1–5)**

1. Most virtuous, consistent
Sample justification for decision

- The most fitting ethical decision for the request to euthanise a healthy dog is to persuade the owner to surrender the dog to the vet for rehoming.
- This decision shows respect for all stakeholders’ desire for life and well-being (deontological ethics requires a duty to universal reciprocity). It satisfies utilitarian ethics by producing the greatest good and the least harm to all stakeholders. It satisfies justice as fairness, giving most support to the least advantaged – in this case the young healthy dog who has the capacity to live a happy life and therefore the most to lose. In comparison, the effort involved in working with others to find a suitable home for the dog is a small cost. It also satisfies virtue ethics as the vet can show courage and compassion and maintain her integrity, showing consistency with the other two fundamental universal ethical principles which reflect the biological structures of sentient beings.

For assistance with using this ethical decision-making template, contact jverrinder@awlqld.com.au
Appendix B – Preston’s ETHIC OF RESPONSE – J Verrinder ©TEMPLATE V4 Ethical Issue:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAKEHOLDERS</th>
<th>Action:</th>
<th>Action:</th>
<th>Action:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Respect life (desire to survive)</td>
<td>Respect well-being (capacity to enjoy life, fulfil goals and capabilities)</td>
<td>Respect life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>✓=Benefits, X=Harms</td>
<td>✓=Benefits, X=Harms</td>
<td>✓=Benefits, X=Harms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. DEONTOLOGICAL ETHICS
Rate Actions 1–5
(1 = Respect for the will to survive and thrive; 5 = Suffering and/or lack of thriving and/or death)

2. UTILITARIAN ETHICS
Rate Actions 1–5 (1 = Greatest benefit for all affected; 5 = Least benefit for all affected)

3. JUSTICE AS FAIRNESS
Rate Actions 1–5
(1 = Greatest benefit to the most disadvantaged; 5 = Least benefit to the most disadvantaged)

4. VIRTUE ETHICS/INTEGRITY
Rate Actions 1–5
(1 = Most virtuous, consistent with ethical principles; 5 = Least virtuous, least consistent)
References


