

interest from the media, points on keeping full and accurate records, relevant legislation, and a list of helpful websites and telephone numbers for both veterinarians and their clients.

The 'toolkit' is aimed at New Zealand veterinarians and some of the information given is specific to New Zealand, eg legislation, however, much of the advice is general and may be a useful starting point for veterinarians in other countries when considering how best to deal with similar situations both on-farm, and in other areas of practice, eg companion animals.

**The Veterinarians Animal Welfare Toolkit** (August 2011). A4, 41 pages. New Zealand Veterinary Association & Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. Leaflet. ISBN 978-0-478-38455-0 (Print) ISBN 978-0-478-38456-7 (Online). Available online at: <http://www.nzva.org.nz/sites/default/files/domain-0/2011%20Vet%20toolkit.pdf>.

*E Carter*  
*UFAW*

### **CAWC report on the rescue and re-homing of companion animals**

Since 1999, the Companion Animal Welfare Council (CAWC) has undertaken independent studies and offered advice on a wide range of companion animal welfare issues. The most recent addition to their publications is a report on the rescue and re-homing of companion animals.

It is estimated that there are approximately 500,000 surplus companion animals each year in the United Kingdom and the task of re-homing unwanted pets is undertaken by many organisations, ranging from large, well-known charities, such as Dogs Trust and the Blue Cross, to small breed societies and species-specific groups, eg The National Ferret Welfare Society. The CAWC report describes how over the last few years many re-homing organisations have experienced an increase in the number of pets relinquished into their care: Cats Protection noted a 77% increase during the first quarter of 2008 when compared to the same time period in 2007, and the RSPCA took care of 57% more pets in 2008 (11,586 animals) than in 2007 (7,347 animals).

To assess whether the welfare needs of relinquished companion animals are met, CAWC reviewed the current guidelines and protocols of a range of re-homing organisations concerned with cats, dogs, rabbits and ferrets. The re-homing process was categorised into six stages: 1) Assessment and selection of suitable animals for re-homing; 2) Preparation of the animals for life in their new homes; 3) Assessment of prospective new homes and owners; 4) Advice given to prospective owners; 5) Knowledge and communication skills of the staff in the re-homing organisation; and 6) Follow-up procedures after re-homing. The report makes six recommendations covering each of the six re-homing stages.

A core point in the report is the importance of correctly assessing the behaviour of animals that have entered the re-homing process and on implementing appropriate rehabilitation and training programmes where necessary. Behavioural problems are one of the main reasons given by previous owners when relinquishing their pets and also by new owners for returning an animal that they have re-homed. The behavioural assessment process of abandoned animals is one that seems to be carried out with varying degrees of success and CAWC notes that where temperament testing is employed on relinquished dogs that: "It is not always clear whether these provide valid indicators of temperament. Nor is it clear whether they are performed by qualified experts, or enthusiasts with varying degrees of expertise or experience". In relation to dog aggression, the report states: "...understanding about aggression in animals in general, and dogs in particular, are rife with ignorance, misguided theories, and lack of diagnostic skills and development of appropriate remedial action". It is considered by CAWC that there is an "urgent need for informed discussion about aggression... and about the qualifications required for behavioural assessors and advisors about standardisations, validity and value assessments in rescue, and about solutions to the problems raised by aggressive animals".

Other interesting points made by CAWC include the importance of achieving the right balance between confidentiality for previous owners and provision of sufficient information about an animal's history and breeding for rescue staff and prospective owners to fully understand and cater for an individual animal's needs. It is also advised that where guidelines are used for judging the suitability of prospective owners that these are not adhered to in an overly rigid way and that the individual nature of people is recognised: "An overly robust initial screening process for prospective owners can actually eliminate potentially good owners".

The ethical issues surrounding euthanasia and 'no-kill' policies are also discussed and the report recommends that where euthanasia is decided upon as a policy that the decision should be taken by an executive authority, after consideration and discussion, and not by an individual.

The CAWC report gives a good overview of the scale of unwanted animals in the United Kingdom, and the difficulties faced by re-homing organisations, whilst also suggesting a number of positive approaches to improving the future prospects of rescue animals. All those involved in seeking new and lasting homes for unwanted pets will find this report an informative and interesting read.

**Rescue and Re-homing of Companion Animals** (June 2011). A4, 29 pages. Companion Animal Welfare Council. Available online at: <http://www.cawc.org.uk/reports-completed>.

*E Carter*  
*UFAW*