



MEDIA RELEASE

AUSTRALIAN ANIMAL STUDIES GROUP (AASG)

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Australian Academics, Activists and Artists Join Forces: Breaking New Ground in Animal Studies

A landmark initiative to develop a knowledge nexus and redefine the boundaries of animal studies in this country will be released (this week, tomorrow).

A national collective of academics, community activists and artists interested in the study of human-animal relations and the protection of animals have developed a cutting edge website. The site has been supported by a grant from Voiceless, a prominent animal protection NGO based in Sydney.

“The website is an Australian first - a meeting point for all, providing information about animal studies scholarship and networks. It will provide a forum for identifying themes of discussion and for the development of animal studies in teaching and research practice. The Australian Animals Studies Group (AASG), together with the projects and programs that it promotes, reflect a growing awareness in the wider community about the benefits of human-animal relations education and research,” said Dr Natalie Edwards, Co-Founder & Convener of the AASG.

According to University of Tasmania academic Dr Carol Freeman, editor of the AASG News Bulletin, the site offers a range of information on research fellowships, grants and sponsorships open to Australian animal studies scholars and students. Australian university units and courses offering human-animal relations content are also listed, together with local and international conferences, art exhibitions, and new books in this growing field.

A recent stock-take of courses featuring human-animal relations reveals the field is a growing area with new legal studies, cultural studies, animal welfare and conservation courses now offered in Victoria, NSW, WA, SA and Qld universities. Since the late 1990s, courses in human-animal studies (including in history, geography, science, and policy) have increasingly been offered in the US and the UK, indicating the field is at the leading edge of a boom.

To date, AASG has hosted three trans-disciplinary conferences and circulates their quarterly bulletin to 400 readers in Australia and overseas. The website will detail an expanding

research network of some 80 academics and other animal-focussed professionals. “The 4th AASG national conference, called ‘Animals, People – a shared environment’, will be hosted by Griffith University in July 2011” said conference convenor Dr Leah Burns. A pre-conference symposium, ‘Global Animal’, is to be run the week prior, hosted by Wollongong University and coordinated by Dr Melissa Boyde.

The AASG committee is comprised of academics, activists and artists from five states across Australia. “We have worked since 2004 to establish a clear meeting point for those interested in the study of human-animal relations. Over these years, the support of committed animal protection NGOs such as Voiceless has been invaluable. The website will add further momentum to this growing field and facilitate a new wave in Australian animal studies,” said Dr Edwards.

[End release]