

# Animal Welfare (Keeping and Breeding of Rats and Mice in the ACT) Mandatory Code of Practice 2024

## Disallowable instrument DI2024-232

made under the

### Animal Welfare Act 1992, Section 23 (Mandatory code of practice)

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#### **1 Name of instrument**

This instrument is the *Animal Welfare (Keeping and Breeding of Rats and Mice in the ACT) Mandatory Code of Practice 2024*.

#### **2 Commencement**

This instrument commences on the day after it is notified.

#### **3 Application**

This Mandatory Code of Practice applies to those people who own, keep, care for breed rats and mice in the ACT.

#### **4 Approval**

I approve the Code of Practice for the Keeping and Breeding of Rats and Mice in the ACT, attached to this instrument, as a mandatory code of practice under the *Animal Welfare Act 1992*.

I am satisfied that adequate consultation has occurred in developing this Code of Practice.

Tara Cheyne MLA  
Minister for City Services

9 July 2024

# Code of Practice for the Keeping and Breeding of Rats and Mice in the ACT

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# Introduction

## Purpose

This Code of Practice for the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) has been prepared with guidance from the ACT Animal Welfare Advisory Committee. Its purpose is to provide information and describe minimum standards of care to achieve acceptable animal welfare outcomes for rodents (being rats and mice).

Sections 109(3)(a), (b) and (c) of the *Animal Welfare Act 1992* provide that the Animal Welfare Advisory Committee has the functions of advising the Minister and participating in the development of approved codes of practice and mandatory codes of practice. Section 22 of the *Animal Welfare Act 1992* authorises the Minister to approve a code of practice related to animal welfare and section 23 of the *Animal Welfare Act 1992* authorises the Minister to approve a code of practice that is mandatory in whole or in part.

This Code is a mandatory code of practice approved under section 23 of the *Animal Welfare Act 1992*.

This Code of Practice includes mandatory standards as well as guidelines that are considered essential for meeting the requirements specified under the *Animal Welfare Act 1992*.

## Who is the Code intended for?

This Code is limited in its application to people who own, keep, care for rats and mice in the ACT. Although the basic principles of good animal welfare as outlined in this Code are universally relevant, this Code does not apply to animals other than rats and mice.

The overall objective of this Code is that rodents kept in the ACT are provided with care that maximises their long-term health and well-being; and are protected from pain, distress, danger, illness and injury.

## Welfare Framework

The *Animal Welfare Act 1992* states the main objects of the Act are to recognise:

- a) animals are sentient beings able to subjectively feel and perceive the world around them; and
- b) animals have intrinsic value, and deserve to be treated with compassion, and have a quality of life that reflects their intrinsic value; and
- c) people have a duty to care for the physical and mental welfare of animals.

This Code of Practice sets out guidelines for best practices as well as mandatory minimum standards of care for animals in line with the Objects of the Act.

There are five Domains to which every animal is entitled namely:

1. **Nutrition** — factors that involve the animal's access to sufficient, balanced, varied, and clean food and water.

2. **Environment** — factors that enable comfort through temperature, substrate, space, air, odour, noise, and predictability,
3. **Health** — factors that enable good health through the absence of disease, injury, impairment with a good fitness level.
4. **Behaviour** — factors that provide varied, novel, and engaging environmental challenges through sensory inputs, exploration, foraging, bonding, playing, retreating, and others.
5. **Mental state** — the fifth domain represents the combined effect of the other four domains on the animal's mental state. The aim is for the mental state of the animal to benefit from predominantly positive states, such as pleasure, comfort, or vitality, while reducing negative states such as fear, frustration, hunger, pain, or boredom.

The five Domains for Animal Welfare are welfare principles that provide a model that is applicable across species and situations including the Code of Practice for the Keeping and Breeding of Rats and Mice in the ACT.

### **Overall welfare objectives**

Since humans can alter and control an animal's environment, animal welfare includes the concept that people have duties and responsibilities towards animals. The greater the level of interference or control of an animal's environment, the greater our responsibility. This Code of Practice aims to give effect to the contemporary understanding of animal welfare including the recognition of sentience and the concept that animals have a right to both mental and physical wellbeing.

Animal welfare considerations are essential in the keeping of animals. This Code is based on established experience and current scientific knowledge and is open to future review as appropriate. Animal welfare in a modern context describes how well an animal is, both mentally and physically. Achieving good animal welfare relies on recognising the five domains of welfare for animals.

### **Compliance with the Code**

The Code of Practice is made under section 23 of the *Animal Welfare Act 1992*, which allows the Minister to approve a Code of Practice, part or all of which has mandatory force.

Failing to comply with the mandatory standards in this Code of Practice is an offence. It is also an offence to fail to follow a direction to comply with this Code of Practice. The following sections of the *Animal Welfare Act 1992* outline these offences and their penalties:

- Section 24A (Reckless failure to comply with a code of practice);
- Section 24B (Failure to comply with mandatory code); and
- Section 24D (Failure to comply with direction to comply with mandatory code).

Sections 24A and 24B of the *Animal Welfare Act 1992* provide that it is an offence to fail to comply with a mandatory code of practice. Compliance with this Code is compulsory for all owners and careers of rodents in the ACT. For penalty units see *Legislation Act 2001*, section 133.

## Structure of the Code

This Code of Practice includes **mandatory standards** that must be met.

### ***Mandatory standards***

In this Code of Practice there are minimum standards that must be met for the appropriate care and welfare of rats and mice. These standards appear under the heading *Mandatory standards* and include the word “must”. They are outlined in a rectangular box.

Mandatory standards must be complied with, and non-compliance can constitute an offence under the *Animal Welfare Act 1992*.

### ***Guidelines***

In this Code of Practice, Guidelines are recommended practices to achieve desirable animal welfare outcomes. The guidelines complement the mandatory standards and should be used as guidance for all owners. Guidelines use the word ‘should’. Non-compliance with one or more guidelines will not in itself constitute an offence under law but may be used to help inform decision-makers of what is considered appropriate care in the event of prosecution.

## Relation to other Codes

Several Codes of Practice for animal welfare have been published over time by the ACT Government. Taken together, the Codes create a matrix of animal welfare provisions that provide guidance on most of the important animal welfare issues in the ACT. The Codes are subject to reviews and updates and additional codes may be developed as industries, technologies, attitudes and best practice animal welfare evolves.

Under the *Nature Conservation Act 2014* you are required by law to be the holder of a licence to import, keep, sell or export rodents, and you must apply for a licence before obtaining a Licence under Chapter 11 of the *Nature Conservation Act 2014* can be submitted online and are valid for three (3) years.

The *Code of Practice for the Sale of Animals in the ACT other than Stock and Commercial Scale Poultry* (2021) requires that a person rehoming an animal, whether by sale or otherwise, must provide the new owner with relevant information on the care of the animal rehomed.

## General guidelines

Rats and mice are considered prey animals and as such will often hide signs of injury or illness so as not to appear weak. Thorough daily checks of an animal’s wellbeing and becoming familiar with their normal behaviour is critical in identifying any issues early as changes are often hidden and therefore are subtle.

In the case of a rodent for whom a new home has been found that information should cover diet, accurate sex of the rodent, when to desex and vaccinate, worming, grooming, housing, identification and general health care. Providing this code to the new carer is advisable.

## Definitions for this Code

In this Code:

**Animal** – has the same meaning as in the *Animal Welfare Act 1992* and *Domestic Animals Act 2000*.

**Carer** – a carer can be, for example, a dog owner, commercial dog walker, or person who has the dog in their current control.

**Death** – evidence of proof of death **must** be confirmed before disposal of any animal remains. In confirming death, a combination of criteria should be used including absence of heartbeat (determined by lack of pulse or audible heartbeat by use of a stethoscope), absence of breathing, absence of corneal reflex, absence of withdrawal reflexes; greying of the mucous membranes; and rigor mortis.

**Euthanasia** – humanely killing an animal to prevent or bring to an end to suffering of any kind.

**Financial gain** – means any monetary or material gain that significantly exceeds the recovery costs reasonably incurred in caring for an animal up to the time of sale.

**Humane killing** – when an animal is either killed instantly or rendered insensible until death, ensuring that pain, suffering, or distress is minimised.

**Owner** – an owner of a dog can be a keeper, carer, handler, breeder, or purchaser. Each comes with their own responsibilities.

**Rehoming** – means any process of finding a new permanent home for an animal other than for financial gain.

**Responsible ownership** – an owner or carer is responsible for every stage and for all aspects of a dog's life, from birth to death.

**Regularly** – at appropriate intervals to achieve the expected or desired outcome

**Adequate Water** – means water that—

- (a) is at a temperature and of a quality that the animal will drink; and
- (b) is of sufficient quantity and quality to meet the physiological needs of the animal; and
- (c) is not harmful to the animal.

**Rodent** – Referring to a rat or mouse.

## 1. Responsibilities

### ***Mandatory standards***

- S1.1 A person must take reasonable actions to safeguard the welfare of Rodents under their care, to ensure the animals have good mental and physical wellbeing.
- S1.2 A person must take appropriate actions to minimise fear and distress in Rodents under their care and address any risks to their welfare.

### **Guidelines**

- G1.1 It is important that anyone keeping rodents as pets can identify the signs of fear and distress. Acute signs may include freezing, distress vocalisation, rapid shallow breathing, trembling, biting, and scratching. Longer term, fear and distress may manifest into health issues such as weight loss, dehydration, failure to nest, overgrooming, failure to groom, increased aggression towards humans and fighting with other animals in their environment.

In the case of a rodent for whom a new home has been found that information should cover diet, accurate sex of the rodent, housing, identification and general health care. Providing this Code to the new carer is advisable.



## 2. Environment and housing

### ***Mandatory standards***

- S2.1 All rats and mice must be provided with a living environment that minimises stress and provides the following:
- a) Adequate space to play, hide, move freely, jump, stretch out and stand fully upright on hind limbs;
  - b) A variety of places to explore and rest;
  - c) Mental stimulation through the provision of enrichment such as a varied diet, gnaw blocks, toys and play with a keeper or carer;
  - d) Companionship, this is ideally provided by a compatible animal of the same species (mouse or rat) and the same sex but where this isn't possible can be provided by regular positive contact with humans. Note, male mice must only be kept together if they are from the same litter and have been together since birth; and
  - e) Safety from predators; this includes not living in close proximity to predators such as dogs and cats.
- S2.2 Rodents must not be housed in cages with wire floors as these can create serious foot and leg injuries.

### ***Guidelines***

- G2.1 In addition to providing for the rodent's needs, a keeper or carer has a responsibility to:
- a) Protect them from direct risk of harm, such as being attacked by other animals or humans;
  - b) Minimise the impact of the rodent on wildlife and the environment through de-sexing and the implementation of appropriate control and/or containment; and
  - c) Provide them with housing that allows them to be protected from heat or cold, and provides appropriate shade, shelter and protection from weather conditions; and
  - d) Provide them with secure housing that prevents the animals from escaping and predators from entering; and
  - e) Provide the animal with adequate and appropriate food and water to maintain the animal's good health and comfort; and
  - f) Provide a level of hygiene that supports good health and prevents illness and disease.
- G2.2 Siblings from the same litter can be housed together for up to 4 weeks, at this point males and females would need to be separated or desexed to prevent breeding and fighting.

- G2.3 Rats and mice are social animals, and their wellbeing is greatly increased if they can be housed with other compatible rats and mice, of the same sex and for males, from the same litter. Combining adults who have not been raised together can create stress, fighting and result in severe injury or death. Males not raised together from weaning are highly likely to fight and cause serious injuries. Sufficient hiding places within enclosures are important at mice can be shy, hiding places provide safety and comfort.
- G2.4 Unrelated female rodents or desexed rodents could be housed together but should be monitored closely to ensure they are not fighting or dominating feeding, hiding and sleeping spaces.
- G2.5 Rodents should be housed in outdoor hutches or enclosures or live indoors in an enclosure or cage specifically designed for rats or mice where they can be trained to use a litter tray. Litter trays should be lined with wood or paper-based litter or hay or straw; other types can be harmful if ingested by rodents.
- G2.6 Vertical space in rodent caging is important as rats and mice like to climb and explore and they increase the overall living area i.e. tunnels, bridges, hanging chains, lofts and elevated platforms.
- G2.7 Caging should consist of a hard wearing plastic base (for warmth and to contain substrate) and a smooth wired top that prevents escape.
- G2.8 Enclosure or cage bases should be lined with absorbent and low dust substrate (minimum 3-4cm layer) such as wood, dried corn cob (specifically designed for bedding material) or compressed paper-based litter. Rats can also be housed on soft hay.
- G2.9 Low dust nesting material should be provided in the form of commercially available compressed nestlets, paper twists or larger timber shavings. Nesting material is a biologically relevant form of enrichment for rodents and is important to ensure they can thermoregulate.
- G2.10 Rodents can suffer from heat stress although at higher temperatures than other species; enclosures should not be positioned in direct sunlight and should allow for good air circulation.
- G2.11 Inclusions inside the cage should be rotated regularly and moved around within the cage to encourage rodents to exercise and explore and to provide stimulation and enrichment.
- G2.12 Rodents are nocturnal animals and need a period of darkness for their wellbeing. This should be taken into consideration when determining an appropriate location for rodent cages. Artificial light that continues into the night can disturb rodents and cause excessive stress.

G2.13 Rodents are sensitive to vibration and high-pitched sounds that may not be audible to humans. This should be taken into consideration when determining an appropriate location for rat and mouse cages.

### 3. Handling

#### ***Mandatory standards***

- S3.1 Children must be closely supervised around rodents to ensure the safety of the child and the animal.
- S3.2 Rodents must never be picked up or handled in such a way as to cause them fear, pain, distress or injury\*.
- S3.3 Rodents must never be tethered. This means not securing an animal to an object or running line by means of a leash, chain, rope or other material. An animal fighting against a fixed tether can cause serious injuries that can result in death.
- S3.4 Collars must never be placed on rats or mice.
- S3.5 Aversive training techniques and devices that cause pain must not be used on rodents for any reason.

#### ***\*How to handle a mouse:***

- a) Placing one hand under the belly and gently scooping the mouse while placing a palm loosely over the top of the mouse, once lifted take care to keep the mouse close to the handler's body; and
- b) Using a tunnel or similar to encourage the mouse to sit inside and raise the tunnel and tilt for the mouse to exit onto a cupped hand.

#### ***How to handle a rat:***

- a) Placing one hand around the belly and gently scooping the rat while placing a palm loosely over the top of the rat, once lifted take care to keep the rat close to the handler's body; and
- b) Placing two hands and scoop underneath the rat to lift the rat and minimising any movements over the top of the rat which may be stressful.

#### ***Guidelines***

- G3.1 Rodents should be introduced gradually to accessories such as harnesses, transport cages or exercise balls or harnesses for rats. They should also be socialised with other rodents of the same litter (see environment and housing) and humans when it is safe to do so.
- G3.2 The use of positive reinforcement with treats or other positive reward system can help acclimatise rodents to new items in their environment and new experiences. Rats in particular can be trained with positive reinforcement to naturally want to seek out contact and handling from their keeper.
- G3.3 Rodents should only be taken outdoors in an enclosure that keeps them safe from predators, the elements and prevents escape. Rodents are nocturnal and may become distressed if taken outside during the day.

## 4. Hygiene

Hygiene is important for the health of your rodent and you as the keeper/carer. Rodents can harbour disease that can be passed onto humans and other animals, so it is important to maintain high levels of hygiene to minimise the risk of disease.

### ***Mandatory standards***

- S4.1 A person responsible for a rodent must maintain a hygienic environment for the rodent by:
- a) Regularly washing the rodent's food and water bowls; and
  - b) Preventing a build-up of faeces and wet substrate or nesting material in the cage; and
  - c) Regularly cleaning the rodent's cage, including furnishings and accessories.

### ***Guidelines***

- G4.1 Water bowls should be washed daily, suspended sipper bottles at least twice weekly.
- G4.2 Suspended food hoppers for dry pellets should be cleaned at least weekly and bowls every second day.
- G4.3 Uneaten fresh produce should be removed within 24 hours of feeding.
- G4.4 Enclosures should be cleaned and disinfected weekly.
- G4.5 Cleaning and disinfecting agents should be chosen on the basis of their suitability, safety and effectiveness. Bleach or chlorine-based disinfectants are effective against common rodent pathogens. Manufacturers' instructions for the use of cleaning and disinfecting agents should be followed, an overly dilute solution may be ineffective and too concentrated a solution may be toxic to animals. All disinfectants should be thoroughly rinsed away with water following application.
- G4.6 Faeces should be removed daily from litter trays and from the enclosure in general where needed.
- G4.7 If substrate or nesting material becomes wet i.e. from a leaky water container, it must be replaced quickly to minimise the risk of the rodents suffering from hypothermia and mould growing in the cage.
- G4.7 Litter trays should be easy to enter and exit, large enough for the rodent to turn around, and contain at least 5 centimetres of litter.
- G4.8 Litter trays should be kept separate from food and sleeping areas and should be cleaned using separate cleaning equipment.

- G4.9 Litter should be completely changed every two (2) days or every day if used by several rodents. Litter trays should be washed, and scalded with hot water every time the litter is changed and cleaned separately from food and water and food containers.
- G4.9 Substrate should be completely changed at least weekly, ideally at the time the cage has been washed. If there are multiple animals housed in the same cage, then more regular replacement will be required. Higher quality substrate allows animals to turn over the litter so that the top remains dry, and the soiled moist bedding is underneath.
- G4.10 Nesting material should also be discarded and replaced once per week.

## 5. Nutrition

### **Mandatory standards**

- S5.1 Adequate water must always be available; water must be checked daily and topped up as necessary. Adult rats require up to 50ml of water daily, or more if the diet is dry. Adult mice require up to 5ml per day each.
- S5.2 Rodents must have access to a palatable diet that provides the nutritional requirements appropriate for their age and breeding stage.

### **Guidelines**

- G5.1 Rodents are omnivores and require a nutritionally complete and varied diet containing plant and meat-based components. Suitable pelleted diets for rodents available from pet shops and supermarkets. New foods should be introduced gradually.
- G5.2 If a hard pelleted diet is not provided, appropriate and safe timber chew blocks must be provided to allow rodents to gnaw. Rodents naturally need to gnaw to keep their teeth healthy and without it, the teeth continually grown, once overgrown rodents can no longer eat properly, causing weight loss and eventual starvation if not rectified.
- G5.3 An average adult mouse require 5-10g of appropriate quality food per day, adult rats require 15-20g of appropriate quality food per day. A complete pelleted diet assists in ensuring rodents receive their nutritional requirements in the small quantity required.
- G5.4 Feed containers should be tended daily to remove pellet dust and to ensure pellets are accessible. The container should be positioned to allow the smallest mouse or rat to comfortably feed.

*Note: To prevent spoilage and contamination by vermin, dry feed should be stored in a sturdy sealed container in a cool location out of direct sunlight.*

- G5.5 Rodents perform coprophagy (eating of their own faeces) as a means of obtaining further nutrients; this is an essential function that rodents should be allowed to perform for good health.
- G5.6 Quality of food is especially important for rodents when pregnant or lactating; the amount and nutritional quality of food provided may need to be increased.
- G5.7 Where dependent young are present food will need to be increased to account for the young moving to solid food. Food should be placed low down so young rodents can reach it.
- G5.8 A rodent's diet may be supplemented with fresh vegetables; any uneaten fresh food should be removed within 24 hours to reduce contaminating the enclosure.

*Note: Some vegetables are not suitable for rodents. You should investigate appropriate options prior to feeding vegetables.*

- G5.9 Diets containing seed can contribute to obesity and poor health and seeds should only be provided as a treat. They should not be fed birdseed.
- G5.10 Fresh produce can be associated with parasitic and bacterial infections and should be washed prior to feeding.
- G5.11 Food can be made available at all times for rodents; however they prefer to eat the majority of their food at night. If food is not made available at all times, then ideally it should be provided in the early evening when rodents will naturally become active and ready to forage.
- G5.12 The amount of food a rodent consumes should be monitored to ensure the rodent is neither overeating or under eating. This is important if more than one rodent is being fed in the same area. Lack of food can result in fighting and cannibalism.
- G5.13 Where multiple rodents, sufficient space is required to allow individuals to feed and drink comfortably.
- G5.14 Water should be provided in a container that cannot be easily soiled or tipped over, such as a suspended water bottle with a sipper tip.

*Note: Not all rodents have learnt how to drink from sipper bottles; other watering containers should be used in conjunction with sipper bottles until there is certainty that sippers are being used. Sippers also need to be checked daily to ensure they are functioning. Open bowls should be shallow enough with an exit point for rodents to escape if they fall in.*

- G5.15 Water should be replaced daily; it should be kept clean and out of direct sunlight and should be thawed or replaced if frozen or contaminated.



## 6. Health

### ***Mandatory standards***

- S6.1 Rodents must be checked daily. When a rodent's keeper or carer is away from home for longer than 24 hours, alternative arrangements must be in place to ensure the rodent's needs are met on a daily basis. Examples of such arrangements include:
- a) boarding with a competent third party; or
  - b) providing a live-in carer for the rodent; or
  - c) having a person provide care for the rodent the usual carer's home on a daily basis.
- S6.2 A person responsible for a rodent must provide ongoing health care to maintain the good health of the rodent.
- S6.3 Overgrown or broken teeth must be treated by a veterinarian as they may impact upon the rodent's ability to feed properly and can cause serious pain.

### ***Guidelines***

- G6.1 Disease prevention should be discussed with a veterinarian as rodents can suffer from internal and external parasites.
- G6.2 Healthy, short-haired rodents do not require grooming given this is an important behaviour of the rodent. However, some fancy breeds with longer hair are likely to require regular grooming. Lack of grooming or overgrooming may be a sign of moderate arousal or high stress states.
- Note: Overweight or geriatric rodents are less likely to self-groom and may require regular gentle grooming with a small soft brush i.e. a toothbrush.*
- G6.3 As rodents age their likelihood of developing tumours increases. These tumours can be fast growing and any lumps appearing on a rodent should be investigated quickly by a veterinarian for early intervention and to minimise suffering.
- G6.4 A rodent's teeth should be checked monthly to ensure they are wearing correctly.
- S6.5 Desexing of rats, particularly females, is strongly recommended to reduce the risk of reproductive based diseases and hormonal aggression. Mice can be desexed but this is usually performed only when required for an individual animal's health or wellbeing.

## 7. Behavioural and social interactions

### ***Mandatory standards***

S7.1 Rats and mice are social species and must have companionship..

### ***Guidelines***

- G7.1 Compatible companions should be of the same species wherever possible. Where this isn't possible, companionship can be provided by regular positive contact with humans.
- G7.2 Rodents should receive sufficient time with people. Such contact should take into consideration the psychological needs of the species and the individual animal's behavioural preferences and may include talking, stroking, grooming, and playing in addition to the time spent providing food and water.
- G7.3 Rodents should equally have time to rest and the opportunity to hide from contact with other animals and people should they choose to do so.

## 8. Identification, lost and unwanted rodents

*Note: It is unusual to microchip a mouse due to the size of the microchip however it is possible for rats, usually under anaesthesia by a veterinarian.*

### **Mandatory standards**

S8.1 A rodent must not be abandoned or released into the environment. Where a keeper is no longer able to provide care for a rodent, every effort should be made to suitably re-home the rodent or surrender the rodent into the care of a shelter or reputable rescue or rehoming organisation.

*Note: It is an offence under the Nature Conservation Act 2014 (s138) to release any captive animal without a permit.*

### **Guidelines**

G8.1 Keepers who lose a small mammal should act promptly to attempt to locate their lost pet for the animal's safety and to minimise the time the animal may be in distress.

G8.2 Keepers should ensure their contact details linked to a rat's microchip are up to date.

G8.3 Keepers should provide information about their lost rodent to animal welfare shelters or organisations and private veterinarians in the area.

G8.4 Persons finding a lost domesticated rodent should attempt to find the usual carer. This could include taking the rodent to a local veterinary practice to be scanned for a microchip and contacting organisations that keepers of lost pets may have already contacted.

## 9. Breeding

Animal shelters and rescue groups are placed under immense pressure to find homes for the large number of unwanted rodents in the ACT. Serious and careful consideration should be undertaken before allowing rodents to breed. Breeding rodents can produce a litter of 4-25 pups every 21 days.

### ***Mandatory standards***

- S9.1 A person must only allow a rodent to breed after considering factors such as:
- a) the rodent's age, physical and genetic suitability for breeding; and
  - b) the person's ability to care for the female and pups properly; and
  - c) the person's ability to find suitable and responsible homes for the pups; and
  - d) the person's ability to correctly identify the sex of any offspring and separate them into male and female groups to prevent unwanted breeding; and
  - e) the person's own lifestyle, recognising that it takes time and energy and a significant financial outlay to produce, raise and find homes for every litter.
- S9.2 Breeding animals must not have any known heritable defects such as malocclusion.
- S9.3 A person responsible for a rodent must not allow the rodent to mate with its sibling or parent.
- S9.4 Male rodents must be removed from the female's living and nesting area well before she gives birth to prevent post-partum mating and another litter born again in 21 days. It also minimises possible cannibalism of offspring by the male. It is not ideal to allow females to mate again so soon after birth as it does not allow her to recover and improve her condition.
- S9.5 The person in charge of a rodent must obtain veterinary advice when a pregnancy or birth is not proceeding normally. This may include – prolonged pregnancy, difficulty passing pups, pups stuck in the birth canal, the mother distressed, excessive bleeding, birth taking longer than a few hours.

## **Guidelines**

- G9.1 Breeding animals with heritable defects can lead to health issues that can seriously impact the welfare of the offspring. Animals should be well examined prior to being used for breeding to identify such risks.
- G9.2 Potential breeding animals should:
- a) be checked by a veterinarian for sound health and physical maturity; and
  - b) not be obese, to avoid added risks of dystocia (difficulty giving birth).
- G9.3 Parents may cannibalise young if they are not weaned prior to their next litter arriving. There is also a risk that new litters will be trampled by older pups.
- G9.4 Rodents can reach sexual maturity from 4 weeks of age for mice and from 5 weeks for rats. Rodents can successfully breed at any time of year.
- G9.5 The average gestation period for a mouse is 21 days. The average gestation period for a rat is 21-23 days.
- G9.6 At least one week prior to giving birth, females should be provided with additional nesting material to allow for extensive natural nesting behaviour during this period.
- G9.7 Unless soiled, the nest should not be disturbed until the young are around two weeks of age.
- G9.8 Cage cleaning during the first two weeks post birth and the week prior, should involve transferring the whole nest into a cage with fresh substrate. When pups are present, they should be held within the nest and carefully transferred in one bundle. Care should be taken to ensure all pups are transferred and not left behind in substrate.
- G9.9 Pups must be checked at least twice daily and closely monitored when they leave the nest to ensure they do not become trapped or injured.
- G9.10 Pups will be born hairless, eyes closed and completely dependent on their mother for warmth and milk. Milk spots should be visible through the skin on the pup within 12 hours of birth, this indicates they have fed. You may be able to observe them from a distance in many circumstances without having to handle the young pups.
- G9.11 Large open water containers are not ideal for pups as they can drown or become soaked and cold, encouraging pups to use a sipper water bottle is ideal. Ensure it is low enough for pups to reach from two weeks of age.
- G9.12 Females feeding a litter should have the opportunity from time to time to escape the attentions of their young. The provision or resting areas

in the enclosure that cannot be reached by the pups Is ideal i.e. loft areas.

- G9.13 A person should only permanently remove a pup from its mother if the pup has reached three weeks of age. This might not apply if the person has veterinary advice recommending the pup be removed before the pup has reached three weeks of age.
- G9.14 The person in charge is responsible for finding suitable homes for all pups produced by their rodent, including pups of any unintended breeding or pups with no commercial value.
- G9.15 Pups are best raised where they have extensive contact with their carer to ensure they will be well conditioned as pets. Pups should be trained to accept handling, and long-haired varieties should be introduced to grooming from a young age.

## 10. Transport

Rodents may be transported by motor vehicle, rail, air, ship or carried by a pedestrian. During transportation rodents can be subjected to a number of distressing experiences, including loud noises, close proximity to predatory species such as dogs or cats, sudden changes or extremes of temperature, poor ventilation, cramped conditions, vibration, thirst and hunger.

### ***Mandatory standards***

- S10.1 A person responsible for transporting rodents must ensure they are transported at all times in a way that minimises stress, does not cause injury and prevents escape.
- S10.2 A person responsible for transporting a rodent must;
- a) Confine the rodent in a travelling box or container which is:
    - i. Large enough to enable the rodent to sit in normal posture, to turn around and lie down;
    - ii. Well-ventilated: there must be multiple holes (fine mesh) on at least three (3) sides to ensure adequate ventilation.
    - iii. Secure and escape-proof; and
    - iv. Lined with a suitable substrate for comfort and to absorb urine and faeces;
  - b) Ensure the travelling containers do not have any projections that may cause injury to the rodent;
  - c) Ensure the travelling container(s) are secured or restrained in the vehicle;
  - d) Ensure that protection from extremes of heat or cold are provided in the transporting vehicle; and
  - e) Not transport the rodent in the boot or on the roof of a car; and not leave the animal unattended in a car if there is a possibility of heat stress occurring or in situations of extreme cold.
- S10.3 Transportation must be undertaken in the shortest time possible. If transported for longer than one hour, drinking water must be provided in a water vessel securely fixed to the side of the container. If in transport for four hours or longer, provision must be made for food to also be provided.
- S10.4 Animals under the age of one month and pregnant females must not be fasted for more than four hours.
- S10.5 Female rodents with dependent young (<21 days old) or females in the latter stages of pregnancy (>14 days gestation) must not be transported.

### ***Guidelines***

- G10.1 If transporting a rodent, the mode of transport will be determined in part by the distance to be travelled, the familiarity of the animal with

travel, and its health status. When transporting a found or injured animal there may not be time or opportunity to follow all the suggestions included in these guidelines.

*Note: If transporting animals beyond the ACT the owner should check the legislation and requirements of other states and territories.*

- G10.2 Animals being transported should be confined in a suitable container made of rigid plastics, metal mesh (with soft resting place) or wood. Cardboard boxes should be avoided as rodents can easily chew and scratch escape holes in cardboard containers.
- G10.3 Containers should have the whole of one face of the container open and covered with bars, metal mesh or smooth expanded metal securely attached to the container. Where multiple cages are transported placement or stacking should not obstruct ventilation.
- G10.4 Containers should be easy to clean and disinfect.
- G10.5 Access to the container should be by a sliding or hinged door adequately secured to prevent accidental opening and escape.
- G10.6 Rodents are best transported singularly as transport containers do not allow enough space for them to move away from each other and the risk of stress and injury increases.
- G10.7 Advice should be sought from the shipping, airline, railway or coach service when transporting a rodent interstate or overseas. International transport will be required adhere to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and International Air Transport Associations (IATA) standards and requirements.
- G10.8 The transport container should have both a label on the top and at least one of the 4 sides with the name, address and phone contact number of both the sender and receiver and a label saying LIVE ANIMAL, except when a rodent is travelling with its keeper or carer in a private motor vehicle.
- G10.9 Tranquillising or sedating rodents for transport is not recommended. Tranquillisers are prescription drugs that may have severe side effects, such as overheating or hypothermia due to disruption of temperature regulatory systems. Such drugs can only be prescribed by a veterinarian, with whom the keeper or carer has fully discussed their use.



## 11. Ending a rat's or mouse's life

*Note: Euthanasia is defined as the act to induce a humane death with the minimum of pain, fear or distress to the animal involved.*

### **Mandatory standards**

- S11.1 Euthanasia must only occur if justified and with a good reason. A person must not without a good reason choose to have a pet rat or mouse euthanised.
- S11.2 If a person responsible for a pet rat or mouse chooses (in accordance with Standard 10.1) to have the rat or mouse euthanised, the rat or mouse may only be euthanised by a registered veterinarian.
- S11.3 Suppliers of killed rats or mice for use as food by other species must ensure that the animals are killed humanely.

### **Guidelines**

- G11.1 Circumstances in which it might be reasonable to euthanise a rat or mouse include, but are not limited to, where the rat or mouse is incurably ill, or injured or in pain and cannot be treated, or where a rat or mouse exhibits uncontrolled behaviour that makes the rat or mouse unable to be rehomed.
- G11.2 Circumstances in which it might be reasonable to euthanise an unwanted rat or mouse include, but are not limited to, where the keeper has been unable to rehome the rat or mouse despite having made a reasonable effort as set out in Standard 8.1 of this Code.