

## THE PROPOSITION

# ‘Prevent suffering among pets with a welfare assessment’

**Marijke Schop conducted experiments on animals in the course of her PhD research. In such experiments, the benefits resulting from the experiment are weighed up against the suffering caused to the lab animal. Schop thinks the same kind of assessment could save domestic pets a lot of suffering. So her proposition is: *Suffering of pet animals is avoided when welfare assessments are a prerequisite for veterinary treatments.***

‘A welfare assessment is a standard element in animal experiments. You want to know whether the answers provided by such an experiment outweigh the impact on the animal’s wellbeing. We don’t do anything like

that with domestic pets. When pet owners go to the vet, the possible tests and treatments are presented to them, and the choice depends on your pet, you as its owner, and also (sadly) the costs. There is no objective welfare assessment like there is for lab animals. I experienced it myself when my cats were ill. For one of them, euthanasia was postponed to wait for further test results, and for the other, palliative care was started so that it still had some quality of life. It is difficult for a pet owner to decide objectively when the treatment should stop. I experienced “quality of life” as a sliding scale: you see the animal slowly go downhill, but it does have good days too. I often hear people say in retrospect

– after their pet has been put down – “I should have done it earlier, really”. I think vets could use an objective welfare assessment tool to judge together with the

### ‘I experienced quality of life as a sliding scale’

owner whether treatment is in the interests of the animal, and to give evidence for the decision. I think treatments are sometimes carried out that are not in the animal’s best interests from the animal welfare angle.’ **TL**



PhD candidates have to include a handful of propositions with their thesis. In this feature, they explain their most thought-provoking proposition. This time it’s Marijke Schop, who got her PhD on 29 January for her study of digestion in pigs.