

People who want to preserve their pets are not strange or weird – they just have a different way of looking at death and their pets.

“Unfortunately, not all pet cremation service providers have the pet in mind. It’s a money-making business,” she said. “In Victoria, there are no operational pet cemeteries as all have closed or are full. It’s such a loss. Being able to bury your pet is so necessary as some religions do not believe in cremation. Pet owners are forced to cremate their pets - that’s why it’s big business!”

Not too long ago, a big drama ensued when a cremation facility told Ms Higgins’ client they would return the ashes on a certain day and didn’t, and then didn’t answer the phone when the client called, which in turn made the client even more stressed within their grief. Ms Higgins argued the vital need for industry standards and guidelines for the pet funeral sector, so long as it is not overseen by “big business, vet-owned cremation facilities or those with a vested financial interest in how they are run.”

“Cremation companies need to have a code of practice and certain ethical standards to adhere to,” she said. “Saying the pet is individually cremated when it is not or having mass burial sites of animals that are being disposed of... All these concerns need to be addressed!”

Pet preservation an increasing trend

Pet preservation – including traditional taxidermy and freeze-drying - is also an increasing trend in the industry. Traditional taxidermy involves skinning the animal and putting the skin on a mannequin that has been prepared for it. This service is mainly for museums, hunters and collectors.

The increasingly more popular freeze-drying method is the actual animal being preserved without skinning it and any removal of flesh and bones in most cases. The preservation happens by removing the moisture in a controlled frozen state under vacuum.

Markus Michalowitz from Down Under Taxidermy and Hunting in Queensland has been a taxidermist for 20 years and

started offering freeze-drying about six years ago. This method of pet preservation has been around in the United States for over 30 years; however, it is relatively new to Australia, he explained.

“Pet owners are becoming more and more aware that this option is available and becoming more acceptable, especially with some taxidermy shows being aired on mainstream TV,” he said. “It’s like having a three-dimensional reminder of your pet instead of just a picture.”

As far as Mr Michalowitz is aware, he is the first and only freeze-dry business preserving pets as well as other small animals on the mainland of Australia.

“Freeze-drying is a more realistic and a lot less invasive method to preserve your pet, as well as cheaper than traditional taxidermy,” he explained. “With general taxidermy, the skin has to be taken off the animal and then a form has to be shaped to suit the pet. This is difficult and near impossible to get the features, like the face, looking like the pet used to.”

Pet preservation is not for everyone, a little creepy for some people in fact, but those who want to do it have their reasons.

“For some, it is because they are too old now to get another pet; they don’t want the pet to outlive them and then not have anywhere to go. Pet preservation still allows them to have their companion around to talk to and pat,” Mr Michalowitz explained. “Others want to preserve their pet so it can be buried with them when it is time for them to go. Others have trouble letting go and this allows them more time to slowly get used to the idea that their pet has passed away.”

And some people just like the idea of having their pet with them still, even if it is no longer alive, as it reminds them of the good times they had together.

“People who want to preserve their pets are not strange or weird – they just have a different way of looking at death and their pets,” he said. “People who think it’s strange are also not wrong for the way

they think as it is the way they look at the life of their pet. But sometimes they try to impose their opinion onto pet owners who want to preserve their pets and that is wrong, as we should not judge others for how they deal with the loss of their much-loved pet.”

Mr Michalowitz is also seeing an increasing demand for taxidermy, especially with pet owners, but seems not having industry standards is creating customer service nightmares with certain businesses that are not up to standard.



“There are now an increasing number of taxidermists, but most of them are amateurs doing taxidermy on the side, and some of their work leaves a lot to be desired,” he said. “I have had a number of people tell me stories of their pet looking nothing like it used to be or in some cases, the person doing the job just disappearing with the deposit!”

Nevertheless, Mr Michalowitz believes most people in the industry are honourable and do the right thing by their customers. “We take the upmost care with each pet we receive. The animal is treated with respect and dignity,” he said.

As a quality pet preservation business, Mr Michalowitz understands the importance of the animal to the individual.

“We also have to be councillors to some clients to help them get through their loss. So sometimes this involves long conversations and listening to the client as they speak about their pet, and being understanding and accommodation to their grief,” he stated. “Our past customers speak for our standards and results. It is a very rewarding job at times seeing the joy and thanks in pet owners’ eyes when they pick their pet up or the thank you emails and texts that we get when they receive the pet by mail.”