



Working Animals Federation of Australia (WAFA) Animal Welfare Member Charter

Preamble

The Working Animals Federation of Australia (WAFA) is dedicated to ensuring the highest standards of welfare for all working animals. Our mission is to advocate for their well-being, dignity, and ethical treatment across all sectors, ensuring they receive the care and respect they deserve.

WAFA members agree to uphold this Animal Welfare Charter, which is based on the internationally recognized Five Freedoms and aligns with the internationally accepted definition of animal welfare from the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE):

Animal welfare means how an animal is coping with the conditions in which it lives. An animal is in a good state of welfare if (as indicated by scientific evidence) it is healthy, comfortable, well-nourished, safe, able to express innate behaviour, and if it is not suffering from unpleasant states such as pain, fear, and distress. Good animal welfare requires disease prevention and veterinary treatment, appropriate shelter, management, nutrition, humane handling, and humane euthanasia when necessary. Animal welfare refers to the state of the animal; the treatment an animal receives is covered by other terms such as animal care, animal husbandry, and humane treatment.

WAFA recognises that working animals contribute significantly to society, and it is our responsibility to ensure they receive the highest standards of care, respect, and ethical treatment. We are committed to providing an environment that prioritises both their psychological (mind) and physical (body) needs.

Commitment to the Five Freedoms

All WAFA members pledge to uphold and continuously improve upon the following fundamental welfare principles for working animals:

1. Freedom from Hunger and Thirst

- Ensure all animals have access to clean, fresh water and a diet tailored to their specific health, breed, and activity requirements.
- Provide appropriate nutrition that supports their well-being, energy levels, and working capacity.
- Implement feeding schedules that accommodate their workload while supporting their mental and physical health.

2. Freedom from Discomfort

- Provide appropriate shelter, bedding, and resting areas suited to the needs of working and companion animals.
- Ensure housing environments are climate-appropriate and allow for comfort during rest and recovery.
- Incorporate enrichment and structured downtime to support mental well-being.

3. Freedom from Pain, Injury, or Disease

- Implement routine health monitoring and provide regular veterinary care, including vaccinations, parasite control, and dental care.
- Use humane training methods that prioritize positive reinforcement and do not cause distress or harm.
- Ensure all equipment (such as harnesses, collars, and working gear) is comfortable, well-fitted, and does not cause injury.
- Monitor aging and retired working animals to ensure they receive appropriate care throughout their lifespan.

4. Freedom to Express Normal Behaviour

- Allow dogs and other working animals to engage in natural behaviours such as play, exploration, and socialization with humans and other animals where appropriate.
- Provide sufficient physical exercise, mental stimulation, and training that supports their working role while promoting overall well-being.
- Ensure working conditions allow for breaks, relaxation, and opportunities to engage in instinctual behaviours.

5. Freedom from Fear and Distress

- Use patient, kind, and scientifically sound training techniques to foster trust and confidence.
- Maintain work environments that minimize stress, anxiety, and overwork.
- Ensure all handlers, trainers, and caregivers are educated in humane handling techniques and behaviour recognition.
- Implement retirement and rehoming plans for working animals to ensure their welfare beyond their service years.

WAFA Member Responsibilities

By joining WAFA, members agree to:

- Advocate for the welfare of working animals in all settings.
- Ensure compliance with local, state, national and international animal welfare standards and strive for continual improvement.
- Engage in ongoing education and training to uphold best practices in animal care, training, and management.
- Promote responsible breeding, ownership, training, and retirement plans to support the long-term welfare of working animals.
- Support and contribute to scientific research and innovation that enhances the welfare of working and companion animals.
- Ensure that handlers, trainers, and caregivers have the necessary resources, training, skills, and experience to fulfill their roles responsibly.

Leadership in Animal Welfare

WAFA members strive to be leaders, advocates, and authorities on the welfare of working and companion animals. We recognize that animal welfare is dynamic, requiring continuous improvement, collaboration, and knowledge-sharing to advance ethical practices.

WAFA acknowledges that while working animals operate in human environments, they have biological and psychological needs that must be met. Though we cannot fully replicate the experience of their wild ancestors, we are committed to providing the highest quality of life possible, respecting their species' natural history and behavioural needs.

Together, we uphold this charter to ensure that every working and companion animal in Australia is treated with respect, dignity, and compassion.

Document Control

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