



Position Statement on Training Methodologies, Animal Welfare, and Legal Compliance

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Introduction

In the field of animal training and behaviour modification, a wide range of theories and methodologies exist, including Force-Free, Positive Reinforcement, Purely Positive, the Humane Hierarchy, Least Intrusive, Minimally Aversive (LIMA), Least Intrusive, Functionally Effective (LIFE), and Functional, Reinforcing, Enriching, Effective (FREE), amongst others.

While these frameworks guide ethical training practices, the reality is that animal training and behaviour modification take place across multiple jurisdictions, each with its own legal requirements, enforcement mechanisms, and definitions of acceptable practices under animal welfare and animal management law. What may be permitted or even encouraged in one region could be restricted or prohibited in another due to differences in how animal welfare is legislated, interpreted, and enforced. These variations can arise from factors such as cultural perspectives on animal training, historical precedents, scientific advancements, and evolving ethical standards in different regions.

Additionally, within a single jurisdiction, multiple governing bodies may have overlapping or distinct responsibilities. For example, national or state-level animal welfare organisations like the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) and Animal Welfare League (AWL) may provide guidance and enforce cruelty prevention laws, while government agencies such as state-based Departments of Primary Industry (DPI) and local councils may regulate specific training tools, licensing requirements, or industry standards. In some cases, industry bodies may develop best-practice guidelines that set higher standards than those legally required.

Given this complexity, we recognise that our role is not to dictate what is legally permissible but rather to operate within the legal frameworks established in each jurisdiction. We defer to the appropriate animal welfare and management authorities to determine whether specific training methods, tools, or interventions comply with current legislation. While we strongly advocate for ethical, science-based training practices that prioritise welfare, we acknowledge that legal definitions of humane treatment and acceptable training methods may differ and that compliance with local laws is a fundamental responsibility of all trainers and animal caregivers.

WAFA Publications will provide guidance on ethically sound training methods grounded in scientific literature to support the professional development of its members. While these guidelines are designed to promote best practices in animal welfare and training, they will not override legal requirements. Instead, they serve as a resource to help WAFA members elevate their standards of practice, ensuring that all approaches align with both legal obligations and current evidence-based methodologies.

Our commitment is to ensure that all training methods and decisions prioritise the well-being of the animals in our care. We recognise the Five Freedoms of Animal Welfare, which underpin humane treatment:

1. Freedom from hunger and thirst – by ensuring access to fresh water and a diet that maintains health and vigor.
2. Freedom from discomfort – by providing an appropriate environment, including shelter and a comfortable resting area.
3. Freedom from pain, injury, or disease – through prevention or rapid diagnosis and treatment.

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4. Freedom to express normal behaviour – by providing sufficient space, proper facilities, and the company of the animal’s own kind when applicable.
5. Freedom from fear and distress – by ensuring conditions and treatment that avoid mental suffering.

Building on the Five Freedoms, WAFA also recognises the Five Domains of Animal Welfare, which provide a holistic framework for assessing and promoting the overall well-being of animals. The Five Domains expand welfare considerations beyond physical health to include mental and emotional states, ensuring a comprehensive approach to care and training. These domains are:

1. Nutrition – ensuring animals receive a balanced diet that meets their physiological needs, supporting health, energy, and normal development.
2. Environment – providing a safe, comfortable, and enriched environment that enables animals to explore, exercise, and engage with their surroundings.
3. Health – maintaining proactive healthcare, including preventative measures, routine monitoring, and timely treatment of injury or illness.
4. Behavioural Interactions – allowing animals to express natural behaviours and social interactions, including opportunities for play, foraging, and companionship where appropriate.
5. Mental State – considering the animal’s subjective experiences, ensuring positive mental states through enrichment, predictable routines, and minimisation of stress, fear, or frustration.

Together, the Five Freedoms and Five Domains guide WAFA members in creating training programs and care practices that safeguard both the physical and psychological welfare of working animals, promoting resilience, confidence, and reliable performance in real-world settings.

We are committed to using positive reinforcement principles and relying on scientific literature to guide our training decisions. Scientific research overwhelmingly supports training approaches that reinforce desired behaviours rather than relying on punishment-based methods, which can cause stress, fear, and behavioural fallout. The latest research in animal behaviour and welfare science informs our practices, ensuring that we are providing training that is not only effective but also ethically sound.

Given the diversity of legal frameworks regulating animal welfare and training across different jurisdictions, we defer to the relevant authorities—including the RSPCA, AWL, DPI, local councils, and industry bodies such as WAFA—to determine the legality and appropriateness of specific training techniques and tools within their respective regions. While we advocate for ethical, science-based training methods, we acknowledge that legal definitions of acceptable practices may vary and must be adhered to accordingly.

Ultimately, our goal is to provide the best possible care for the animals we work with, ensuring their well-being, safety, and ability to thrive. We remain committed to training practices that are humane, ethical, and aligned with the highest welfare standards, always striving to balance

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scientific best practices with the legal and regulatory requirements of the jurisdictions in which we operate.

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