



Position Statement on Rehabilitation for Working Animals

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Introduction

The Working Animals Federation of Australia (WAFA) is committed to ensuring that working animals who experience injury or illness are given the necessary rehabilitation to recover fully and return to their duties in optimal condition. Rehabilitation is an essential component of animal care, particularly in the working animals sector, where animals are exposed to the physical demands of their roles. Injuries and physical wear-and-tear are common in working animals, and effective rehabilitation programs play a vital role in recovery, improving their quality of life, and ensuring that they can continue their important work.

The Importance of Rehabilitation for Working Animals

Rehabilitation is critical when working animals sustain injuries or develop health issues due to their intense physical labor. Whether it's a sprained muscle, joint issues, or wear-and-tear from high-impact activities, rehabilitation helps the animal recover efficiently, minimizing downtime and ensuring they can return to their duties. These rehabilitation processes also prevent more severe injuries in the future by addressing and correcting any underlying issues.

For example, a police dog involved in high-intensity chases might develop a joint problem or muscle strain due to the physical demands of its job. Without proper rehabilitation, this issue could worsen, leading to more serious injuries that could end the dog's career prematurely. Rehabilitation techniques, such as physiotherapy, hydrotherapy, and strength-building exercises, can help the dog recover, regain full mobility, and prevent further damage to its muscles and joints.

Similarly, an assistance dog that has experienced a traumatic injury or illness, such as a leg fracture or nerve damage, will benefit from targeted rehabilitation to regain strength and mobility. In these cases, rehabilitation ensures that the dog can continue to perform its guiding duties effectively, without pain or discomfort.

Rehabilitation Programs for Working Animals

Rehabilitation programs for working animals must be designed specifically to address the type of injury or condition the animal has experienced. These programs are typically developed in collaboration with veterinary specialists and animal rehabilitation experts to ensure they are safe, effective, and appropriate for the animal's needs.

For example, physiotherapy and hydrotherapy are commonly used rehabilitation techniques that can help animals recover from musculoskeletal injuries. Physiotherapy may include techniques like massage, stretching exercises, and joint manipulation to improve mobility and alleviate pain. Hydrotherapy, which involves controlled swimming or walking on underwater treadmills, helps build strength and flexibility without placing undue strain on the animal's joints and muscles.

Another common approach is strength and conditioning exercises aimed at restoring balance and coordination. These exercises can be adjusted based on the specific needs of the animal. For instance, a dog recovering from a hip injury might engage in low-impact exercises that target muscle strengthening around the affected area, ultimately improving mobility and reducing the risk of reinjury.

In addition to physical rehabilitation, psychological support is also essential in the recovery process. Working animals, especially those that are closely bonded with their handlers, can

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experience stress and anxiety during periods of injury or recovery. Offering a calm and supportive environment, along with positive reinforcement, ensures that the animal remains mentally engaged and confident during its recovery.

The Benefits of Rehabilitation

- 1. **Faster Recovery:** Rehabilitation accelerates recovery by addressing the underlying causes of the injury and promoting healing in a controlled, safe manner.
- 2. **Prevention of Further Injury:** Proper rehabilitation helps to prevent reinjury by strengthening the affected area and correcting any imbalances that may have contributed to the injury in the first place.
- 3. **Increased Longevity and Career Duration:** By properly rehabilitating injured working animals, we can extend their careers, allowing them to return to active duty and continue contributing to society for longer periods.
- 4. **Enhanced Well-Being:** Rehabilitation improves the overall well-being of working animals by relieving pain, improving mobility, and ensuring they are comfortable and capable of performing their roles without distress.
- 5. **Maintained Performance:** Proper rehabilitation ensures that animals can return to their roles with their full capabilities, ensuring they perform their duties effectively without limitations.

In conclusion, rehabilitation is an essential aspect of working animal care. It enables animals to recover from injuries and illnesses and return to their roles in optimal condition. With a well-designed rehabilitation program, working animals can continue to serve efficiently, extending their careers and ensuring their health and happiness. Rehabilitation plays a critical role in maintaining the overall quality of service provided by working animals and is a vital investment in their long-term success.

Document Control

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