



Position Statement on Desexing for Working Animals

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For enquiries, please contact admin@workinganimals.com.au

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Introduction

The Working Animal Federation of Australia (WAFA) supports desexing as a critical component of responsible working animal management. Desexing helps control animal populations, minimises certain health risks, and reduces behaviours that may interfere with a working animal's ability to perform their duties effectively. At the same time, WAFA acknowledges the importance of tailoring desexing approaches to individual animals based on peer-reviewed evidence, veterinary advice, and their specific working roles.

WAFA recognises that desexing is not a one-size-fits-all approach and that advancements in veterinary medicine now offer several options:

1. Spaying (Ovariohysterectomy): Surgical removal of the ovaries and uterus, eliminating the animal's ability to reproduce and significantly reducing the risk of uterine infections and ovarian cancers.
2. Ovariectomy (OSS – Ovary-Sparing Spay): Removal of the ovaries only, preserving the uterus while preventing reproduction. This option maintains some hormonal balance and is increasingly recommended in specific cases.
3. Hysterectomy: Removal of the uterus while leaving the ovaries intact, preventing reproduction while maintaining full hormone production.
4. Castration: Removal of the testes in male animals, eliminating the ability to reproduce and reducing the risk of testicular cancer.
5. Vasectomy: Severing or blocking the vas deferens in male animals, preventing reproduction while preserving hormonal function.

WAFA acknowledges that peer-reviewed research highlights potential benefits of delaying desexing for certain animals, particularly large-breed dogs and working animals. Delayed desexing may contribute to healthier bone development, reduced risk of orthopaedic conditions, and better long-term health outcomes in some cases. However, this must be balanced with the risks of delayed desexing, such as unplanned reproduction or the development of hormonally driven behaviours.

WAFA advocates for desexing practices informed by scientific evidence and individualised care plans. Research supports the following considerations:

1. Tailored Timing: The optimal timing for desexing varies based on factors such as the animal's size, breed, age, health status, and working role.
2. Health Benefits: Desexing can prevent or reduce the risk of reproductive cancers, uterine infections, and other health conditions while also helping to control population growth.
3. Behavioural Management: In some cases, desexing reduces hormonally driven behaviours such as aggression, roaming, and marking, which can interfere with a working animal's ability to perform their duties.

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WAFA's Recommendations

1. **Mandatory Desexing Policies:** Working animals should undergo desexing unless there is a specific medical or working requirement that necessitates an exception. Exceptions may include:
 - **Veterinary Recommendation:** A veterinarian may advise against desexing or recommend delaying the procedure due to health considerations, such as chronic illness, a specific breed predisposition, or orthopedic concerns that benefit from delayed desexing.
 - **Species Not Routinely Desexed:** Some species, such as birds, rodents, reptiles, or fish, are not commonly desexed due to the complexity of the procedure, lack of necessity, or limited impact on behaviour or reproduction.
 - **Gender Not Typically Desexed:** Certain genders of animals may not routinely undergo desexing, such as:
 - **Roosters:** Caponing (surgical castration) is uncommon , potentially life threatening and typically unnecessary.
 - **Female Equids:** Female equids are rarely desexed unless medically indicated.
2. **Veterinary Consultation:** Decisions about desexing procedures and timing should be made in consultation with a qualified veterinarian, considering the animal's health, breed, and role.
3. **Education and Awareness:** WAFA encourages public awareness of desexing options, including newer procedures such as OSS, hysterectomy, and vasectomy, to empower handlers to make informed decisions.

Desexing is a vital aspect of responsible working animal management, offering significant health, behavioural, and population control benefits. WAFA supports the use of evidence-based approaches to desexing, including consideration of individualized timing and the variety of surgical options available. This approach ensures the best outcomes for the health and well-being of working animals while maintaining their ability to serve their communities effectively.

WAFA remains committed to reviewing its position as new research emerges and advancing the highest standards of care for working animals.

Document Control

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