



Position Statement on Bullying, Harassment, and Victimisation in the Working Animals Industry

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Introduction

The working animals industry plays an essential role in supporting individuals with disabilities, enhancing safety and security, and providing critical services to both individuals and society. From guide dogs assisting individuals with visual impairments to therapy animals providing emotional support, working animals are indispensable. However, as this industry continues to evolve and grow, it is paramount that we foster an environment grounded in respect, professionalism, and collaboration. One of the most significant challenges we face is the occurrence of bullying, harassment, and victimisation, which not only undermines the integrity of the industry but also negatively impacts the welfare of the animals and the professionals working with them.

Respectful Disagreement and the Value of Diversity

It is crucial to acknowledge that in any field, especially one as dynamic and complex as the working animals industry, disagreements are inevitable. Differences in perspectives on training methodologies, animal care, and even contentious issues such as desexing practices or the use of certain training tools are natural. These differences are often reflective of diverse approaches, experiences, and areas of expertise. For example, a professional trainer may prefer a positive reinforcement-based training method, while another might advocate for a balanced approach that includes both positive reinforcement and correction. Both methodologies have their merits, but disagreements should always be approached with a mindset of respect and a willingness to engage in thoughtful, constructive dialogue.

In these cases, rather than resorting to hostility or dismissiveness, we must make room for open, respectful conversations where all parties are encouraged to share their views, listen actively, and learn from one another. This approach not only enriches our understanding but also leads to more effective and innovative practices. It is through these discussions that we can refine and adapt our methods to best meet the needs of working animals and the people they assist.

The Unacceptable Impact of Bullying and Harassment

While disagreements are a natural part of any industry, bullying, harassment, and victimisation are never acceptable. Such behaviours create toxic environments that can have far-reaching consequences. Bullying in any form—whether verbal, physical, or emotional—can cause lasting harm to individuals, leading to diminished morale, decreased productivity, and severe psychological distress. In a high-stakes field like working animals, where professionalism, compassion, and ethical behaviour are critical, such negative behaviours are doubly damaging.

For example, consider a scenario where a professional trainer is ridiculed by peers for their choice of training technique, even though they are achieving positive results with their methods. This ridicule may be based on differences in style or personal preference rather than any objective evaluation of the effectiveness of the training. Such harassment not only isolates the individual but also discourages them from sharing their expertise, ultimately stifling the development of the field as a whole. In extreme cases, it could drive someone out of the industry, leaving a gap in the pool of knowledge and experience.

Victimisation, particularly when it involves discrimination based on experience, gender, race, or disability, can further alienate individuals and perpetuate systemic inequalities. For instance, if a new trainer is subjected to unfair treatment because they are perceived as lacking experience or

Document Name:	PS-019- Bullying, Harassment, and Victimisation	Page:	2
Working Animals Federation of Australia		Version	V1.0

qualifications, despite their passion and dedication to learning, this can hinder their professional growth and limit their contributions to the field.

The repercussions of bullying, harassment, and victimisation go beyond the individuals involved; they affect the animals we work with, who rely on a stable, professional environment to receive the best care and training. If working professionals are subjected to ongoing harassment or ridicule, they may be less effective in their roles, potentially compromising the welfare of the animals.

The Importance of Collaboration and Understanding

To ensure that the working animals industry thrives, we must foster an environment where differences are respected and everyone—regardless of their background or methodology—feels valued and heard. Collaboration and mutual respect should be the foundation of our interactions. For example, if a trainer advocates for a particular training method that another trainer may not agree with, it's essential that both parties take the time to understand the reasoning behind each other's approaches, share their experiences, and even consider trying each other's methods in the spirit of learning and growth. By working together, professionals can expand their knowledge and improve their practices.

Furthermore, contentious issues such as desexing practices for working animals or the ethical considerations surrounding breeding and genetics can create division within the industry. These topics, though important, should not lead to personal attacks or exclusion of those who hold differing opinions. Instead, these issues should be approached with a willingness to listen and understand the concerns of all parties. For instance, some professionals may argue that early desexing of working animals is beneficial for health reasons, while others may believe it interferes with natural development and behaviour. Rather than allowing these disagreements to escalate into personal animosity, we should focus on discussing the evidence, sharing experiences, and exploring potential solutions that benefit both the animals and the professionals involved.

A Call to Action: Reject Bullying and Promote Respect

In conclusion, we call on all members of the working animals industry to commit to rejecting bullying, harassment, and victimisation in any form. We urge all professionals, from trainers to veterinarians, support staff, and administrators, to uphold a standard of respect, kindness, and professionalism in all their interactions. Differences in opinion, training styles, and methodologies should be welcomed as opportunities for learning and growth, not as a cause for division or hostility. The working animals industry is at its best when we embrace diverse perspectives and collaborate to ensure the well-being of the animals we serve and the professionals who work with them.

We must actively promote a culture where all individuals, regardless of their background or approach, feel supported, respected, and encouraged to contribute to the shared mission of the industry. Together, we can create a future where the working animals industry continues to thrive, providing critical services to individuals with disabilities and enriching the lives of both animals and humans alike.

Let us stand united, committed to fostering an inclusive, compassionate, and professional environment, and reject any form of behaviour that seeks to divide, harass, or victimize others.

Document Name:	PS-019- Bullying, Harassment, and Victimisation	Page:	3
Working Animals Federation of Australia		Version	V1.0

Together, we are stronger, and together, we can build a better future for working animals and the people they serve.

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Document Name:	PS-019- Bullying, Harassment, and Victimisation	Page:	4
Working Animals Federation of Australia		Version	V1.0