

# Adopting animals for work purposes

(adopted 5/12/2020)

NOTE: Reference to 'the RSPCA' or 'RSPCA' in this document means RSPCA Australia and each of its member Societies. RSPCA policies reflect the best available evidence to direct and guide RSPCA and others, to promote and achieve good animal welfare outcomes.

## 1 General principles

1.1 This position paper must be read in conjunction with the following RSPCA policies and position papers:

- RSPCA Policy A1 General principles
- RSPCA Policy A2 Responsible companion animal ownership
- RSPCA Policy A3 Acquiring a companion animal
- RSPCA Policy A4 Shelter and rehoming of companion animals
- RSPCA Policy A7 Companion animal management
- RSPCA Policy C1 Animals in sport, entertainment, performance, recreation and work - general principles
- RSPCA Policy C3 Working animals
- RSPCA Policy C7 Training, behaviour modification and invasive procedures
- RSPCA Policy F1 Transportation of animals - general principles

*Note: For the purpose of this position paper, an animal used for work purposes is any animal who is adopted for the primary purpose of being trained to complete specific tasks, under the control of a person/handler, in order to assist that person in carrying out their work and assistance animals. This does not include animals used for sport, recreation, or performance.*

1.2 RSPCA Australia is opposed to the use of any animal for the purpose of work, or training associated with such use, where it is judged that the animal will not have a good quality of life and/or where injury, pain, suffering or distress is likely to be caused ([Policy C3](#)).

1.3 [Policy C3](#) allows animals to be adopted for work purposes, as long as procedures and policies are in place in the organisation to which the animal will be adopted which ensure that the animal should have a good quality of life and that the work, or training associated with the work, is not likely to cause injury, pain, suffering or distress.

1.4 Any decision to re-home an animal to a working environment must take into account the benefit to the animal of being in that environment and their likely quality of life (versus alternative options), the likelihood of the animal experiencing physical harm or emotional distress as a result of performing the work duties intended and the severity of that suffering should that distress occur.

1.5 The RSPCA aims to adopt out all suitable animals in its care; this can include direct adoption, transfer to rescue groups or carers for adoption or adoption for work purposes. If it is determined that an animal is not suited to live as a companion or is better suited to a working life, the animal may be assessed for

suitability for adoption for work purposes, where this does not contravene RSPCA policies.

- 1.6 Where adoption of animals for work purposes is being considered, this position paper provides guidance for Member Societies on whether such adoptions meet RSPCA policy and are in the individual animal's best interests.

## **2 Pre-adoption Process**

- 2.1 Requests for animals for work should be assessed on a case-by-case basis, as with any other adoption. An animal will undergo a health and behaviour assessment to determine the ideal situation for that individual in accordance with all RSPCA policies. Both potential risks and potential positive aspects of the proposed working home should be taken into consideration when making an assessment for each individual animal.
- 2.2 Consideration should be given to an animal's suitability for a family-home situation; for some animals, adoption to a working home may suit that individual and be a good option for them. For example, a dog with a strong toy focus, high arousal and high energy may become frustrated in a family home situation but could have positive welfare in some working environments.
- 2.3 Consideration should be given to the health, behaviour and temperament of the individual animal when determining their suitability for work. Many working animal organisations have their own protocols, such as behavioural assessments, which would also need to be considered in the assessment of whether a certain work type would be a good option for an individual animal.
- 2.4 When considering whether 'injury, pain, suffering or distress is likely to be caused', one should consider not only the work required, but the training that is needed for the work, and the training approach that will be adopted. Training must not contravene Policy [A7](#) or [C7](#).
- 2.5 Procedures and policies must be in place in the adopting organisation that ensure that the animal should have a good quality of life and that the work, or training associated with the work, is not likely to cause injury, pain, suffering or distress. Clear evidence that the training and work will not expose the animals to likely harm is required; if this is not available (i.e. if there are institutionalised practices that make harm likely), then animals must not be adopted to those organisations.
- 2.6 When determining if an adoption for working purposes is suitable, consideration must be given to the following:
- what the animal will be required to do
  - if there are unacceptable risks to the animal's welfare
  - what training is required and how this is undertaken in the proposed adoption situation
  - how the animal will be housed and transported
  - any environmental enrichment provided
  - the written policies and protocols of the adopting party
  - the level of care provided to the animal

- what will happen to the animal when they can no longer work.
- 2.7 If an organisation expresses interest in adopting multiple RSPCA animals for working purposes on an ongoing basis, the RSPCA may choose to determine the suitability of this relationship by undertaking site visits, audits of training and housing documentation, and viewing training and handling practices as appropriate.

### **3 Adoption Process**

- 3.1 The process for adopting for work purposes should align with standard rehoming procedures, other than as outlined in this position paper.
- 3.2 If an animal is deemed suitable for certain work purposes and is unlikely to be adopted for that purpose directly from the shelter, transferring the animal to a reputable rescue group that adopts to that type of work should be considered. This should be undertaken in accordance with [Position Paper A7 'Working with Rescue Groups'](#).