

# POSITION STATEMENT

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## ASSISTANCE ANIMAL ACCESS TO ZOOS & AQUARIA

### BACKGROUND

Assistance animals, such as guide dogs, provide assistance to individuals by providing them with independence and safer mobility. In Australia, disability access is protected by the Australian Human Rights Commission under the Disability Discrimination Act (1992), and in New Zealand by the New Zealand Public Health and Disability Act 2000.

The role of zoos and aquaria is to provide visitors with the opportunity to encounter the natural world and to become involved in conservation action. The Zoo and Aquarium Association welcomes the promotion of equal opportunity and access for people with disabilities to its member institutions.

### THE POSITION

In order to protect the health and well being of the animals in our care, assistance animals might not be permitted access to all zoos and aquaria. The decision to deny access is at the discretion of the individual institution following a risk assessment of their specific site.

Australian zoos have the option to restrict the access of assistance animals, such as guide dogs, from entering zoo grounds, based on biosecurity risks. The Discrimination Disability Act (1992) Section s54A Subsection 4b (Amendment Act 2008) states:

“it does not render it unlawful for a person (the discriminator) to discriminate against the person with the disability on the ground of the disability, if:

- (a) the discriminator reasonably suspects that the assistance animal has an infectious disease; and
- (b) the discrimination is reasonably necessary to protect public health or the health of other animals.”

The Association advises all zoos and aquaria to perform a documented risk assessment, taking into account the specifics of their environment including the proximity of animals to visitors during a visit. If the risk assessment determines that access to assistance animals should be declined then the Association advises that all efforts should be made to ensure that the disabled visitor is provided with an alternative support to visit the zoo.

It is recommended that an appropriate holding place be offered for the assistance animal and a zoo guide or volunteer made available to accompany the individual and assist them in enjoying their zoo experience.

Zoos and aquaria may also decide, after conducting a risk assessment that there is minimal risk in allowing an assistance animal onto their grounds.

It is imperative also that all relevant staffs are made aware of and have access to the written policy or protocol concerning assistance animals.

### REFERENCES

The Discrimination Disability Act (1992) Section s54A Subsection 4b (Amendment Act 2008)  
([http://www.hreoc.gov.au/disability\\_rights/legislation/2009.htm#animals](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/disability_rights/legislation/2009.htm#animals))