

Position Statement

Animal Visitor Interactions

Zoo and Aquarium Association (ZAA) member organisations are uniquely placed to facilitate enjoyable and meaningful connections between people and animals. These experiences can have a deep impression upon the subsequent attitudes, knowledge and actions of people and should aim to be positive for both animals and visitors. Members should carefully consider different species' requirements so that an interaction can adequately provide appropriate conditions and context.

ZAA is committed to positive animal welfare and ensuring, via the ZAA Accreditation Program and incorporation of the Five Domains Model¹ for assessing welfare, that member institutions are meeting the highest standards of care. Animal visitor interactions must foster respect for the species by presenting the individual in a respectful context as well as supporting the animal's welfare.

An animal visitor interaction is any encounter where an animal and visitor are brought together for physical / near physical interaction. These experiences can nurture appreciation and respect for animals and provide an opportunity for information and messaging that can develop an interest in and respect for wildlife and the environment and what action visitors can take to minimise threats.

Interactive experiences may include:

- Animal encounters in areas of the zoo / aquarium that are not usually accessible to the public;
- Animal encounters which are up close individual encounters or group encounters;
- Pop-up encounters within a zoo or aquarium;
- Demonstrations including presentations and feeding;
- Animals taken off-site for outreach programs, appropriate functions or special events;
- Walk-through habitats; and
- Photo opportunities.

To ensure animal visitor interactions facilitate safe, positive and engaging experiences for both animals and visitors, ZAA member institutions must consider these criteria for interactive experiences:

- All animals must be treated with respect in an interaction;
- An interaction must not compromise an animal's welfare;
- Risk of ill-health or injury to the animal, visitor and staff member must be minimised during an interaction²;

¹ Mellor, D. J., and N. J. Beausoleil. "Extending the 'Five Domains' model for animal welfare assessment to incorporate positive welfare states." *Animal Welfare* 24.3 (2015): 241-253.

² Refer National Zoo Biosecurity Manual, March 2011 for Australia and the New Zealand Biosecurity Manual for New Zealand.

- Activities in an animal visitor interaction should not compel an animal to perform unnatural behaviours;
- If at any time during the interaction, a trained staff member sees that an animal’s behaviour indicates it does not want to participate, the animal must be taken out of the interaction;
- Animals must be conditioned to the interaction and where standards³ exist, meet interaction frequency and duration guidelines;
- Animal visitor interactions requiring supervision must be managed by appropriately trained and proficient staff members or volunteers;
- Any feeding during an interaction must be regulated to ensure it is consistent with the animal’s overall appropriate diet and health care; and
- Animal visitor interactions must take place in a setting and context which encourages appreciation and respect for the animal – for on-site or off-site interactions.

ZAA believes that some activities are unacceptable when it comes to ensuring positive experiences for animals and visitors in an interactive experience. The following activities are not considered acceptable for the purpose of enabling an animal visitor interaction:

- Causing physical injury and/or mutilation;
- Sedation or other forms of chemical restraint intended to render the animal more docile to interactions;
- Physical restraint that results in negative animal welfare or where an animal indicates it does not want to participate; and
- Interactive activities for which the conditioning may compromise an animal’s welfare.

All members should analyse their current animal visitor interactions as per the criteria provided in this Position Statement. ZAA members are encouraged to train staff and volunteer teams to ensure they understand the principles behind this Position Statement. These criteria can also be used as a decision-making framework for the development of new interactions.

Approval

This Position Statement was approved by the Board of the Association on 21/08/2018.

Revision Record

Approved/ Amended/ Rescinded/Reviewed	Date	Board / Executive Director	Description
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This document should be reviewed within two years of the date of approval or last review.

³ For example, Standards applicable to relevant jurisdiction, such as Standards for Exhibiting Australian Mammals in New South Wales. Exhibited Animals Protection Act, 1986, and other such Standards relevant to various jurisdictions across the region