

Tips for responders: Applying animal welfare considerations to large animal rescue or relocation

Animal welfare at a rescue scene relates to how an animal is coping with the conditions in which they are found. An animal requiring rescue or relocation will likely be in a situation where their welfare may be compromised or at risk.

The following tips for responders will aid in monitoring and improving the animal's welfare throughout the rescue, in situ, or relocation operations. The involvement of a veterinarian, referring to the Five Domains Model, will ensure the animal's welfare is monitored and all activities to aid the animal are done with the animal's welfare in mind.

The key goal for responders is to keep the animal calm and minimise their stress.

Tips for responders	Pre-rescue / relocation	Decision <u>NOT</u> to rescue/relocate	During the rescue/relocation	Post-rescue / relocation
Nutrition	<p>Observe the animal's general condition (<i>seek assistance if poor condition is observed</i>)</p> <p>Provide hay/forage/ water (if possible/ appropriate)</p>	<p>Provide hay/forage and fresh water for the duration of isolation</p>	<p>Strictly only on veterinary advice</p>	<p>Provide hay/forage</p> <p>Provide fresh water (+ molasses if appropriate)</p> <p>Ensure the animal(s) is handed over to someone responsible for ongoing care.</p>
Environment	<p>Provide shade and a non-slip surface (if feasible)</p> <p>Keep the animal's head out of the water</p> <p>Remove hazards preventing the animal from breathing fresh air, resting, and remaining calm.</p> <p>Trapped animals often remain calm</p> <p>Wait until veterinary examination before extraction.</p> <p>Management options for deceased animals</p>	<p>Ensure animals are out of the water or safe from bushfires or other hazards.</p> <p>Arrange containment if required</p> <p>Ensure there is shade or protection from wind and weather extremes</p> <p>If standing in water for [duration], seek veterinary advice regarding euthanasia</p>	<p>Clear hazards and monitor for snags or limbs catching or bumping into objects when skidding</p> <p>The animal moved to a flat area well away from the source of entrapment</p> <p>Positioned to aid standing – legs downhill</p>	<p>Safe non-slip, hazard-free area to come out of sedation/ anaesthetic</p> <p>Follow Washing & decontamination procedures</p> <p>Warming</p> <p>Drying off</p> <p>Dry rugs</p> <p>Moving to a safer location</p> <p>Or ensure the animal(s) is handed over to someone responsible for ongoing care</p>

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<p>Health</p>	<p>Obtain pre-rescue information incl., health status, e.g., age, and Hendra vaccination status</p> <p>Obtain veterinary advice on how (if possible and safe) to provide comfort for animals and reduce pain, e.g. protect eyes</p> <p>Veterinary initial assessment (triaged to identify non-viable animals and zoonotic risks)</p> <p>Provision of resuscitation fluids and other veterinary support before the tactical plan is deployed</p> <p>Check suitable transport & post-rescue site, e.g. equine hospital</p>	<p>Veterinary monitoring of individual animal flock or herd condition</p> <p>Veterinary sedation or anaesthetic & medications to reduce the animals stress & pain</p>	<p>Veterinary advice to responders regarding techniques being considered (effects on anatomy and physiology)</p> <p>Minimise time being skidded or lifted (pressure on the anatomy)</p> <p>Use wide slings (min 75mm)</p> <p>Don't use the head and neck to rescue an animal.</p> <p>Don't use ears, tail or fleece to lift or move an animal</p> <p>Minimise the time chest area is compressed (Forward skid)</p>	<p>Veterinary assessment for post-rescue or relocation injuries</p> <p>The animal is positioned in a sternal position to aid recovery</p> <p>Support veterinary provision of resuscitation fluids and ongoing veterinary care</p> <p>Seek veterinary advice and supervision for transport</p> <p>E.g., Standing or recumbent, monitoring, application of leg protection etc.</p>
<p>Behaviour in response to interactions with surroundings, other animals, people.</p>	<p>Awareness of freeze, flight, and fight behaviours., & effect of adrenaline</p> <p>Observe body language</p> <p>Keep a companion animal nearby (if appropriate)</p> <p>Keep mothers and young together</p> <p>Remove owner (if emotional)</p>	<p>Keep flock or herd together</p> <p>Report changes in behaviours to monitoring veterinarian</p>	<p>Minimise emotional responses by owner or bystanders</p> <p>Awareness that behaviour may suddenly change, e.g., become reactive</p>	<p>Monitor behaviour and report any changes to the veterinarian</p> <p>Return to the herd as soon as feasible</p> <p>Minimise the animal's stress once rescued</p> <p>Reunite animal(s) with owners</p>

Tips to keep the animal calm and minimise their stress during and after the rescue or relocation operation:

- **Noise:** No sirens on approach; Minimise background noise and vibration (e.g., traffic and/or lifting machines)
- **Smell:** Don't use gloves that have been used for firefighting or human rescue.
- **Sight:** No running or quick movements; Blindfold (if appropriate); Avoid direct bright lights and flashing lights
- **Touch:** Gentle grooming, stroking (not patting); Maintain a sense of entrapment (if appropriate)
- **Taste:** Select feeds, treats familiar to the animal (see nutrition).

References

Anonymous. (2022). *Large Animal Rescue Operations Guideline*. Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council. Retrieved 19 March from https://www.afac.com.au/docs/default-source/doctrine/large-animal-rescue-operations_v01-0.pdf

Mellor, D., & Burns, M. (2020). Using the Five Domains Model to develop welfare assessment guidelines for Thoroughbred horses in New Zealand. *New Zealand Veterinary Journal*, 68(3), 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00480169.2020.1715900>