

ONSTAGE ANIMALS POLICY

1. OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this policy is to ensure the welfare of any animal appearing onstage in a Melbourne Theatre Company work. The policy outlines the ways in which Melbourne Theatre Company may approve and facilitate the appearance of live animal/s onstage, and the steps that must be taken to prioritise their welfare.

2. SCOPE

This policy applies to all Melbourne Theatre Company (**Company**) employees and other workers, including actors, creatives and contractors (**Staff**), involved in the presenting of a work (mainstage or otherwise) featuring, or requesting to feature, a live animal.

3. VICTORIAN CODE OF PRACTICE

Melbourne Theatre Company acknowledges that, at the time of finalisation of this Policy, a dedicated Victorian Code of Practice for the appearance of live animals in theatrical stage productions does not currently exist.

The Company accepts the guidance of Animal Welfare Victoria and Agriculture Victoria in utilising the Code of Practice for the Welfare of Film Animals as a baseline for the creation of this Policy and prioritisation of the animal's welfare.

4. POLICY

Decision to feature a live animal onstage

Melbourne Theatre Company discourages the use of live animals onstage and ardently opposes any use where injury, suffering or distress to the animal is likely to be caused.

The appearance of live animals onstage shall be contained to the following situations:

- Where a live animal is scripted to appear onstage.
- Where the appearance of a live animal onstage meets a significant and impactful creative requirement of the Production.

Live animals will not be approved to appear onstage where they are simply appearing in the 'background' of a scene or are for ornamental appearance.

The final decision to feature a live animal onstage rests with the Company and is subject to the Approval process listed below.

The welfare of the live animal shall at all times be the priority.

Approval process

Where a live animal is scripted to appear onstage, this shall be considered at the time of programming and the relevant production's parameters determined to either include or not include a live animal, before committing to the Play.

Where a live animal is not scripted but requested by a production's Creative Team, such request must be submitted during the Design Concept Discussion. Melbourne Theatre Company's Executive Management team shall then consider the request, including seeking guidance where appropriate from professional Animal Trainers and/or a veterinary surgeon and/or an animal welfare agency such as the RSPCA, and make the final determination on whether to approve the appearance of a live animal onstage.

Engagement of a Professional Animal Trainer

Where the onstage appearance of a live animal has been approved, the Company will engage a suitably qualified and experienced professional Animal Trainer to source, procure, train, care for, manage and provide the animal, for the duration of the production, including during performances.

Such Animal Trainer, and where appropriate assisted by an Animal Handler, shall be responsible for ensuring the animal's welfare at all points of the engagement, and remaining compliant with any legal obligations or codes of practice relating to the specific animal and its welfare.

During procurement of the animal, the Animal Trainer shall only procure from responsible and legal sources, and shall ensure the animal is of appropriate temperament and nature, so as to avoid distress or discomfort to the animal when it appears onstage.

Where the animal is desired to perform a specific action or behaviour, the Company shall defer in full to the Animal Trainer for guidance and direction on how to achieve such action or behaviour, using the animal's natural instincts and positive reinforcement. During rehearsals, the Animal Trainer shall work with the production's creative team to meet the desired action or behaviour of the animal, whilst at all times ensuring and protecting the welfare of the animal.

The Company shall contractually require all Animal Trainers and Handlers it engages with to only utilise training methods that avoid any and all forms of cruelty or any techniques, equipment or gear that could cause distress, pain or injury to the animal.

The Animal Trainer shall be responsible for ensuring that the animal provided has received vaccinations as appropriate, before it commences with the production.

The Animal Trainer shall be consulted by the Company in the development of appropriate risk management controls relating to the use of the animal in the production, including but not limited to controls relating to the behaviour and hygiene of the animal, and the prevention of transmissible diseases (applicable to the type of animal) from animal to human.

A Company Staff member (including performers or creatives) owning the animal shall not preclude the need and commitment to engage a professional Animal Trainer.

The Company acknowledges that the Victorian Code of Practice for the Welfare of Film Animals requires the engagement of a veterinary surgeon to be onsite, where there is risk of injury or distress to the animal. As the risk of injury or distress to an animal will not be tolerated by the Company, there should be no circumstances in which an animal is approved to appear onstage where a veterinary surgeon is required onsite.

Animal Welfare

Melbourne Theatre Company is opposed to any use of a live animal where injury, suffering or distress to the animal is likely to be caused.

Whenever the animal is on Company premises, or the applicable Venue premises, adequate facilities for the animal's housing and rest will be provided, in consultation and under guidance of the Animal Trainer. Such facilities shall provide a clean, comfortable and safe environment, appropriate to the size and type of animal. Consideration shall be made, and controls enacted, to provide adequate facilities for the animal's waste.

Dedicated and appropriate evacuation procedures for the animal shall be determined before the first occasion the animal is onsite.

The Animal Trainer shall be responsible for monitoring the welfare of the animal at all times. Should the animal at any point be unwell, the animal shall not appear onstage and the Animal Trainer must seek veterinary consultation.

Where it is deemed, in consult with the Animal Trainer and/or a veterinary surgeon and/or an animal welfare agency such as the RSPCA, that the involvement of the animal onstage is likely to cause distress or risk of injury to the animal, the involvement shall not proceed.

5. DEFINITIONS

- **'Animal'** means any live member of a vertebrate species including any fish, amphibian, reptile, bird, crustacean or mammal other than human being.
- **'Animal Handler'** means a person who as an assistant, under the supervision of an Animal Trainer, is capable of handling the types of animals which are to be used.
- **'Animal Trainer'** includes a 'wrangler' and means a person who has experience and is competent in the management and training of the types of animals to be used, and has a working knowledge of theatrical and live performance production requirements.
- **'Veterinary surgeon'** includes a 'veterinary practitioner' and means a qualified professional registered under the *Veterinary Practice Act 1997* (Vic).

6. REFERENCES

- *Code of Practice for the Welfare of Film Animals (Victoria)*
- *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 (Victoria)*

7. RESPONSIBLE OFFICERS

- Executive Management
- Senior Producer
- Production Management

8. REVIEW

Created May 2024

9. VERSION HISTORY

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