

WSAVA CONVENTION FOR THE PROTECTION OF COMPANION ANIMALS

One of the major aims and objectives of the World Small Animal Veterinary Association (WSAVA) is furthering the cause of animal welfare in the light of current veterinary scientific knowledge.

As a basis for these aims and objectives, the member Associations of the World Small Animal Veterinary Association have endorsed the general principles of companion animal welfare stated in the European Convention for the Protection of Pet Animals. Several modifications to the European Convention have been made in the light of current veterinary knowledge on animal welfare issues.

These principles and modifications are expressed as the WSAVA Convention for the Protection of Companion Animals. The Assembly of the WSAVA, at their 1996 Yokohama Congress endorsed this Convention. The WSAVA Convention has been presented to the Animal Welfare committee of the World Veterinary Association for consideration and adoption by the WVA.

The member Associations of the World Small Animal Veterinary Association offer this Convention for the consideration by its member Associations for discussion and adoption by individual Associations.

Preamble

This Convention recognises that man has a moral obligation to respect all other living creatures and to protect the environment in which we all live on this planet.

This Convention recognises man has developed a close and special relationship with certain species of animals and that these animals have been kept as companions of man over many centuries. For this reason these animals have become known as companion or pet animals.

Companion animals are known to improve the quality of human life and have enormous value to society. However, the enormous numbers and variety of animals, which are kept by man, create various difficulties and problems. Among these problems are the risks inherent in companion animal overpopulation for the hygiene, health and safety of man and other animals, particularly in heavily populated urban environments.

This Convention recognises that man occasionally keeps as companions or pets, those species of animals normally recognised as wild free-living fauna. While the member Associations of the WSAVA believe that this practice should be discouraged, this Convention makes provision for the humane care of such species in those cases where release back to the wild state would endanger the animal's life or be unacceptable for other reasons.

The member Associations of the WSAVA are aware that many companion animals are not always kept in conditions that promote their health and well-being.

The member Associations of the WSAVA understand and acknowledge that the attitude of man towards the welfare of companion animals varies widely across the countries of the world.

Where animal welfare issues are either neglected or poorly understood due to limited knowledge and public awareness, the member Associations of the WSAVA agree to use their influence and veterinary knowledge to educate the community about animals and to increase community awareness of all issues affecting animal welfare.

The member Associations of the WSAVA, in common with the member countries of the Council of Europe, considers that a basic common standard of attitude and practice, which results in responsible pet ownership, is not only desirable, but also a realistic goal.

Adoption of the terms of this Convention by the member Associations of the WSAVA is part of the process of achieving this goal.

Part 1 - General provisions

Section 1

Definitions used in this Convention

By Convention is meant the WSAVA Convention for the Protection of Companion Animals as outlined below.

By companion or pet animal is meant any animal kept or intended to be kept by man, in particular in his household, for mutual pleasure and personal companionship.

By trading in companion animals is meant all regular business transactions, carried out for profit, which involve the change of ownership of companion animals.

By commercial breeding and boarding is meant the breeding or boarding of mainly companion animals, carried out for profit.

By animal sanctuary or refuge is meant a non-profit making establishment where companion animals may be kept in substantial numbers. If national legislative and/or administrative measures permit, such establishments may accept stray animals.

By a stray animal is meant an animal, of a type normally kept as a companion or pet, which either has no home or that is outside the normal bounds of its owner's or keeper's household and is not under the control or direct supervision of any owner or keeper.

By competent authority or responsible authority is meant the authority designated by the member State, municipality or country to undertake control, administration and implementation of legislative aspects of animal control in the community.

Section 2

Scope and implementation of this Convention

Each member Association of the WSAVA undertakes to take the necessary steps to promote and to give effect to the provisions of this Convention in respect of:

- a. Companion animals kept by a person or legal entity in any household or in any establishment for trading, commercial breeding and boarding, and in animal sanctuaries and refuges.

b. Where appropriate, stray animals.

Nothing in this Convention shall affect the implementation of other legislation or instrument designed for the protection of animals or the conservation of threatened wild species, unless the terms of such legislation or instrument is contrary to the animal welfare principles espoused in this Convention.

Nothing in this Convention shall affect the liberty of the member Associations of the WSAVA to adopt or promote stricter measures for the protection of companion or pet animals or to apply the provisions contained herein to categories of animals, which have not been mentioned expressly in this instrument.

Part two - Principles for the keeping of companion / pet animals

Section 3

Cruelty to and abandonment of companion animals to be an offense

It should be an offense, punishable by an appropriate penalty imposed by the competent authority, for any person to knowingly cause a companion animal unnecessary pain, suffering or distress.

It should be an offense; punishable by an appropriate penalty imposed by the competent authority, for any person to knowingly abandon a companion animal.

Section 4

Keeping of companion / pet animals

i) Any person who keeps a companion animal or who has agreed to look after a companion animal should be responsible for its health and welfare.

ii) Any person who is keeping a companion animal or who is looking after a companion animal should provide accommodation, care and attention which take into account the biological and ethnological needs of the animal in accordance with its species and breed, in particular:

- a. Provide it with suitable and sufficient food and water;
- b. Provide it with adequate opportunities for exercise;
- c. Take all reasonable measures to prevent it from becoming a stray animal.
- c. Provide accommodation, heating and light suitable for that species

iii) An animal should not be kept as a companion animal if:

- a. The conditions of paragraph (ii) above are not met or if,
- b. In spite of these conditions being met, the animal cannot adapt itself to captivity and domestication.

Section 5

Responsibility for the breeding of companion / pet animals

Any person who selects a companion animal for breeding should be responsible for having due regard to the anatomical, physiological and behavioral characteristics which are likely to put at risk the health and welfare of either the offspring or the female parent.

The practice of over - breeding from any one female animal should be discouraged. Particular care should be taken to avoid breeding female animals that are either too young or too old. The interval between litters should be sufficient to allow the female to recover normal physical and physiological condition.

Any person who breeds from a companion animal should, as far as possible, be responsible for placing the weaned offspring of the female parent into the care of a person who will look after such animals in accordance with Section 4, paragraph (ii) of this Convention.

Section 6

Age-limit on acquisition of companion animals

No companion animal should be sold to persons under the age of 16 years without the knowledge and express consent of their parents or other persons exercising parental responsibilities.

Section 7

Training of companion animals

No companion animal should be trained in such a way that is detrimental to its health and welfare, especially by methods which force it to exceed its natural capacities or strength or by employing artificial training aids which may cause physical injury, pain, suffering or distress.

Section 8

Trading, commercial breeding and boarding, animal sanctuaries and refuges

- i) Any person, who is already trading in or who is commercially breeding companion animals or boarding companion animals or who is operating an animal sanctuary or refuge should declare this activity to the competent authority within an appropriate period to be determined by the competent authority.
- ii) People with only one breeding female animal shall be considered commercial breeders if that animal is bred at regular intervals and the offspring sold.
- iii) Any person who intends to engage in any of these activities should declare this intention to the competent authority.

The declaration should stipulate:

- a. The species of companion animals which are involved or to be involved;
- b. The person or persons responsible and their knowledge, prior experience and any formal qualifications applicable to the proposed activity;
- c. A description of the premises and equipment used or to be used.

The above-mentioned activities should only be carried out:

- a. If the person responsible has the knowledge, qualifications and abilities required for the activity either as a result of professional training or of sufficient prior experience with the animals concerned.

and

- b. If the premises and the equipment used for the activity comply with the requirements set out in Section 4.

The competent authority shall determine the basis of the declaration made under the provisions of paragraph 1 whether or not the conditions set out in paragraph 3 are being complied with. If these conditions are not adequately met, it should recommend measures and, if necessary for the welfare of the animals, it shall prohibit the commencement or continuation of the activity until they can be met.

The competent authority or their appointed agents should, in accordance with appropriate national legislation, be the body responsible for supervision and accreditation of the above-mentioned conditions.

Section 9

Use of companion animals in advertising, entertainment, exhibitions, competitions and similar events.

i) Companion animals should not be used in advertising, entertainment, exhibitions, competitions and similar events unless:

- a. The organizer has created appropriate conditions for the companion animals to be treated in accordance with the requirements of Section 4, paragraph (ii), and
- b. The animal's health and welfare are not put at risk.

ii) No substances should be given to, treatments applied to, or devices used on a companion animal for the purposes of increasing or decreasing its natural level of performance:

- a. During competition or
- b. At any other time, when this would put at risk the health and welfare of the animal.

Section 10

Non-therapeutic surgical operations on companion animals

- i) Surgical operations for the purpose of modifying the appearance of a companion animal for non-therapeutic purposes should be actively discouraged.
- ii) Where possible legislation should be enacted to prohibit the performance of non-therapeutic surgical procedures for purely cosmetic purposes, in particular;
 - a. Docking of tails;
 - b. Cropping of ears;
 - c. Devocalisation;
 - d. Declawing and defanging.
- iii) Exceptions to these prohibitions should be permitted only:
 - a. If a veterinarian considers that the particular surgical procedure is necessary, either for veterinary medical reasons or where euthanasia is the only alternative to either devocalisation, declawing or defanging.
 - b. To prevent reproduction and the breeding of unwanted animals;

Requirement for anaesthesia for the performance of surgical procedures

- a. All operations in which the animal will or is likely to experience pain should be carried out under anaesthesia.
- b. Anaesthesia should only be administered by a veterinarian or under the direct supervision of a veterinarian.

Section 11

Killing / euthanasia of companion animals

- i) Only a veterinarian or another competent person, authorised under national legislation, should kill or carry out euthanasia on a companion animal; except where it is necessary to terminate an animal's suffering in an emergency, when veterinary or other competent assistance cannot be obtained or in any other emergency covered by national legislation.
- ii) All killing should be done rapidly with the minimum of physical and mental suffering appropriate to the circumstances.
- iii) The method chosen, except in an emergency, should either:
 - a. Cause immediate loss of consciousness and subsequent death,or

- b. Begin with the induction of deep general anaesthesia to be followed by a step which will ultimately and certainly cause death.
- iii) The person responsible for the killing should also be responsible to ensure that the animal is dead before the carcass is disposed of.
- iv) The following methods of killing animals are considered inhumane and should be prohibited:
 - a. Drowning, strangulation and other methods of suffocation;
 - b. The use of any poisonous substance or drug, the dose and application of which cannot be controlled so as to give the effect mentioned in Section 11, paragraph (ii) and (iii) (a) & (b);
 - c. Electrocutation unless preceded by immediate induction of loss of consciousness as specified in Section 11 paragraph (iii) (a) & (b).

Part three- Supplementary measures for stray animals

Section 12

Reduction of numbers of stray animals.

When a member Association of the WSAVA considers that the numbers of stray animals in the community present the community with a problem, it should take this issue up with the competent authority to promote the appropriate legislative and/or administrative measures necessary to reduce their numbers in a way that does not cause pain, suffering or distress.

- i) Such measures should include the requirements that:
 - a) If such stray animals are to be captured, that this is done with the minimum of physical and mental suffering appropriate to the species of animal;
 - b) Where captured stray animals are either kept or killed, this is done in accordance with the principles as laid down in this Convention.
 - c) Only healthy, non-aggressive stray animals should be re-homed or placed back into the community.
 - d) Where applicable, stray animals should be surgically sterilized and suitably vaccinated by a veterinarian before being re-homed or placed back into the community.
- ii) Member Associations of the WSAVA undertake to promote to the responsible competent authority that:
 - a) Companion animals in the community should be permanently identified by some appropriate permanent method which causes no undue pain, suffering or distress, such as electronic microchipping or tattooing.
 - b) Details of this identification should be recorded in a central register together with the name, telephone numbers and address of their owners.

- c) This register should be accessible 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to all parties in the community responsible for the management and control of stray animals.
- d) The unplanned breeding of dogs and cats in the community should be reduced by actively promoting the neutering of these animals, preferably prior to sexual maturity.
- e) The finder of any stray dog or cat should be encouraged to report it to the competent authority.

Section 13

Exceptions for capture keeping and killing of companion animals

Exceptions to the principles laid down in this Convention for the capture, the keeping and the killing of stray animals should only be made if unavoidable in the framework of national disease control programs and, where possible, any method of killing used should conform to the provisions of Section 11.

Part four - Information and Education

Section 14

Information and education programs

The member Associations of the WSAVA undertake to encourage the development of information and education programs so as to promote awareness and knowledge amongst responsible authorities and the organisations and individuals concerned with the keeping, breeding, training, trading and boarding of companion animals, of the provisions and the principles embodied in this Convention.

In these programs, particular attention should be drawn to the following subjects:

- i) The need for training companion animals for any commercial or competitive purposes to be carried out only by persons with adequate knowledge and ability;
- ii) The need to discourage:
 - a) Gifts of companion animals to persons under the age of 16 without the express knowledge and consent of their parents or other persons exercising parental responsibilities.
 - b) Gifts of companion animals as prizes, awards or bonuses.
 - c) Unplanned breeding of companion animals.
- iii) The possible negative consequences for the health and well-being of wild animals if they were to be acquired or introduced as companion animals;
- iv) The risks of irresponsible acquisition of companion animals leading to an increase in the number of unwanted and abandoned animals.

Part five - Consultation and agreement between member Associations on the terms of this Convention.

Section 15

Welfare committee meetings

The member Associations of the WSAVA, who are signatories to this Convention, shall within five years of signing the Convention and every five years thereafter, and, in any case, whenever a majority of the representatives of the member Associations of the WSAVA and WVA so request, hold a meeting under the auspices of the Companion Animal Welfare Committee of the WSAVA to examine the application of the Convention and the advisability of revising it or extending any of its provisions. These consultations should take place at meetings convened by the WSAVA and will be chaired by the Chairperson of the Companion Animal Welfare Committee of the WSAVA.

Each member Association of the WSAVA being a signatory to this Convention shall have the right to appoint a representative to participate in these consultations. Any member Association of the WSAVA which is not signatory to the Convention, shall have the right to be represented by an observer in these consultations.

After each consultation, the member Associations of the WSAVA shall submit to the Executive Committee of the WSAVA a report on the consultation and on the functioning of the Convention including, if they consider it necessary, proposals for the amendment of Sections 15 to 23 of the Convention.

The Chairperson of the WSAVA Companion Animal Welfare Committee shall be appointed by the Assembly of the WSAVA for a five-year term. This person may be re-appointed for another five-year term after which a new chairperson shall be appointed.

The Chairperson of the WSAVA Companion Animal Welfare Committee shall draw up the agenda and rules of procedure for the consultations.

Part six - Amendments

Section 16

Amendments to the Convention

Any amendments to Sections 1 to 14 proposed by a member Association of the WSAVA or an authorised representative of the member Association of the WSAVA shall be communicated in writing to the chairperson of the WSAVA Companion Animal Welfare Committee through the address of the Secretary of the WSAVA at least 6 months prior to the next Congress of the WSAVA.

Any amendment proposed in accordance with the provisions of the preceding paragraph shall also be circulated to all member Associations of the WSAVA at least 90 days prior to the next Congress of the WSAVA and shall be discussed at a meeting of the WSAVA Companion Animal Welfare Committee to be convened at the next Congress of the WSAVA.

After due discussion, any amendment may be adopted by a two-thirds majority of the member Associations of the WSAVA represented at this meeting. Postal votes from representatives of member Associations who are signatories to the Convention will be allowed at such meetings. The text of the adopted amendment shall be forwarded to the member Associations of the WSAVA within 60 days of the Congress at which the amendment was discussed.

The Assembly of the WSAVA shall ratify any amendment to this Convention at the next annual Congress of the WSAVA unless one of the member Associations of the WSAVA who are signatories to the Convention has notified objections, in which case the amendment will be subject to discussion at the next meeting of the WSAVA Companion Animal Welfare committee as per the provisions of paragraphs 1 to 3 above.

Part seven - Final provisions

Section 17

Signature, ratification, acceptance, approval

This Convention shall be open for signature by the member Associations of the WSAVA.

The member Association shall take such signature as acceptance and approval of the terms of the Convention.

Copies of the signed Instruments of acceptance or approval shall be deposited with the Secretary of the WSAVA.

Signatories to this Convention agree to assist the cause of animal welfare by bringing the provisions of this Convention to the attention of the responsible competent authorities in their countries and by using their influence to bring about responsible legislation reflecting the provisions of this Convention wherever possible.

Section 18

Territorial clause

Any member Association may, at the time of signature or when depositing its instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession, specify the territory or territories to which this Convention shall apply.

Any member Association of the WSAVA may, at any later date, by a declaration addressed to the Secretary of the WSAVA extend the application of this Convention to any other territory specified in the declaration.

Any declaration made under the preceding two paragraphs may, in respect of any territory specified in such a declaration, be withdrawn by a notification addressed to the Secretary of the WSAVA.

Section 19

Reservations

Any member Association of the WSAVA may, at the time of signature or when depositing its instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession, declare that it avails itself of one or more reservations in respect of either Section 6 and / or Section 10, paragraph ii, sub-paragraph (a). No other reservations may be made.

Any member Association of the WSAVA, which has made a reservation under the preceding paragraph, may wholly or partly withdraw it by means of a notification addressed to the Secretary of the WSAVA. The withdrawal shall take effect on the date of receipt of such notification by the Secretary of the WSAVA.

Section 20

Renunciation of this Convention

Any member Association of the WSAVA may at any time renounce this Convention by means of a notification addressed to the Secretary of the WSAVA.

Such renunciation shall become effective on receipt by the Secretary of the WSAVA and notification of the renunciation shall be circulated to all member Associations of the WSAVA within 90 days of receipt of the notification.

Section 21

Notifications

The Chairperson of the Companion Animal Welfare Committee of the WSAVA shall notify the Secretary of the WSAVA of any member Association which has become a signatory to this Convention or which has been invited to become a signatory to this Convention. The Secretary of the WSAVA shall notify all member Associations within 90 days of the receipt of such notification.