



PHILLIP ISLAND NATURE PARKS ANIMAL WELFARE CHARTER 2022

Phillip Island Nature Parks (the Nature Parks) is a unique conservation organisation that was established in 1996 under the Crown Land (Reserves) Act 1978 “for the conservation of areas of natural interest or beauty or of scientific, historic or archaeological interest”.

We acknowledge that the Crown Land we are privileged to manage forms part of the traditional lands of the Bunurong who know the Island as ‘Millowl’. We also recognise that the Land, Waters and Sea are of spiritual, cultural, and economic importance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. We are an organisation committed to recognition and reconciliation, and pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.

The Nature Parks accepts the responsibility of treating animals with care and respect. We acknowledge all animals under our care deserve a ‘good life,’ experiencing good physical and mental health, and being provided with an environment that enables positive experiences, choice, and expression of the widest possible range of natural behaviours.





ANIMAL WELFARE DEFINED

The Nature Parks accepts the agreed definition of animal welfare as the state of an animal as it attempts to cope with its environment (*Broom, 1988*). This definition incorporates both the emotional and physical health of an animal and can be measured on a scale from negative to positive. Animal welfare considerations may refer to actions or interventions designed to minimise suffering in an individual animal living in the wild. While decisions are primarily based on the welfare outcome for an individual, conservation status of species can also influence decision-making by prioritising those more at risk of extinction. However, the focus remains on preventing suffering, and improving the animal's quality of life.

Our approach



The Nature Parks introduces its first Animal Welfare Charter, adopting a holistic approach to achieve the highest standards of animal welfare in our conservation, tourism, education, and research activities. The organisation is committed to maintaining an evidence-led approach to conservation and animal welfare, which has delivered outstanding outcomes on Phillip Island (Mollw) and beyond. This unique evidence-led and tourism funded approach to conservation has helped to make the Nature Parks a global leader in tourism-integrated conservation.



Vision



The vision of Phillip Island Nature Parks is to be a place where conservation and ecotourism excellence inspire people to actively protect the environment. Its purpose is to protect nature for wildlife and inspire people to act.

To achieve this vision, the Nature Parks works towards securing thriving terrestrial and marine ecosystems for wildlife populations, acknowledging that this is a shared responsibility with all who visit, live, and connect with Phillip Island (Millowl).

Our Animal Welfare Commitments

The Nature Parks has conducted extensive work on wild populations that has been extremely successful and well regarded.

We also care for captive native animals at the Koala Conservation Reserve, which was established to support the conservation of koalas on Phillip Island and surrounds, where native wildlife will only be held for conservation purposes, an animal's natural habitat will be reproduced to the extent possible, and the animal's behavioural and physiological needs will be prioritised in management activities.

This Charter outlines a series of overarching principles guiding the organisation's decision-making process and commitments under four pillars.

PILLAR 1

Animal welfare commitments for wildlife tourism

PILLAR 2

Animal welfare commitments for wildlife conservation programs

PILLAR 3

Animal welfare commitments for wildlife care, rescue, rehabilitation, and release

PILLAR 4

Animal welfare commitments for Churchill Island farm animals

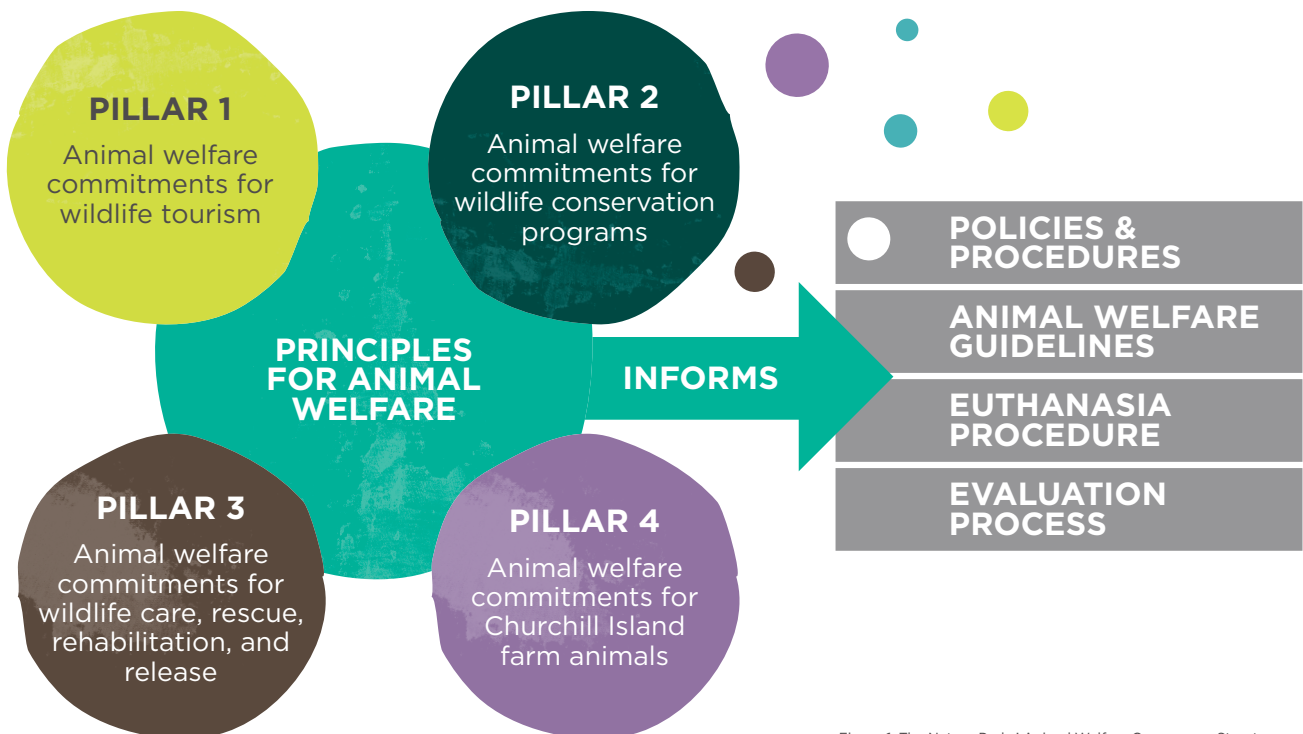


Figure 1: The Nature Parks' Animal Welfare Governance Structure



Our Animal Welfare Commitments continued

While many of these activities already operate to the high standard, the Nature Parks has identified that the domestic and farm animal management at Churchill Island requires consideration to reach the high standards of this Charter.

The Nature Parks is in a unique position to promote animal welfare through interaction and management of both wild and captive animals. As such, we are committed to exceeding the requirements of animal welfare legislation and guidelines and acknowledge both its legal and moral responsibilities in animal care.

Over the next three years, the Nature Parks is committed to continuous improvement through the implementation of the Five Domain Model (Mellor et al., 2020). This process will further identify areas of potential welfare compromise as well as areas where animal welfare can be enhanced.

FOUR PILLARS OF ANIMAL WELFARE

The Nature Parks has a diverse range of animal welfare responsibilities across the Crown Land Reserve it manages, and within the businesses that it operates. There are four focus pillars of animal welfare activities which are described on the following pages.

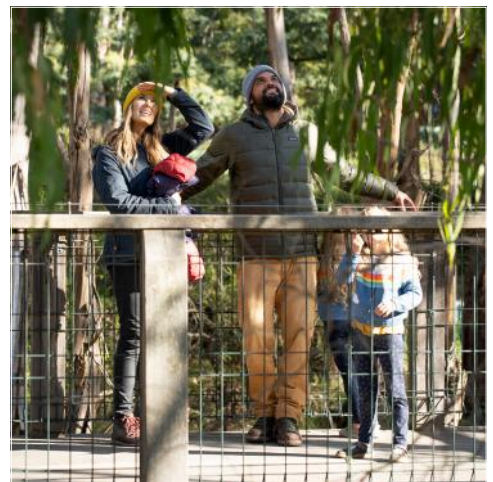
PILLAR 1

Animal welfare commitments for wildlife tourism

The Nature Parks engages in wildlife tourism experiences such as the Penguin Parade, Koala Conservation Reserve and Churchill Island. These aim to connect visitors to nature and inspire future conservation-friendly behaviour. The revenue from these experiences goes towards our conservation outcomes, so tourism complements the role in upholding conservation and the commitment to ensuring good animal welfare.

We commit to all wildlife tourism activities being conducted in accordance with best practice animal welfare standards by:

- **Ensuring** animal behaviour is not interrupted, and visitor experiences promote authentic, responsible, and respectful wildlife watching.
- **Delivering** credible and strong conservation messages and interpreting natural animal behaviours leaving visitors informed and inspired to act for nature.
- **Discouraging** wildlife feeding by visitors and acknowledging it is prohibited across all the Crown Land Reserves, and strongly discouraged by wildlife management authorities.
- **Making sure** facilities or assets used for tourism are designed in a way that minimises impact on the wildlife through considering the environmental footprint, lighting impacts, equipment use, traffic access, excessive noise etc.
- **Training** our tourism staff in wildlife response and ecotourism accreditations, enabling staff to intervene when they observe wildlife welfare concerns.
- **Continuously monitoring** and reviewing wildlife populations exposed to visitor experiences to ensure good animal welfare is upheld.



CASE STUDY

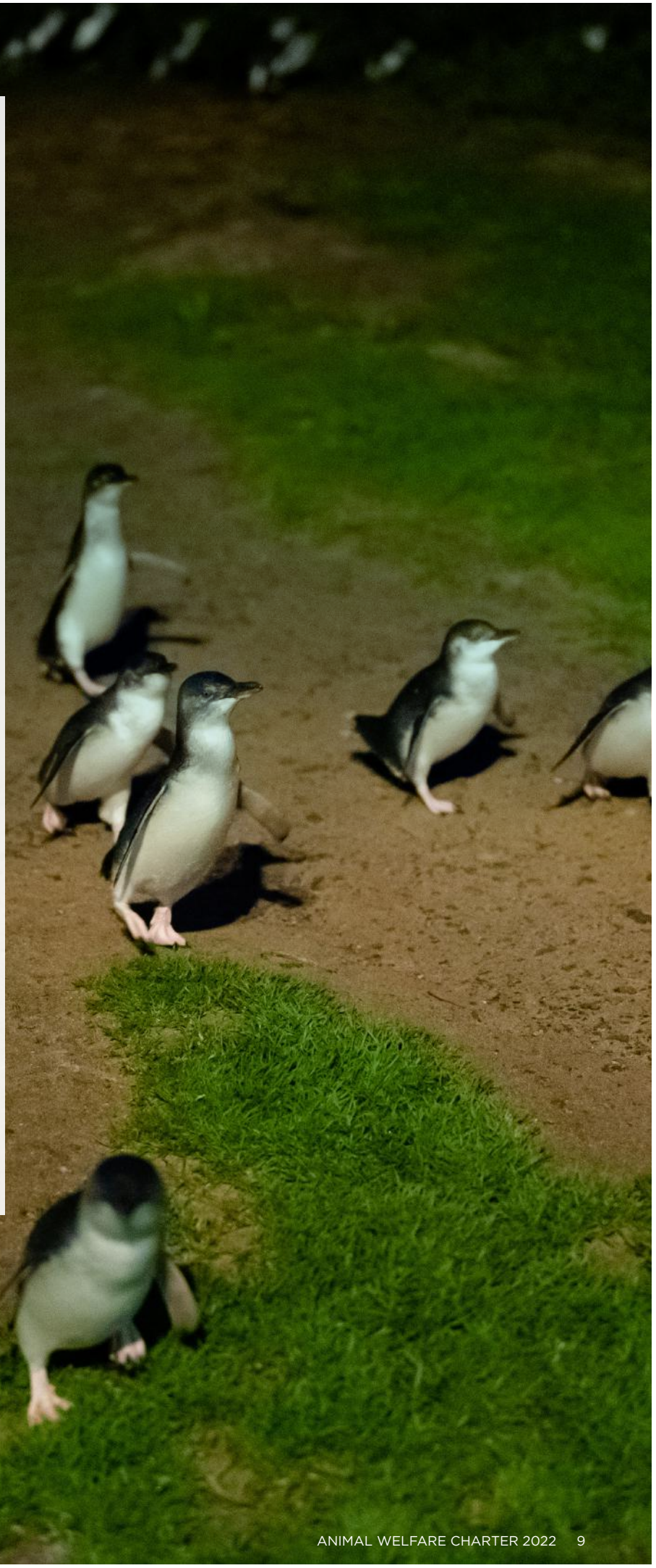
Little Penguins

The Penguin Parade - the most popular tourist attraction for the Nature Parks - is a global example of successful tourism-based conservation and a vital element to our ecotourism business model.

With over 50 years of continuing research on the Little Penguin (*Eudyptula minor*) colony at the Penguin Parade, there is no evidence that well-regulated tourism has had a negative impact on the penguins on Summerland Peninsula. Research carried out in the early 1980s found predation by foxes and dogs, road mortality and other factors associated with a nearby housing estate to be the causal factors of decline. Since then, control of foxes, progressive removal of the housing estate, and the implementation of traffic management strategies has resulted in an increase in penguin numbers from 15,000 to around 40,000, making Phillip Island globally the largest colony for this species.

The welfare of the penguins is the first consideration to any changes in the visitor experiences, infrastructural development, or operational delivery. Our experienced team regularly evaluate, monitor, manage and predict emerging issues and their impacts on penguin welfare.

We have carefully designed, trialed, and evaluated over the years various infrastructure changes and practices to accommodate for this: from implementing viewing stands on the beach and raising walkways above the ground to restrict visitor movement and allow penguins unrestricted access to the colony and breeding areas, to installing artificial breeding boxes and having only soft lighting amongst others.



PILLAR 2

Animal welfare commitment for wildlife conservation programs

The Nature Parks believes that native wildlife should remain in its natural environment whenever possible to achieve the best welfare outcomes. Our conservation work includes protection and re-establishment of natural habitat, threatened species recovery and reintroduction programs (e.g. Eastern barred bandicoots), humane management and intervention of overabundant native and invasive pest species, and conservation research programs.

Within these activities **we commit to:**

- **Ensuring** any wildlife management activities including the control of invasive species or over-abundant native wildlife is conducted in a way that complies with government standards and legislation, is evidence-led, humane, and effective.
- **Embracing** innovation and new advancements in humane animal control methods.
- **Demonstrating** best practice animal welfare in threatened species programs and in preparing individual animals for release to the wild.
- **Continuously** monitoring and reviewing the animal welfare impact of our activities on native wildlife.
- **Designing** all conservation programs in a way that minimises disturbance of native wildlife.
- **Securing** protection of natural habitat on the Island through engagement with Traditional Owners, local community, Bass Coast Shire Council, State Government, and businesses.
- **Considering** the individual animal welfare implications of our research and management activities and ensuring the most welfare-friendly research methods are used.
- **Providing** appropriate independent governance and oversight of our conservation work through the maintenance of two independent committees being:
 - An independent Animal Ethics Committee, which is required by Law, and is responsible for overseeing the ethical approach of the Nature Parks research projects and procedures involving wildlife.
 - The Scientific and Research Advisory Committee which includes outstanding external scientists who advise the Research Department and the Phillip Island Nature Parks Board on scientific programs and strategic research directions.



CASE STUDY

Adapting new technologies to further improve animal welfare practices for Australian fur seals

To safeguard the Australian fur seal (*Arctocephalus pusillus doriferus*) the Nature Parks is leading vital research using advanced technology. Monitoring the population of seals and pups at major breeding colonies across Victoria is the best way to understand the health of the Bass Strait ecosystem, causes of reduction in pups born in any given year, mortality research or animal welfare.

The use of Remote Piloted Aircraft (RPA) - drones - helped improve techniques for surveying seal breeding sites and develop methods that compared to the traditional methods of physical presence of staff reduce disturbance to seals. The drones allow greater ease and frequency of seal surveys resulting in more precise data outcomes and reduce potential risk to the welfare of the seals and safety of the staff, which is particularly important during the breeding season when young pups are most vulnerable to disturbance. This technology has enabled scientists to perform annual surveys to detect and understand rapid changes, compared to only every five years in the past.

The Nature Parks harnesses the involvement of the global community through an online citizen science platform named 'SealSpotter' where participants get involved with conservation outcomes by counting the seals. This helps to foster a connection between people, seals, and the marine environment, through engaging them in direct population surveys and conservation efforts, whilst enabling us to use new technologies to improve our research and the welfare of the seals.



PILLAR 3

Animal welfare commitments for native wildlife care, rescue, rehabilitation, and release

The Nature Parks houses Victorian koalas (*Phascolarctos cinereus*) and Bush Stone-curlew (*Burhinus grallarius*) at the Koala Conservation Reserve. These animals form part of an ecotourism experience for the Nature Parks.

For those animals that are living their lives under our care, **we commit to:**

- **Continuing** to undertake captive animal practices that ensure animals have a 'good life' through application of the Five Domains Model (Mellor et al., 2020).
- **Designing** and building captive environments to support the animals' natural behaviours.
- **Ensuring** that animals can express choice and control in their daily activities.
- **Establishing** breeding plans to consider conservation value and animal welfare outcomes.
- **Providing** animals with a high quality, nutritionally appropriate diet, and present food in a way that encourages natural foraging behaviour.
- **Supporting** all individuals with proactive health care and the highest quality medical treatment when required.
- **Encouraging** all our visitors not to touch or interrupt the animal's natural behaviour.



The Nature Parks also cares for individuals being housed temporarily for rehabilitation at the Wildlife Clinic. Wildlife rehabilitation is defined as “caring for injured, sick, or orphaned native animals and providing access to veterinary assessment and treatment where required, then nursing care and support, with the goal of restoring them to their natural condition and habitat” (Animal Welfare Victoria, 2022).

We commit to animal welfare in wildlife rescue and rehabilitation through:

- **Decision-making** for wildlife rescue and rehabilitation cases will consider animal welfare firstly, as well as conservation implications.
- **Providing** all native wildlife under care with the best chance for rehabilitation and return to their natural habitat.
- **Ensuring** all our wildlife rescue and rehabilitation guidelines are evidence-based and draw on expertise from leading professionals and practitioners in this field through partnerships with other organisations or engagement of specialist advice.
- **Providing** our Wildlife Clinic with appropriate housing for injured seabirds (and other native wildlife) including victims of emergencies in events like oil spills, heatwaves, bushfires, and road injuries.
- **Maintaining** expertise to assist in wildlife emergency events such as marine pollution, marine wildlife welfare issues, heatwaves and bushfires when requested by the lead agency.
- **Training** other key agencies and volunteers in seabird rehabilitation practices so they can support any future oil spill emergencies.
- **Supporting** research designed to build a stronger evidence base behind rehabilitation approaches.
- **Continuing** to showcase care and compassion for wildlife by engaging the community in the stories of animals undergoing rehabilitation.



CASE STUDY

Koala Rehabilitation and Research

During Australia's 2019-20 catastrophic bushfires, the Nature Parks embraced inter-agency collaboration to support koala rehabilitation and release for East Gippsland.

With thirteen rescued koalas receiving specialised veterinary care from Zoos Victoria veterinarians prior to being transferred to our natural, semi-wild facilities at the Koala Conservation Reserve for further rehabilitation.

The Nature Parks facilities at the Koala Conservation Reserve can accommodate up to thirty-five koalas at any time, across twelve purpose-built enclosures. We will continue to embrace minimal handling practices to ensure little stress for all koalas that are undergoing an intense rehabilitation program. To date, twelve koalas from these bushfires have been released back into the wild at East Gippsland.

We will also carry on our support for koala health research by partnering with key agencies to learn about treatment for sarcoptic mange, a parasite which causes severe welfare implications for koalas.



PILLAR 4

Animal welfare commitments for farm and domestic animals

The Nature Parks believes that farm (and other domestic) animals have value and deserve respect as individuals, and for their role in society. We operate Churchill Island for the purpose of representing the significance of the working farm to the history of this heritage listed site.

We commit to animal welfare for these animals through:

- **Continuing** to undertake farming practices that ensure farm animals have a 'good life' through application of the Five Domains Model (Mellor et al., 2020).
- **Conducting** tourism activities that nurture respect for farm animals.
- **Demonstrating** how native wildlife (threatened species programs) and farming can co-exist to achieve positive outcomes in both food production and conservation.
- **Securing** a caring and enriching home for all domestic animals at the end of their working life.
- **Undertaking** tourism activities involving farm animals to promote best farming practices and human/animal interactions.
- **Improving** the documentation of animal management methods to ensure best practice animal welfare and compliance can be evidenced.

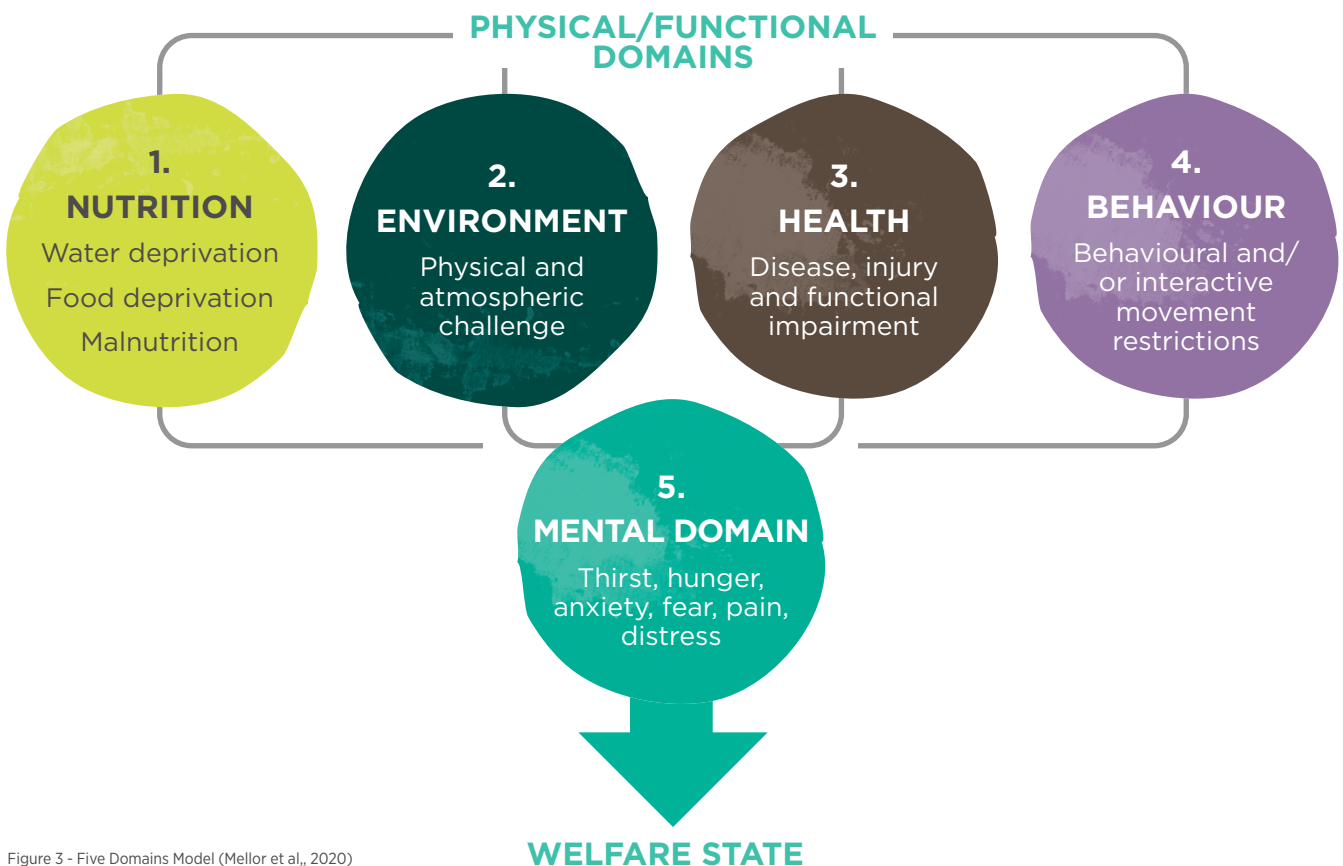


Figure 3 - Five Domains Model (Mellor et al., 2020)

CASE STUDY

Working farm on Churchill Island

Churchill Island has been farmed since the 1950s with the Nature Parks managing the farm since 1996 to uphold animal welfare and conduct annual inspections by a qualified veterinarian. The facilities and enrichment programs are constantly evaluated and improved to meet the behavioural needs of all animals present, including cattle, sheep, horses, and a number of resident birds (cockatoo, rooster, and hens), many of which can freely roam the farm.

The establishment of a healthy population of endangered Eastern barred bandicoots creates a narrative with visitors on how livestock can co-exist with native animals. In this example, the native animals also bring benefits to agriculture and land management through turning over soil and eating insects.



PRINCIPLES FOR ANIMAL WELFARE

The Nature Parks' purpose to 'protect nature for wildlife' naturally aligns with animal welfare goals by building compassion for wild and captive animals and Phillip Island's (Millowl) special places.

Our organisational values reflect our commitment to animal welfare.

Nature Conservation is Paramount:

Nature conservation must be integral to everything we do for us to deliver upon our purpose and achieve our vision. This value will help ensure that all of our activities either improve the environment or minimise harm in every way possible.



To implement this value with regard to animal welfare, **we commit to:**

- **Recognising** that many animals, especially higher vertebrates, feel and experience emotions.
- **Acknowledging** the everlasting connection of First Nations Peoples to nature and culture on Phillip Island (Millowl) is to be respected, nurtured, and adopted in animal welfare management.
- **Considering** individual animal and population level impacts in our decision-making around land management, threatened species conservation, wildlife research, and ethical tourism.
- **Understanding** that humane euthanasia may be appropriate in certain circumstances where it is in the best interest of the individual (to alleviate incurable pain and distress) or for the conservation of native wildlife populations.

Engaging Experiences: The way our staff engage with each other, our stakeholders, and our visitors has a big impact on our success. We want our visitor experiences to inspire and delight as we provide a window to Phillip Island's natural environment. We also want our team to experience a welcoming, fun, and inspiring working environment and culture. If we are successful in creating this type of workplace, our stakeholders' experiences will also become more engaging.



To implement this value with regard to animal welfare, **we commit to:**

- **Showcasing** to our visitors and community (local and abroad) our commitment to animal welfare.
- **Striving** to be a leader in ethical wildlife tourism practices by putting the welfare of animals first and communicating this through natural experiences.

Future-Focused: The Nature Parks has never faced a greater challenge than today's environment. Our greatest asset is our ability to sustain our own funding. It is imperative that we achieve this financial sustainability once again. To get there we need to be more adventurous, adaptable and driven by our financial success.



To implement this value regarding animal welfare, **we commit to:**

- **Embracing** an evidence-based approach that fosters continuous improvement in our standards and technology.
- **Continuing** to be future-focused, flexible and adaptable in identifying risks and opportunities to enhance animal welfare.

Delivering outcomes together:

Our partnerships include our staff, volunteers, community, the Bunurong, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, and the many groups and organisations we work with. All of our achievements are through the collective effort of many. We achieve more when our teams work effectively together and when we utilise the knowledge, skills, and experience of our community and partners.



We commit to:

- **Collaborating** and building partnerships with our community to provide solutions and expertise in animal welfare.

Figure 2: The Nature Parks Values

REGULATORY AND COMPLIANCE FRAMEWORK

The Nature Parks is committed to risk management and compliance as critical business processes to support its vision and strategic objectives. The management of wildlife both within and outside the Nature Parks is the responsibility of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) Victoria. The Nature Parks will make decisions with priority given to ongoing animal welfare, habitat protection and the safety of visitors and staff, in consultation with DELWP and in accordance with the Victorian State Government Animal Welfare Policies and Guidelines.

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PUBLICATIONS

The Nature Parks develops and undertakes innovative research and technologies to support conservation and tourism activities across the business. The effectiveness of animal welfare outcomes is monitored as part of an adaptive management cycle and the research is shared globally to educate, promote, and update evidence-based industry practices.

You can find the list of our animal welfare publications on our [website](#).





PHILLIP ISLAND NATURE PARKS ANIMAL WELFARE CHARTER 2022

CREDITS

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