

ASSISTANCE ANIMAL POLICY

Purpose:

This policy outlines the approach of Numurkah Singers Theatre Inc. (NSTI) to supporting access for individuals accompanied by trained assistance animals, in line with the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth), and the Domestic Animals Act 1994 (Vic). It ensures that individuals with a disability can fully participate in our events, performances, rehearsals, and activities.

Scope:

This policy applies to all committee members, volunteers, performers, members, and members of the public attending events or participating in activities organised or hosted by NSTI.

Policy Statement:

NSTI welcomes and supports the inclusion of individuals accompanied by trained assistance animals. We recognise that assistance animals are not pets but medical devices that support people with disability in a range of important tasks.

Definition – What is an Assistance Animal?

Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth), an assistance animal is:

- Accredited or trained to assist a person with a disability
- Behave appropriately in public (no aggression, barking, or disruptive behaviour).
- Maintained to a high standard of hygiene and must not pose a risk to public health (e.g. clean, well-groomed, and toilet-trained).
- Accompanied by a person with a disability who relies on the animal for support in daily life or in managing their condition

Examples include guide dogs, hearing dogs, mobility assistance dogs, seizure response dogs, and psychiatric assistance dogs.

Access Rights:

Persons accompanied by an assistance animal are entitled to:

- Attend rehearsals, meetings, and performances
- Bring their assistance animal into any public or participant area
- Be treated with respect and without discrimination

- Be provided with reasonable accommodations to ensure safety and inclusion

Assistance animals are permitted in all areas where members of the public or participants are normally allowed. However, access may be restricted if the presence of the animal poses an unreasonable risk to health or safety that cannot be reduced through reasonable measures. These rules apply under the Domestic Animals Act 1994 (VIC) and the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth), both of which take precedence over the Health Act.

Responsibilities of Handlers:

Handlers of assistance animals are expected to:

- Keep the dog under effective control at all times (leash, harness, or reliable voice command).
- Ensure the dog is clean, well-groomed, parasite-free, and toilet trained.
- Prevent disruptive or unsafe behaviour (no aggression, barking, begging, or jumping on people).
- Make sure the dog does not pose a risk to health or safety in public places.
- Provide proper care for the dog's wellbeing (food, water, rest, veterinary care).
- Respect businesses and the public by ensuring the dog's presence is non-intrusive and task focused.
- Be prepared to provide reasonable evidence, when asked, that the dog is trained and meets assistance animal standards.

Committee and Volunteer Responsibilities:

Committee members and volunteers should:

- Treat all individuals with respect
- Avoid drawing attention to the assistance animal.
- Respect the handler's privacy regarding their disability.
- Refrain from interacting with (touching, feeding, or distracting) the Assistance animal without the handler's permission each time.
- Assist in making reasonable accommodations if the handler requires support.
- Report any concerns or incidents involving an assistance animal to the President or Secretary.

Exceptions:

An assistance animal may only be excluded from the premises in the following circumstances:

- The animal poses a direct threat to the health or safety of others that cannot be mitigated through reasonable modifications or precautions.
- The animal is out of control, and the handler does not or cannot take effective action to regain control.
- The animal is in a sterile or food preparation area that is restricted and not open to the public.

Exclusion should only occur as a last resort, and any decision must be based on objective evidence, not assumptions or preferences. If an assistance animal is

excluded for safety or legal reasons, alternative arrangements must be offered to ensure the individual's participation is supported.

Complaints and Concerns:

Any individual who feels they have been unfairly treated or denied access due to an assistance animal may raise the matter with the Committee in writing. All complaints will be handled with sensitivity, confidentiality, and in accordance with our grievance procedures which can found on our website or by emailing numurkahsingersinc@gmail.com.

Document Control

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