



## **VOLUNTEER TRAINING NOTE 3**

### **SAVEM volunteer behaviour**

#### Becoming known

SAVEM began in 2009. We have so far established good relations with other Emergency response organisations at head office and regional levels.

Becoming more widely known at brigade level takes time, and is inevitably enhanced at the time of Activation for a specific incident.

#### Consistent behaviours

SAVEM's obligations, and that of all its volunteers, is to develop a reputation for credibility and reliability, made manifest in our day to day actions. Training is targeted at achieving that reputation throughout our organisation.

This can generate frustration in volunteers. We understand this, but this is the way it has to be.

The "hurry up and wait" mantra is important.

We **always** wait until the Control Agency gives us clearance to enter an affected area. This clearance may be revoked if conditions alter unfavourably.

We cannot send volunteers into incidents without training. That could result in actions and behaviours outside safe protocols. SAVEM's reputation could be permanently tarnished from a single occurrence, such as if we needed rescue ourselves, or put a crew from another agency at risk.

#### Reputation once lost

There are already other animal rescue individuals tarnished with that reputation: when they

- evaded police road blocks to enter danger areas,
- entered without PPE (personal protective equipment) and PPC (personal protective clothing) e.g. they were in an active bushfire area dressed inappropriately
- entered without back up (someone knowing where they were, no radio),
- entered without the necessary resources to do an effective job (carrying injured animal out hammocked in their T shirt instead of in an animal carry cage).

And so on.

SAVEM is a serious agency doing a serious job. No room for cowboys, bunny-huggers and self aggrandisement.

#### Veterinary focus

SAVEM is **Veterinary** Emergency Management. The core of the work is applying these professional skills toward animal welfare.

The many volunteers from allied fields who approach us are very welcome. There are a myriad of integrated tasks that need doing that make the professional task effective. The team doing those tasks frees the veterinarians to concentrate on applying their knowledge, skills and expertise.

The focus is **animal welfare**. This is NOT 'save every animal'.

For example - some regional animal species are well known to be easily subject to stress. So a koala coming from a bushfire event, possibly injured, its habitat destroyed, is already stressed. The prognosis is often guarded – in South Australia, possible decline toward renal failure, slow demise, and in the wild, suffering and death.

(A few years ago another agency intensively treated six such koalas, after three months, one was left, and its future uncertain).

The interventionist approach might involve intensive handling by humans, the stress and discomfort of transport and treatment, a long time (months) of rehabilitation before release is a possibility, assuming no adverse reaction from territorial species already resident.

This is not good animal welfare. At SAVEM, decisions will be made in the best interests of the animal.

The “giving a koala drink” photo opportunity may look good on TV. The animal welfare condition it underscores can be questionable.

The Best Practice approach, especially with wildlife, may look to outsiders like not enough is being done: minimum handling, a quiet, darkened enclosure with least intrusive primary treatment of dehydration, burns, and the provision of pain relief.

The follow on veterinary triage and prognosis may indicate euthanasia.

#### The mantra

This is not easy territory. We do what is best for the animal, not what makes us feel good.

