



LARGE ANIMAL EMERGENCY RESCUE TRAINING



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AgriFood Skills International Fellowship

Fellowship funded by AgriFood Skills Australia



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Also extract published on www.issinstitute.org.au

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Executive Summary

Melinda Howlett and Celia Turnbull were privileged to be awarded the inaugural ISS Institute AgriFood Skills International Fellowship. The Fellowship was used to investigate and learn specialised techniques in Large Animal Emergency Rescue methods from experts in the UK and the USA.

The description 'Large Animal Emergency Rescue' refers to the practice of rescuing individual large animals from hazardous situations. This is distinct from the 'rescue' by animal welfare personnel of an animal from abuse or neglect situations.

The impetus for pursuing this training was the Fellows' personal involvement in a number of serious, distressing and costly situations involving animals caught in hazardous situations. The importance of understanding how to act in emergencies involving animals was further highlighted in the recent Victorian bushfire tragedies.

The rescue of large animals in emergency situations is a difficult and risky business. Horses, cattle and other large heavy animals can find themselves trapped in predicaments such as having fallen into rivers, down cliffs, into wells, drains, caves and trapped in boggy dams.

Similarly, injured recumbent animals are difficult to move to safe ground where veterinary attention can be given. For example, animals injured on roadways during traffic accidents, on the racetrack or injured within the confined space of an animal transportation vehicle, all require specialised rescue techniques to remove the animal and allow for safe treatment of the animal.

Large animals are a valuable economic commodity of the Australian agricultural, export and racing Industries. Equally, animals are a valuable social commodity and Australians have a very high personal emotional attachment to their animals. A study in the USA revealed that more than 80 per cent of animal owners would risk their own lives in order to save their animal. This highlights the importance and necessity of the safe rescue of animals.

In many countries, a 'natural disaster planning protocol' involving the management and rescue of animals during times of floods, fires and droughts is in place. Emergency personnel are trained in horse and cattle handling skills to deal with these situations.

The rescue of large animals in emergency situations is carried out in Australia under various local and state by-laws and statutes, by rangers, council and park officials, veterinarians, animal welfare workers such as Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA), and by emergency response personnel such as police, fire and state emergency services. These services are fragmented and often involve rescue personnel with little or no training in animal handling and rescue techniques. Many times, the emergency intervention is carried out by members of the public, including the animal owners, or members of the farming community (depending on the nature of the emergency), often at great risk to personal safety.

There is no national or state standard for dealing with large animal emergencies, other than those involving exotic disease outbreaks.

Howlett and Turnbull interviewed a number of leading large animal rescue specialists and animal disaster management planners in the UK and in various states of USA, including North Carolina, and Kentucky. They undertook training courses conducted by the British Equine Veterinary Association and the Hampshire Fire Rescue Service in the UK, and with the Technical Large Animal Emergency Rescue trainers, Dr Tomas and Rebecca Gimenez, in Kentucky, USA.

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They also discussed training procedures with Dr Richard Mansmann, Clinical Professor at North Carolina State University College of Veterinary Medicine, and with John and Deb Fox from the Large Animal Rescue Company, Felton Fire Department, California. They discussed animal disaster planning and mitigation with Chester Lowder, Executive Director of North Carolina (NC) State Animal Response Team (SART) and Sharron Stewart, Director of Emergency Programs Division, North Carolina Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services.

The training involved hands-on practical training using mannequin and live animals (horses and llamas) in many rescue techniques, with thorough instruction in safety, scene management, animal behaviour and handling, extrication techniques and animal first aid.

The aim of this Fellowship was to bring back specialised rescue skills that can be passed on in training programs for the range of Australians involved with animals, from horse owners, farmers, veterinarians, animal welfare officers, and rangers to horse trainers, racing officials, livestock transporters and emergency personnel. The overall aim of each rescue is to maximise the chances of a positive outcome for the animal, avoiding animal deaths, plus ensuring the safety of all involved personnel.

The Fellows believe that this report will inspire the beginnings of an appreciation within Australia for the need for a national coordinated approach to animal emergency rescue and animal disaster response and mitigation, and will provide a skill and knowledge framework for undertaking such work.