

## Animal Sentience

### **Position:**

The Edmonton Humane Society (EHS) recognizes that many animals are sentient beings. As evidence of sentience in animals continues to grow, EHS believes the precautionary principle should apply when determining the treatment of animals, and animal sentience should be assumed even when evidence of it is inconclusive.

### **Definitions:**

Sentience: The ability to perceive and feel both positive and negative experiences, including pain, fear, distress, and pleasure.

Precautionary principle: In the context of animal sentience, when evidence of sentience is inconclusive, we should assume the animals is sentient, and alter our treatment of them accordingly.

### Summary

- Sentient animals are capable of suffering and must be treated humanely.
- When sentience is not entirely established, EHS believes the precautionary principle should be assumed to minimize potential harm to these animals.
- EHS supports the legal recognition of animal sentience to promote the humane treatment of animals.

### Rationale

- Sentience refers to the ability for an animal to feel or perceive positive and negative experiences, such as pain, distress, and pleasure.
- Since sentient animals can feel both physical pain and experience positive and negative affective states, we should alter our treatment of them to be as humane as possible and protect their welfare.
- Sentience has been established in certain animals, and evidence of sentience in a variety of species is growing.
- Evidence of sentience across a variety of animals exists. The following animals are considered or have shown evidence of sentience:
  - Vertebrates such as mammals, birds, reptiles, fish, and amphibians;
  - Decapod crustaceans such as lobsters and crabs;
  - Cephalopods such as octopuses and squids;
  - Insects
- When sentience is not entirely established, EHS believes the precautionary principle should be applied to minimize potential harm to these animals.

- Animals are recognized as sentient beings in legislation in several countries including Peru, Sweden, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom.
- Federal legislation in Canada and provincial legislation in Alberta have not yet recognized animal sentience.
- EHS believes sentience should be legally recognized in order to protect the welfare of animals and encourages for animal welfare policies to account for sentience when determining how animals are treated.
- EHS supports the continued humane research of sentience in animals to best inform legislation and animal welfare practices.

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