

DEH - STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

KEEPING VENOMOUS SNAKES

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972* provides for a permit system to keep native animals (including mammals, birds and reptiles) in captivity.
- 1.2 The keeping and trading in native animals has the potential to impact on wild populations unless there are systems in place to ensure accountability for the legal possession of animals and the manner in which they are managed.
- 1.3 Special consideration is required for a person to keep venomous snakes. Venomous snakes are of particular significance as they may require special feeding or housing, and special expertise for handling and security.

2. APPLICATION

- 2.1 This policy addresses:
 - (a) Safety to permit holders handling snakes, and any other person who has access to these snakes;
 - (b) The welfare of the animals; and
 - (c) The cost to the community for hospital treatment of people suffering from snake bites from captive animals.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In 1997, following extensive public consultation, the *Wildlife Regulations 1990* were amended to enable the implementation of a species based permit system. This involved the preparation of two schedules which listed animals which could be readily kept based on their status (both in captivity and in the wild) and ease of keeping (animal welfare). As a consequence, the keeping of the majority of venomous snakes requires a person to hold a Specialist Permit.
- 3.2 Following three separate incidents during 1988 concerning Taipan bites, a series of meetings were held with individuals experienced in the keeping of venomous snakes and representatives from relevant organisations to develop a policy on the keeping of venomous snakes. From the recommendations of these meetings the original Department's policy was formulated.
- 3.3 The policy was revised in 1995 after consultation with the Fauna Consultative Committee (previously called the Consultative Committee for the Keeping and Trading in Native Fauna), the SA Herpetology Group, the South Australian Museum and various private keepers.

4. PRINCIPLES

- 4.1 Access to wildlife
 - 4.1.1 The Department for Environment and Heritage (DEH) promotes fair and reasonable access to wildlife within parameters that address the conservation status of species, proper accountability for possession and appropriate standards of husbandry.

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4.1.2 South Australia promotes the concept of private people being able to keep any species of native animal as long as the animal is legally acquired and the person has sufficient experience and knowledge and appropriate facilities to keep the animal. There is no prohibited list of native animals in South Australia.

4.2 Public safety

Venomous snakes can present a considerable risk to public safety. This policy has been developed in the interests of minimising this risk.

5 OBJECTIVES

5.1 To develop and implement standards for the keeping of venomous snakes in order to minimise risk and enhance animal welfare.

5.2 To promote the management of risks and safety amongst permit holders keeping venomous snakes.

6 POLICY

6.1 Pre-requisites

6.1.1 Applicants must be over 18 years of age. Consideration will be given to applicants over 15 years where their legal guardian provides a letter supporting the application.

6.1.2 The applicant must supply the name and contact number of two people who can attest to the applicant's ability, knowledge and experience in the handling of venomous snakes. These referees must hold or have Specialist permits authorising the keeping of venomous snakes and be experienced in the husbandry of these animals.

6.1.3 The Applicant must provide a copy of a current senior first aid certificate issued by an approved first aid training provider (eg. St John or Red Cross). The course undertaken must include a component dealing with snake bite treatment.

6.2 Permit endorsements

6.2.1 Two species of venomous snake, namely *Boiga irregularis* (Brown Tree snake) and *Drysdalia masterii* (Master's snake) are listed as basic species, and do not require a specialist endorsement. All species not listed under paragraph 6.2.2 do not require a Venomous Snake Keeping Endorsement.

6.2.2 For specialist permits there is a graded system based on the applicant's experience in both husbandry and handling of those venomous snakes. These endorsements are:

(a) Endorsement 1 – Easily kept or reasonably placid dangerous snakes namely *Rhinoplocephalus nigrescens* (Small-eyed Snake), *Denisonia maculata* (Ornamental Snake), *Suta suta* (Curl Snake), *Pseudechis porphyriacus* and *guttatus* (Red-bellied Black Snake and Spotted Black Snake) and all species of *Demansia* (Whip Snakes).

(b) Endorsement 2 – Very difficult to keep and or highly venomous snakes or species considered likely to cause a severe or life threatening bite, namely all species of *Pseudechis*, except *P. porphyriacus* and *P. guttatus*; all species of *Acanthophis* (Death Adder), *Notechis* (Tiger Snakes), *Pseudonaja* (Brown Snakes), *Austrelaps* (Copperheads) and *Hoplocephalus* (Broad-headed Snakes).

(c) Endorsement 3 – Extremely venomous snakes including all species of *Oxyuranus* (Taipans) and *Tropidechis carinatus* (Rough Scaled Snake).

6.3 Upgrading permit endorsement

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- 6.3.1 Endorsement of permits would normally commence with the lowest category. Endorsement to the next level is subject to further application after experience in the husbandry and keeping venomous snakes has been gained.
- 6.3.2 A minimum of 12 months keeping either a *Pseudechis porphyriacus* (Red-Bellied Black Snake) or *Pseudechis guttatus* (Spotted Black Snake) is required prior to upgrading to endorsed 2 species.
- 6.3.3 A minimum of 12 months keeping of endorsed 2 species is required prior to upgrading to endorsed 3 species.

NOTE: Nomenclature follows Cogger (2000). The policy applied to all species listed in section 6 also applies to all synonyms recognised after Cogger (2000).

Species names

Nomenclature relating to reptiles is subject to ongoing revision. There have been several recent taxonomic revisions relating to reptiles that have been carried out but some new names have not been widely published or accepted.

Where taxonomic revisions occur which relate to species referred to in this policy, the species names given in this policy will be substituted by the revised taxonomy.

7 PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES

7.1 Facilities for Keeping Venomous Snakes.

7.1.1 Permit holders must ensure that they:

- (a) Address all animal welfare considerations in respect of keeping snakes in captivity (see Regulation 18 of the *National Parks and Wildlife (Wildlife) Regulations 2001* regarding standards for the keeping of protected animals).
- (b) Prevent the escape of snakes out of an enclosed environment.

7.2 Safety and Welfare

- 7.2.1 Permit holders should ensure that they minimise the possibility of snake bite either to the permit holder or any other person. They should provide first aid equipment for the treatment of snake bite on site where venomous snakes are being held.
- 7.2.2 It is recommended that Permit holders have a written emergency response plan in place which has procedures that cover any incident involving snake bite (self or others) and snake escape.

7.3 Security and Access.

- 7.3.1 It is a minimum requirement that all venomous snakes shall be kept in either lockable, sealed containers or in containers within a lockable and sealed room which prevents both unauthorised entry and/or tampering with cages and the escape of snakes.
- 7.3.2 Where snakes are kept in locked containers, the room housing the snakes should be “snake-proof”, to prevent the possibility of accidental escape.
- 7.3.3 Access to venomous snakes must be limited to persons under the supervision of the permit holder or to persons holding permits with the same endorsement.

7.4 Applications.

- 7.4.1 Applications are to be made in writing on a specialist application form.
- 7.4.2 Applicants must address the pre-requisites for obtaining a permit.

7.5 Assessment & Inspections.

- 7.5.1 Premises will be inspected by DEH (or its representative) to evaluate suitability prior to any permit being granted.
Photographs/plans/specifications of enclosures/room/premises may be required.

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7.5.2 DEH must be satisfied that the applicant has the appropriate facilities, ability, knowledge and experience to safely and properly care for venomous snakes.

7.5.3 Referee checks will be undertaken to assist in determining if the applicant has the appropriate ability, knowledge and experience to safely and properly care for venomous snakes.

8 REVIEW

8.1 Public Consultation regarding Endorsements.

8.1.1 Species may be re-categorised within endorsements groups by Interested people putting forward proposal(s) outlining:

- (a) Husbandry requirements; and
- (b) Venomous nature.

8.1.2 Proposals will be circulated to the Captive Fauna Consultative Committee, the South Australian Museum and the South Australian Herpetology Group.

8.1.3 If there is a rational case for change, reclassification will occur.

8.2 The policy will be reviewed within five years of the date of approval.

9 LEGISLATION

9.1 Authority to keep and trade in protected reptiles is given under Section 58(1) of the *National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972*.

9.2 Conditions relating to the keeping and trading in native fauna and keeping of records are applied under the *National Parks and Wildlife (Wildlife) Regulations 2001*.

10 APPENDICES AND REFERENCES

Nil

This policy was endorsed by the CFCC at its meeting on 11 August 2003

This policy was endorsed by the WAC at its meeting on 1 October 2003

This policy was adopted by the Director, Science and Conservation, DEH

Signed by

Dated: