



WILDLIFE ETHICS COMMITTEE

Guidelines for Submitting an Application for Ethics Approval

Ethical Considerations

Investigators and teachers have personal responsibility for all matters related to the welfare of the animals they use and must act in accordance with all requirements of the Australian Code of Practice for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes (7th Edition 2004). It is the responsibility of investigators, teachers and institutions using animals to ensure that the use of animals is justified and that the welfare of the animals is always considered. They must promote the development of techniques that replace the use of animals, minimise the numbers of animals used and refine procedures to avoid pain or distress in animals (the 3Rs - Replacement, Reduction and Refinement).

The Code of Practice defines an animal as:

any live non-human vertebrate; that is, fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals, encompassing domestic animals, purpose-bred animals, livestock and wildlife, and also cephalopods such as octopus and squid.

Researchers should also be familiar with the South Australian Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1985, including the requirement that any person using animals for teaching, research or experimentation must be licensed to do so by the Minister for Environment and Conservation. The Animal Welfare Unit of the Department for Environment and Heritage administers the licences.

Application Process

It is important that applications for ethics approval are submitted well before the planned starting dates. No project can start without **written** approval from the Committee.

The Wildlife Ethics Committee meets about once every six weeks. All applications are circulated to the Committee before to the meeting to allow members reading and consideration time. Contact the Executive Officer for submission closing dates, which are 10 days prior to each meeting.

Incomplete applications, or applications that do not contain sufficient detail, will require follow-up questions and/or may need to be re-submitted. This will delay the approval process. The Executive Officer can offer guidance on completing the form.

Common problems with applications that may result in delays of approval include:

- The use of animals, and numbers required, is not adequately justified.
- The use of less invasive alternatives is not adequately addressed.
- The use of non-animal alternatives (eg modelling; historical data) is not adequately addressed

- There is inadequate or insufficient information, with respect to aims, objectives and benefits.
- The description of the procedures, including what will happen to which group(s) of animals, is not clearly explained.
- There is inadequate information about how animals will be monitored or how any adverse effects will be managed.
- The role, experience and training of personnel is inadequately addressed.

The application form is designed to help applicants to appreciate the ethical aspects of their project and to enable members of the Committee to understand fully the ethical implications of the use of animals in the project.

The Wildlife Ethics Committee Standard Operating Procedures can be used as a guide to ensure that your application is in accordance with approved procedures. If you apply to use methods that are not recommended by the Committee, your application may take longer to assess.

- Standard Operating Procedure for the Euthanasia of Research Animals
- Standard Operating Procedure for the Collection of Hair and Feather Samples
- Standard Operating Procedure for the Use of Live Traps to Capture Terrestrial Vertebrates
- Standard Operating Procedure for the Use of Microchips
- Standard Operating Procedure for the Use of Tracking Tunnels
- Standard Operating Procedure for the Transportation of Live Animals
- Standard Operating Procedure for the Collection of Voucher Specimens

Contact the Executive Officer for copies of Standard Operating Procedures

Completing the Form

PLEASE NOTE: As all the application forms are constantly being updated and improved, please ensure that you always request the most recent version of each form from the Executive Officer before submitting your application.

The application form is in three parts:

Part One - Core application form

All applicants must complete this. It must be completed in lay language that can be understood by people without a scientific background.

Part Two - Additional Sections

This part contains questions specific to certain activities. Applicants only need to complete (and attach) the additional sections that apply to their project.

Additional Section A - Attachment of Radio-collars or Transmitters
Additional Section B - Conducting a Fauna Survey
Additional Section C - Collecting Blood or Tissue Samples

Additional Section D – Holding and Transporting Live Animals

Additional Section E - Anaesthesia

Part Three - Declaration

This must be completed by all applicants, signed, countersigned by the Head of Department (or equivalent) and returned by fax or mail.

Answering the Questions

The boxes are expandable and you may use as much space as needed to adequately answer the questions. You may attach other documents if appropriate, but they must not replace any section of the form.

Part One - Core application form

Section 1 Project details

The title should describe the work proposed. The lay summary must be written in everyday language. Approvals for on-going or lengthy projects are given for a maximum of three years, after which a new application must be submitted.

Section 2 Applicant and Personnel Details

The applicant has overall responsibility for the project, including fulfilling all reporting requirements.

Students cannot be applicants. If the research is a student project, the supervisor should be the applicant, but students are encouraged to contribute to the preparation of the application so they understand the process and responsibilities.

You must state the role of each person involved and explain how their qualifications and experience are appropriate to the procedures to be performed and relevant to the species to be used. Include details of any short courses in techniques, animal care and handling and legal responsibilities that have been undertaken by the research workers involved in the project.

If the researchers are inexperienced, you must state what arrangements will be made to ensure that appropriate training will be carried out prior to the commencement of the project. Explain how inexperienced researchers or assistants will be supervised.

Section 3 Aims, Justification, Potential Benefits and Replacement

The Code of Practice requires that scientific and teaching activities using animals may be performed only after the decision has been made that they are justified, weighing the predicted scientific or educational value of the project against the potential effects on the welfare of the animals. The overview of the project, including its aims and objectives is essential to help Committee members understand the basis of the request to use animals and the potential benefits of the project.

In writing your overview, you must use everyday language that can be understood by non-scientists. The answer must be clear and simple, and avoid scientific terminology.

Investigators and teachers are required by the Code of Practice to consider the principle of Replacement of animals with alternative models where possible. Applicants have responsibility to inform AECs about the suitability of alternatives.

Section 4 Procedures and Refinement

The Code of Practice requires that proposals must identify and justify the impact of all aspects of the project on an animal's wellbeing from the time it is obtained until the project is completed, and detail how that impact will be minimised. To fulfil this requirement, all activities involving animals must be described in full.

The Additional Sections should also be completed where relevant. These ask for specific information relating to particular procedures.

Section 5 Animals Required and Reduction

Irrespective of whether or not the experiments are likely to cause distress to the animals, the Animal Ethics Committee needs to assess whether or not the use of animals will allow worthwhile scientific or educational objectives to be met. Each project must use no more than the minimum number of animals necessary to ensure scientific and statistical validity.

You must be able to adequately justify the number of animals needed. The statistical basis for the number of animals required must be provided. For many projects, the number of animals to be used can best be determined by a power analysis. A statistician may assist you in designing the project to ensure that the maximum amount of valid information is obtained from the minimum number of animals.

Section 6 Monitoring and Emergencies

You must inform the Committee of the extent to which the monitoring of animals and their care has been considered in the project design. Your answers must explain how you will detect signs of pain and distress, and how you will assess animals regularly for these signs.

You must give details of possible emergencies eg breakdown of cooling or heating systems; unplanned staff absence. The Committee needs to know that adequate plans are in place to cover such emergencies.

If you have completed any Additional Sections, you do not need to duplicate answers here, however, you must ensure that the monitoring of animals, and emergency plans, are included in the application.

Section 7 Impact Category

When completing the Impact Category for your project, the examples given are a guide only to some procedures that may fall under these categories. Please assess your methodology in relation to what you think best categorises the procedures. Mark more than one Category if appropriate.

NOTE: Killing animals humanely for Museum voucher specimens is Category B – Animal Unconscious No Recovery. Category H – Death as an Endpoint only applies in those rare cases where a procedure is designed to cause the death of animals with no humane end-point.

Section 8 Pain Classification

Your assessment of the likely pain or distress must correlate with the stated Impact Category.

Section 9 Use of Drugs

You must list all drugs to be administered including sedatives, analgesics and preventives (eg Vit E/Selenium). You must also complete Attachment E if you are using anaesthetics.

Section 10 Risk Assessment

Your answers must identify all the potential risks that may arise from the project, including risks to the animal, risks that may arise from the procedures, and risks to the researcher and other people involved in the project. In providing strategies that will be used to prevent, minimise or manage the potential risks identified for this project, you should consider the 3-R's (Replacement, Reduction and Refinement)

Part Two - Additional Sections

Applicants may need to complete one or more of these sections, depending on the type of project to be conducted. You do not need to complete or attach any sections that do not apply to your project.

The Additional Sections are designed to help you provide the Committee with all the information needed in order to adequately understand what you are doing. Applications that do not contain sufficient detail will be delayed.

Additional Section A – Attachment of Radio-collars or Transmitters

- You should use alternative, less invasive methods wherever possible.
- You must give evidence that the methods used, including weight and attachment are ones that have been previously used on the same or similar species and have been proved to be satisfactory.
- Total package weight (collar, transmitter, battery, aerial and bonding material) should ideally be less than 5% of the animal's bodyweight, less than 4% for bats.
- Where freely attached, antennae should cause minimum disruption to the movement of the animal. Animals should be closely tracked for the first 24 hours. You should include a discussion of what you will do if attachments are found to be causing distress to the animal.
- Transmitters should normally be removed from all animals at the end of the survey. You will need a good justification if you do not plan to do this.
- Collars or harnesses should not be used in species where they would interfere with locomotion e.g., aquatic, burrowing animals.

When completing the Cost/Benefit Analysis, the potential negative impacts on the animal should include consideration of aspects such as physical discomfort, increased energy expenditure, increased risk of predation, reduced foraging ability, capture and handling stress, surgical risk, infection risk and entanglement potential.

Additional Section B - Conducting a Fauna Survey

The Wildlife Ethics Committee understands that it is often not possible to accurately predict how many animals will be captured in some studies. However, an attempt must be made to explain the number of animals that need to be caught in order to satisfy your research or teaching purpose. For fauna surveys, you should refer to previous studies, in similar habitats and in the same season, to indicate likely species/ genus and give numbers within a realistic range. The number of traps to be employed, plus known trapping success from similar surveys, could also be used to give an estimate of numbers.

A critical element in biological surveys is accurate, challengeable and reviewable taxonomic identifications. Applicants will be expected to liaise closely with the SA Museum, and seek advice on the numbers and species to be collected as voucher specimens. You will need to provide the Museum with the grid co-ordinates (as Lats and Longs in degrees, minutes and seconds, or AMG) for a rectangular area that encompasses the survey area plus a surrounding buffer zone. From this, the Museum can produce a suitable species list on which to base their advice. See the WEC Standard Operating Procedure for the Collection of Voucher Specimens for more information.

Additional Section C - Collecting Blood or Tissue Samples

Blood collection impacts upon the pain and distress experienced by the animal, therefore refinements to the methodology must be considered in order to meet the requirements of the Code of Practice. The most appropriate methodology will vary according to the species, individual animal characteristics (eg. age, sex), the volume of blood required, and the requirements of the research. If you apply to use methods that are not recommended by the Committee, your application may take longer to assess.

The recommended maximum volume of blood collected as a single sample is 10% of the circulating blood volume. As a general guide, the circulating blood volume of most animals is approximately 5-10% of the animal's bodyweight. Thus a maximum of 1% of the total body weight is the recommended volume of blood collected.

Only small amounts of blood are needed for most DNA studies. Applicants will need to clearly justify why amounts larger than this are needed. Because taking blood from many animals is stressful to both animal and researcher, blood should only be an option where other tissues (eg ear biopsy, fur) are not useable.

Additional Section D - Holding and Transporting Live Animals

The time for which an animal is held should be minimal and consistent with the achievement of scientific or educational objectives. Animals must be held in a way that minimises stress and injury. Researchers must base management practices for captured animals on available information about the normal behaviour of the species and the likely response to captivity.

Close confinement devices such as bags and crates must:

- allow animals to rest comfortably;
- minimise the risk of escape and injury;
- be adequately ventilated;
- maintain animals within appropriate levels of ambient light, temperature and humidity; and
- minimise the risk of disease transmission.

Transportation can cause animals distress due to confinement, movement, noise and changes in environment and personnel. The extent of any distress will depend on the animals' health, temperament, species, age and sex, the number of animals travelling together and their social relationships, the period without food and water, the duration and mode of transportation, environmental conditions, particularly extremes of temperature, and the care given during the journey. The conditions and duration of the transportation must ensure the impact on animal health and welfare is minimal. There must be satisfactory delivery procedures in place, with animals received by a responsible person.

Transportation by air should be in accordance with International Air Transportation (IATA) regulations.

Additional Section E – Anaesthesia

You must be able to explain how the use of anaesthesia will benefit the animal, not just the researcher. Research activities that are liable to cause pain of a kind and degree for which anaesthesia would normally be used in veterinary practice must be carried out under anaesthesia. Researchers must be aware that the effects of a series of stressors, such as trapping, handling, transportation, marking and sampling can be cumulative, and that anaesthesia may be recommended in these situations.

If using anaesthesia in the field, animals should be able to experience uneventful recovery to full consciousness in an observation area where they are able to maintain normal body temperature and are protected from injury and predators.

Part Three – Declaration

You must give details if the project involves another animal ethics committee. Where projects are to be conducted at more than one institution, or researchers from another institution are involved, there must be clear communication between all involved AECs and researchers. Where parts of a project take place at different institutions, each AEC may choose to approve and monitor only those parts that take place at their institution. However, it is essential that each AEC is fully informed of all aspects of the project and ensures that any cumulative impact of procedures on animals is considered.

You must ensure that you have the appropriate licence/permits. The listed licences/permits are a guide only; it is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that they are in compliance with all relevant legislation.

In particular, note that under the South Australian 'Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1985' any organisation or person undertaking a research or teaching project within South Australia involving animals **must** obtain a Licence from the Office of Animal Welfare, Department for Environment and Heritage. The Licence is approved by the Minister for Environment and Conservation. The purpose of the Licence is to ensure that the person or institution has suitable experience, facilities and skills. A Licence costs \$60.00 and is valid for two years, regardless of how many projects are undertaken.

Wildlife researchers and teachers who are not members of licensed organisations will need to obtain a Licence in their own name. Researchers from interstate or overseas institutions will need to arrange for their Institution to apply for a Licence.

Researcher Responsibilities

Reports

A written report is required every 12 months (for ongoing projects) and a Final Report is due as soon as practicable on completion of the project. Reporting forms are available from the Executive Officer.

Statistics

It is a condition applying to each South Australian Animal Ethics Committee approval that statistical information is provided to the AEC annually. The brief animal use information that researchers provide in the annual collection form is entered into a database to produce the annual submission to the Minister responsible for Animal Welfare.

It is the researcher's responsibility to complete a statistics return **before the end of February** each year, for the previous calendar year. Annual Statistics reporting forms are available from the Executive Officer.

Modifications

Approval is required for any change in researcher, methodology, or animal numbers. The Executive Committee may give interim approval for a minor modification, but all other modifications must be considered at a full meeting in the same way as new applications. Contact the Executive Officer for Modification application forms.

Accidental Deaths/Complications

Any unexpected deaths, or complications that may impact on the wellbeing of an animal used in the study, must be reported immediately to the Wildlife Ethics Committee. The WEC recommends that whenever possible, an autopsy should be conducted in the event of a death.

In the event of a death or complication, contact the Executive Officer and provide a written report giving details of the project details, a description the adverse event including date(s), the species and numbers involved, the cause (where known) and an explanation of the remedial action taken.

Record Keeping

The legislation requires you to keep records of the animals that you use, and everything that you do with the animals allocated to your project. These must be made available to the Committee (or an external review panel) on request. Examples are field notebooks, datasheets, or daily feeding charts.

Access to Facilities and Work Sites

The Committee is required to monitor all approved projects, and may make inspections of animal holding facilities or work sites to ensure that activities are being conducted as approved by the Committee and in accordance with the Code. Inspections of remote field locations may be performed by a delegate and can be substantiated with photographs or videos.

Contact Details

Executive Officer - Wildlife Ethics Committee

Research Management Section

Plant Biodiversity Centre

Department for Environment and Heritage

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