

WILDLIFE ETHICS COMMITTEE **Submitting an application form policy**

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 for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes (8th Edition).

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 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 Animal Welfare 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 Sustainability, Environment and Conservation. The Animal Welfare Unit of the Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (DEWNR) 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 Wildlife Ethics Committee (WEC).

The WEC meets at least once every eight weeks. All applications are circulated to the Committee prior to the meeting to allow members reading and consideration time. Refer to the website for deadline dates to receive all submissions.

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 application 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 (e.g. 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 are 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 Committee's policies 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.

- Collection of blood from wildlife
- Collection of hair and feather samples
- Collection of voucher specimens
- Euthanasia of research animals in the field
- Reporting adverse events
- Submitting an application form (this document)
- Transportation of live animals
- Use of live traps to capture terrestrial vertebrates
- Use of microchips for marking wildlife
- Use of tracking tunnels
- Visit the DEWNR website to download these [**policies**](#).

Completing and submitting the application form

The application form is available from the DEWNR website under [**Common forms**](#). Then click on [**Wildlife**](#) link. No details are saved online so it is important that you save the template first, before filling in the form on your computer.

In some cases, several institutions work collaboratively on a project. In this case, you may need to apply to each of the following:

- your organisation's AEC (for interstate or independent researchers this is the SA AEC nominated on the [**licence**](#) you are working under)
- the AEC of each organisation collaborating on the project
- the institutional AEC of any teacher supervising a research student
- the AEC with responsibility for the animal holding facility.

When you have completed the application form:

- save it to your computer
- select the committee(s) that the form is to be emailed to
- click the Email button
- print a hard copy of the form.

Once the application has been signed by all relevant parties, send an electronic copy to the Wildlife Ethics Committee Executive Officer (see Contact details below). Where you are applying to multiple AEC's, contact each institution for advice on whether or not hard copies must be submitted and, if so, how many copies.

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.

Project details

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

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.

Aims, justification, potential benefits and replacement

The Code 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 plain english 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.

Procedures and refinement

The Code 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.

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.

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 e.g. breakdown of cooling or heating systems; unplanned staff absence. The Committee needs to know that adequate plans are in place to cover such emergencies.

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.

Pain classification

Your assessment of the likely pain or distress must correlate with the stated impact category.

Use of drugs

You must list all drugs to be administered including sedatives, analgesics and preventives (e.g. Vitamin E/Selenium). Include concentration, dose rates and volume.

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).

Q 4.1 Capture methods

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.

Q 4.2.1 Collection of biological samples (e.g. hair, tissue, blood etc.)

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. The most appropriate methodology will vary according to the species, individual animal characteristics (e.g. 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 (e.g. ear biopsy, fur) are not useable.

Q 4.3 Anaesthesia or sedation

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.

Q 4.4 Collection of museum voucher specimens

A critical element in biological surveys is accurate, challengeable and reviewable taxonomic identifications. Applicants will be expected to liaise closely with the South Australian Museum, and seek advice on the numbers and species to be collected as voucher specimens. You will need to provide the museum with a species list on which to base their advice. This list can be obtained from DEWNR. Contact DEWNRBioDataRequests@sa.gov.au for data requests. DEWNR charge on a cost

recovery basis – no charge is applied for the actual data. See the WEC Collection of Voucher Specimens policy for more information.

Q 4.5 Transporting 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
- 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 Transport Association (IATA) [live animals regulations](#).

Q 4.6 Identification of individual animals

Animals should only be marked permanently when a project is sufficiently funded to ensure that efforts can be made to recapture/relocate the marked animal/population. The method chosen to identify individual animals must be that which causes the least distress and interference with the normal functioning of the animal within the context of the scientific purpose and should be the most appropriate for the species and the project.

Q 4.7 Tracking or monitoring technologies

- 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.

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.

Cross-institutional studies

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.

Other approvals and requirements

You must ensure that you have the appropriate licence/permits. 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 "Animal Welfare 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 of Environment, Water and Natural Resources. The licence is approved by the Minister. The purpose of the licence is to ensure that the person or institution has suitable experience, facilities and skills. A licence costs \$75.00 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 progress 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, a necropsy 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, 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

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