

# Wildlife 5.1.7 Terms of Reference

Welfare, Conservation and Science

Conservation Science

Wildlife 5.1 Animal Ethics Committee

## Animal Ethics Committee Terms of Reference

1. The Animal Ethics Committee (AEC) of the Taronga Conservation Society Australia (Taronga) is defined under the Animal Research Act 1985 and in accordance with the Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes (the Code);
2. The role of the AEC is to ensure that the use of animals is justified, provides for the welfare of those animals and incorporates the principles of Replacement, Reduction and Refinement;
3. Appointment of members:
  - i. The Committee shall be comprised of at least four persons, recommended by the Executive Director and Chief Executive, Taronga, and approved by the Taronga Board. Members are appointed for a term of three (3) years and may be reappointed by the Executive Director and Chief Executive. Members may retire at any time during their tenure in writing to the Director and Chief Executive. The Executive Director and Chief Executive or Taronga Board may remove an AEC Member for a justifiable reason at any time.
  - ii. The Committee must comprise at least one member represented from each of the four categories as specified in Clause 2.2.2 of the Code, specifically:
    - a) A person with qualifications in veterinary science and with experience relevant to the activities of the institution. Veterinarians who lack this experience must familiarise themselves with the biology and clinical characteristics of the species of animals used;
    - b) A suitably qualified person with substantial recent experience in the use of animals in scientific or teaching activities. This will usually entail possession of a higher degree in research;
    - c) A person with demonstrable commitment to, and established experience in, furthering the welfare of animals, who is not employed by or otherwise associated with the institution, and who is not involved in the care and use of animals for scientific purposes. Veterinarians with specific animal welfare interest and experience may meet the requirements of this Category. While not representing an animal welfare organisation, the person should, where possible, be selected on the basis of active membership of, and nomination by, such an organisation; and
    - d) A person who is both independent of the institution and who has never been involved in the use of animals in scientific or teaching activities, either in their employment or beyond their under-graduate education. Category D members should be viewed by the wider community as bringing a completely independent view to the AEC, and must not fit the requirements of any other Category.
  - iii. The Committee shall be chaired by a Chairperson as elected by the Executive Director and Chief Executive. The tenure of a Chairperson is determined by the Executive Director and Chief Executive. The Chairperson must act within the responsibilities set out in clause 2.2.9 of the Code.
  - iv. A quorum will be four persons with at least one member represented from each of the four categories. Categories C and D must together represent at least one-third of the AEC membership. Where a face-to-face meeting is not possible, quorate AEC meetings may be conducted through the use of video- and web-conferencing or, in exceptional circumstances,

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teleconferencing. Decisions made out of session must be ratified at the next quorate face-to-face AEC meeting.

- v. All out of session minor amendments to previously approved projects must only be approved by a quorum of AEC members or a properly constituted AEC Executive (the Chairperson and at least one member from Category C or D). These decisions must be ratified at the next quorate AEC meeting. A minor amendment is defined as a change that, in comparison to what has already been approved, has a minor or positive impact on 1) animal welfare, and 2) the anticipated scientific or educational value and the likelihood of meeting the project's objectives;
  - vi. When the AEC has conditionally approved a new project or amendment at a quorate meeting, pending a satisfactory response from the investigator regarding certain issues, the AEC may delegate the Chair, AEC Executive or other AEC members with relevant expertise to confirm final approval.
4. Remuneration can be paid to non-public sector employees as determined in accordance with the NSW Premier's Department Guidelines for NSW Board and Committee Members: Appointments and Remuneration;
  5. Members must declare any conflict of interest to the Chairperson and have that conflict recorded in the minutes of the meeting;
    - i. Any AEC members or non-members attending a meeting, who are named on a project application as a principal or associate investigator, must declare a conflict of interest and remove themselves from the AEC's decision making on matters that relate to the conflict of interest. Once such members have withdrawn, the remaining members must constitute a quorum;
    - ii. Any conflict of Committee members must be declared to the relevant Minister as per the NSW Government Boards and Committees Guidelines;
  6. The Committee shall consider all applications received in writing to Taronga, for approval to conduct scientific research and teaching on animals in the Taronga's collection and all applications by Taronga staff for approval to conduct research on animals outside that collection. The Committee will examine and approve, approve subject to modification, or reject written proposals relevant to the use of animals for scientific purposes.

The Committee will approve only those studies for which animals are essential and justified and which conform to these requirements and the Code. This should take into consideration factors including ethics, the impact on the animal(s) and the anticipated scientific and educational value.

The Committee may withdraw approval for any project at any time with reasonable cause, and will notify the PI and all personnel listed on the 'Support for New Animal Research Application Form', of the reasons why;

7. The Committee will regularly conduct inspections of Taronga's facilities used for research and education. Appropriate records will be kept, including any significant findings (both positive and negative) and problem areas that need to be addressed. Where problems are encountered, documentation will be kept of how these have been followed up and solved. For projects conducted outside Taronga, a Taronga staff member will be appointed to regularly report back to the AEC on the sites used for research. The AEC will recommend to the Taronga Board any measures needed to ensure that the standards of the Code are met;
8. The Committee will examine and comment on any institutional plans or policies which may affect the welfare of animals used for research as defined in the Animal Research Act 1985:

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- i. The Committee shall assess first the validity and justification of each proposed research program, including the consideration of factors such as ethics, the impact on the animal (or animals) and the anticipated scientific or educational value. If, in the view of the Committee, the work proposed is not valid or not adequately justifiable, the application will be declined and reasons given to the applicant; and
  - ii. The Committee shall next consider the methodology and animal care and handling involved in the proposal with respect to the statutory requirements for research to be humane and considerate. If the Committee is of the view that the research proposal will not meet these statutory requirements, the application will be declined, and reasons will be given to the applicant.
9. The Committee shall meet every two months. A meeting may be cancelled if no new, renewal or amendment applications have been submitted. However, no incoming new applications will wait more than 3 months before review;
10. In the case of emergency, all reasonable steps must be taken by animal care staff to consult with the responsible Principal Investigator before an animal is treated or euthanased. Any treatment or euthanasia must be reported promptly to the responsible Principal Investigator and the AEC with reasons for the action taken, and confirmed in writing;
11. The Committee will review, from time to time at intervals of not greater than 12 months, all research proposals that have been approved to ensure that the work is being conducted in accordance with the approvals earlier granted by the Committee and any conditions on these approvals. The Committee may formally withdraw approval for any project found contravening the statutory requirements or not being conducted in accordance with the approvals. Where inspections detect activities that are non-compliant with the Code, the Committee must ensure any noncompliant activities cease immediately and remedial action is initiated;
12. The Committee will endeavour to make its decisions by consensus. If consensus cannot be achieved the matter will go to the vote. Each member shall have a single vote. Investigators will be notified by email within seven days of the decision being made;
13. All Committee meetings will be formally minuted and a register of approved projects will be maintained;
14. The Committee will submit an annual report on its activities to the Department of Primary Industries in accordance with section 2.2.4 of the Code;
15. The Committee will perform all other duties as required by the Code; and
16. Additional representatives from Taronga Conservation Science, Conservation, Population & Welfare, and Taronga Wildlife Operations Divisions may also attend meetings as non-voting attendees to provide additional technical support with respect to animal husbandry and management and increase communication about the role and function of the Committee.
17. A person who is or has been an AEC Member or other attendee of an AEC meeting must maintain confidentiality regarding the content of applications and the deliberations of the AEC, in accordance with Taronga's Code of Conduct.