

Research & Conservation

Wildlife 5.1 Animal Ethics Committee

1. Purpose and Scope

The aim of this policy is to ensure that all Taronga Conservation Society Australia (Taronga) employees and external collaborators understand the processes and procedures of the Animal Ethics Committee (AEC) of Taronga.

2. Policy Statement

The Taronga AEC has been appointed by Taronga to oversee all animal research involving Taronga staff and animals on Taronga's zoo sites. The AEC is a statutory committee through which all projects involving the care and use of animals for scientific purposes must be approved. It is constituted in accordance with the Animal Research Act 1985 and the Animal Research Regulation 2010, which incorporated the Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes into the legislation.

The constitution and procedure of ethics committees are outlined in the Animal Research Regulation 2010 - schedule 2. It is the responsibility of the AEC under the Act to protect the welfare of animals by ensuring that their use in research is always humane, considerate, responsible, justified and incorporates methods for reduction, refinement and replacement wherever possible.

The Committee issues "Authorities" for researchers to conduct research, after assessing that their research is in keeping with policies of Taronga and that the individuals using animals for research and teaching comply with:

The Act (http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/ara1985134/)

The Regulation (<https://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/#/view/regulation/2010/425/full>)

The Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes (<https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines-publications/ea28>) which:

- i. Encompasses all aspects of the care and use of, or interaction with, animals for scientific purposes in medicine, biology, agriculture, veterinary and other animal sciences, industry and teaching. It includes their use in research, teaching, field trials, product testing, diagnosis, the production of biological products and environmental studies;
- ii. Provides general principles for the care and use of animals, specifies the responsibilities of investigators and institutions, and details the terms of reference, membership and operation of institutional AEC's (the Taronga AEC's Terms of Reference are detailed in a separate policy, *Wildlife 5.1.7 Terms of Reference*). It also provides guidelines for the humane conduct of scientific and teaching activities, and for the acquisition of animals and their care, including their environmental needs; and
- iii. Covers all live non-human vertebrates. Eggs, fetuses and embryos must be treated in a humane manner where development of an integrated nervous system is evident. Investigators should consider forwarding proposals to use higher order invertebrates to AEC's.

The Code of Practice embodies the principles of "the three R's":

- i. Reduction of animal use
- ii. Replacement of animal use
- iii. Refinement of animal use

Research & Conservation

Wildlife 5.1 Animal Ethics Committee

- The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1979. (<http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/aboutus/about/legislation-acts/prevention-cruelty-animals>).

An Animal Ethics Committee **cannot approve** a procedure proscribed under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act unless:

- i. It is an integral part of a research project and both the approval process and the conduct of the research, including the procedures, fully comply with the Animal Research Act and Regulations; and
- ii. Where the procedure is intended only to assist in the management of the animals.

Industry & Investment NSW (formerly Department of Primary Industries / NSW Agriculture) also provides policies on wildlife research that will be taken into consideration by the Committee when making their deliberations (see: <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/research/guidelines-for-research>).

3. Definitions

3.1 Employee

Employee means all staff of Taronga (including full-time, part-time, casual or voluntary staff).

3.2 Collaborator

Collaborator means all students and external scientists of an educational or research facility, including but not limited to Universities.

3.3 Principal Investigator

Principal Investigator means the Taronga employee or external collaborator primarily responsible for the management of the research proposal.

3.4 Animal

Animal means all live non-human vertebrates, such as fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals.

3.5 Lay Terms

Lay terms means the use of non-professional language when describing scientific or veterinary procedures. Simple language should be used at all times and jargon avoided.

4. References

NSW Department of Primary Industries/NSW Agriculture:

- Animal Ethics Infolink: www.animaethics.org.au
- Policies on wildlife research: <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/research/guidelines-for-research>
- DPI guidelines on collaborative research: <http://www.animaethics.org.au/policies-and-guidelines/collaborative-research>
- Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes, published by the National Health and Medical Research Council, Canberra: <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines-publications/ea28>

Research & Conservation

Wildlife 5.1 Animal Ethics Committee

- NSW Animal Research Act 1985: http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/ara1985134/
- NSW Animal Research Regulation 2010: <https://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/regulations/2010-425.pdf>
- The Prevention of Cruelty to Animal Act 1979: <http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/aboutus/about/legislation-acts/prevention-cruelty-animals>

5. Responsibility

5.1 Animal Ethics Committee (AEC) of Taronga

The Taronga AEC is responsible for the processing of ethics applications and the monitoring of welfare issues in relation to research and teaching activities conducted on animals on site at locations under Taronga's management, or by Taronga appointed employees. Where research is being conducted by Taronga staff at off-site locations, the Taronga AEC remains responsible for the direction and supervision of the employee, and while the work may be approved by another AEC, Taronga AEC should note any related ethics approval from other AEC's.

All work involving the use of animals on Taronga's sites is reviewed by the AEC and NO animal experimentation or teaching for research and education purposes can take place without a current Taronga Animal Ethics Approval. The only exception to this is where the research meets all of the following criteria:

- The animal's routine husbandry practices are not altered in any way;
- No modifications are made to the animal's enclosure for the purpose of the research (by means of either addition or removal);
- The animal's feeding regime is not altered in any way;
- No contact is made with the animals by the researcher(s); and
- The animals are not marked or tagged by any means for the purpose of the research.

In this case, an Animal Sample Request may be submitted and reviewed independently of the Taronga AEC by the Director, Wildlife, (see *Wildlife 5.4 Opportunistic Sample Policy* and *Wildlife 5.4.1 Animal Sample Request/Licence Agreement*).

The Taronga AEC is also responsible for the annual collection of information on animal use and submission to the NSW Department of Primary Industries/Agriculture.

5.2 Investigator

The Principal Investigator (PI) is responsible for ensuring that all facets of animal care and use meet the requirements of the Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes. This includes a responsibility to protect and promote the welfare of animals used.

Where the PI is a Taronga employee, it will be the responsibility of the PI to ensure that they obtain the necessary department approvals (Divisional, Veterinary, Curatorial, Nutrition, Research and Director) prior to submitting their application to the Taronga AEC. A copy of the approval sheet (*Wildlife 5.1.2 – Support for New Animal Research Applications*) must be completed in full and submitted along with the new application. It should be noted that the new applications will NOT be accepted without this form attached.

Where the PI is not a Taronga employee it will be the responsibility of the PI to ensure that they obtain approval of the operational staff and management prior to submitting their application where possible.

The PI must also apply to the Taronga AEC in advance requesting approval for any amendments to their original protocol.

Research & Conservation

Wildlife 5.1 Animal Ethics Committee

Principal Investigators must also inform the Taronga AEC when an approved project is completed or discontinued, or when there are unexpected and/or adverse consequences as a result of the research, in an expeditious manner.

Where the PI is a Taronga employee and the project is based solely on research involving animals outside of Taronga's sites, the following applies:

Where the off-site work is being carried out as part of the investigator's normal work duties the Taronga AEC is responsible for the direction and supervision of the employee.

Where the work will be done collaboratively at two or more institutions (e.g. some tasks done at a University and others at the Zoo), the PI should engage each institution in a written agreement that collaborative research will be supervised by the AEC and that collaborative researchers will agree to abide by the decisions of the relevant AEC. Each institution should be notified of the others involved in the project and which will be subject to a similar written agreement. The PI must contact each respective AEC at the time the protocol is being considered, and each AEC should be aware of, and agree on, which parts of the work each committee will supervise. Interim and final reports and any reports of adverse events such as unexpected injuries to animals or the death of an animal should be provided to all committees.

The onus is on the Principal Investigator to ensure that the AEC(s) of all institutions involved in the project are kept informed of all relevant correspondence including all relevant applications and all significant aspects of the project. The Principal Investigator is responsible for ensuring that monitoring of animals is appropriate at each site and of a standard considered satisfactory to the relevant AEC(s).

Where a Taronga employee is assisting as an investigator (but not as the Principal Investigator) on a project at another institution based solely on animals outside Taronga's sites, the Taronga employee needs to provide a copy of the AEC Authority from the overseeing institution to the Taronga AEC.

The PI is responsible for returning a completed Annual Animal Use Form to the Administrator AEC prior to 31 January each year stating animal use for the previous calendar year. The animal use form requires information on species of animals used, types of studies, whether the studies will benefit humans, or animals (or both) and whether the study is new or continuing. It also provides for progress reporting, with particular regard to the number of animals used in a research project.

All applications and reports to the Taronga AEC should be done so using lay-terms wherever possible.

6. Procedures

The process by which projects gain AEC approval is outlined diagrammatically in Figure 1. External collaborators wishing to submit proposals that involve Taronga animals must first contact the Director, Wildlife Conservation and Science, to seek approval for their program. The Director must also seek the approval of relevant Zoo departments including that of Curatorial and Veterinary. As such, proposals should be submitted to allow appropriate time for assessment by these departments prior to Taronga AEC meetings.

Applicants are encouraged to consult the relevant Guidelines when preparing their application. The Taronga AEC must assess the impact on animals of all procedures and of the project as a whole. Consequently, the application should therefore focus on what is happening to animals and what is being done to ensure their well-being.

Research & Conservation

Wildlife 5.1 Animal Ethics Committee

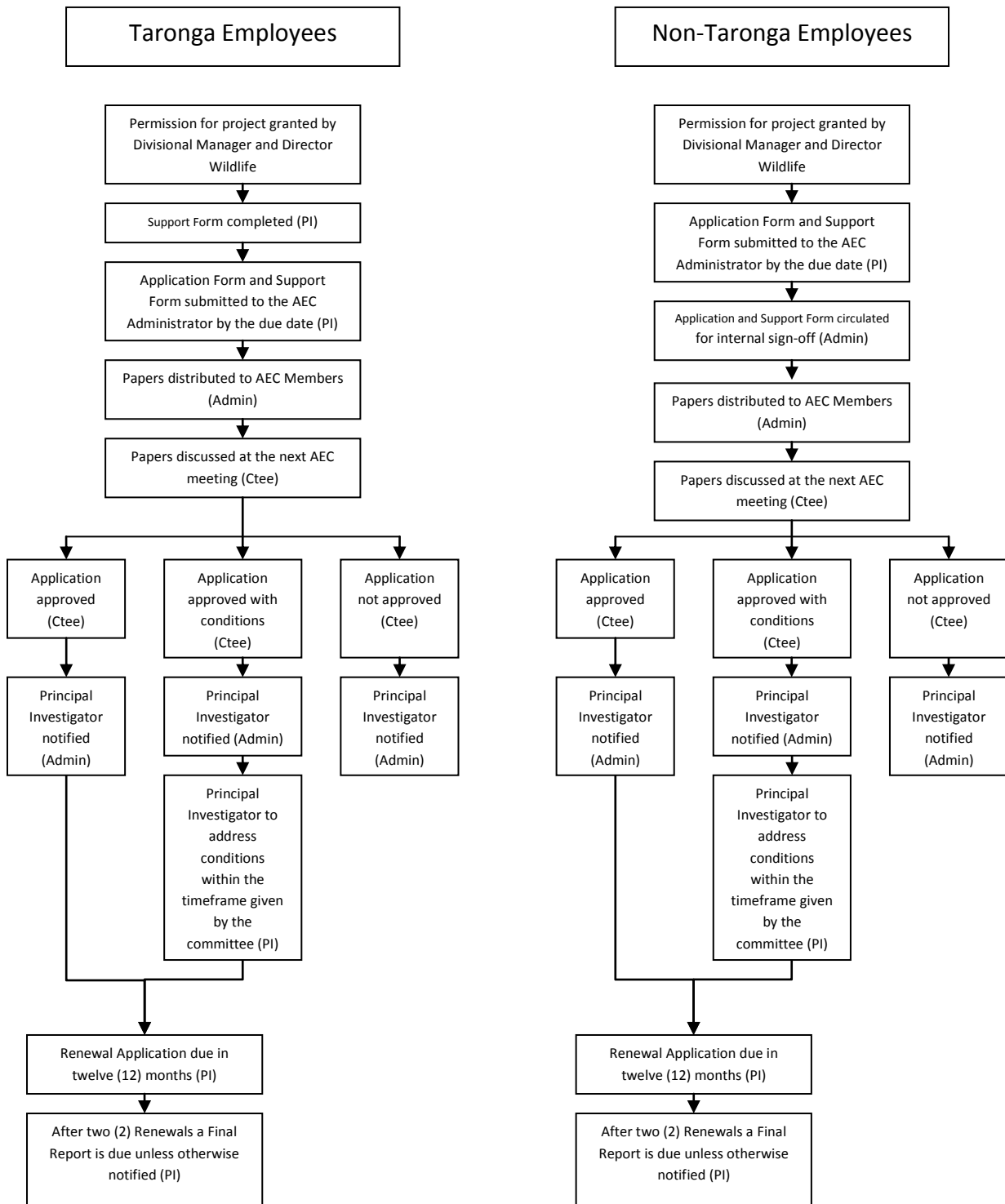


Figure 1: Process by which projects gain AEC approval
 PI = Principal Investigator
 Ctee = Committee Taronga AEC; Admin = Chair/ Administrator Taronga AEC

Research & Conservation

Wildlife 5.1 Animal Ethics Committee

6.1 New Applications

The Principal Investigator on a new project must submit a completed application *Wildlife 5.1.1 – Animal Research Application Form* to the Taronga AEC. A completed copy of form – *Wildlife 5.1.2 – Support for New Animal Research Applications* must be submitted at the same time as the application form. This form must be signed by the relevant department heads and the Director, Wildlife. Where a research application requests a change to an animal's regular diet, this support form must also be signed by the Taronga Nutritionist. Applications must be written primarily for an interested, intelligent person without a scientific background, not for a specialist. The impact of procedures needs to be clearly detailed. The application should also explain clearly why the use of animals is justified, why the species and number of animals have been chosen and that the qualifications of personnel are suitable for the procedures to be performed. Principal Investigators are required to provide a contact number for the date and time of the meeting of the Taronga AEC should they be required to participate in discussions regarding their proposed research.

6.2 Amendment Applications

Principal Investigators must inform the Taronga AEC of any changes to personnel, or any other aspect of the project. As such, Principal Investigators must submit a completed amendment application to the Taronga AEC for consideration, using the *Wildlife 5.1.4 – Animal Research Amendment Application Form*. Changes may not be made to any project until written confirmation has been provided by the AEC that the amendment request has been approved.

6.3 Renewal Applications

Continuing projects must be renewed annually. The Principal Investigator must submit a completed renewal application to Taronga AEC for consideration using the *Wildlife 5.1.3 – Animal Research Renewal Application Form*. The Renewal Application serves to provide the Institution and the Committee with information on the progress of the project.

6.4 Final Reports

Principal Investigators must inform the Taronga AEC when an approved project is completed or discontinued. As such, Principal Investigators must submit a final report to the Taronga AEC for consideration, using form *Wildlife 5.1.5 – Animal Research Final Report*. The Final Report serves to inform the Institution and the Committee of the outcomes of the use of animals within the Institution. The Final Report is to be submitted as soon as possible once a project is completed or discontinued.

6.5 Unexpected Adverse Event Reports

Principal Investigators must inform the Chair of the Taronga AEC, within 2 days, of any unexpected adverse effects encountered throughout the duration of an approved project. An unexpected adverse effect is defined as; an event that may have a negative impact on the wellbeing of animals and was not foreshadowed in the approved project or activity. In the occurrence of an unexpected adverse event, the Primary Investigator must submit a completed *Wildlife 5.1.6 Animal Research Unexpected Adverse Event Report* to the AEC. If the unexpected adverse event involves a Taronga collection animal, a *Wildlife 1.7.1 Animal Welfare Incident Report* may be submitted by a Taronga employee instead of the *Unexpected Adverse Event Report*.

6.6 Grievances

Refer to *Wildlife 5.1.8 Procedures for Grievances Regarding the Use of Animals*, *Wildlife 1.2.2 – Animal Welfare Grievance Guidelines*, or to the NSW Department of Primary Industries/NSW Agriculture website for guidelines on grievances:

www.animaethics.org.au

7. Approval

Cameron Kerr

Director and Chief Executive

Date:

Acknowledgments:

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