

# Wildlife 5.1 Animal Ethics Committee

Welfare, Conservation and Science

Conservation Science

## 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.

### 1.1 Governing principles and ethical framework

The Taronga AEC has been appointed by the Executive Director and Chief Executive, Taronga, and is approved by the Taronga Board and the NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Animal Research Review Panel (DPI sits within the NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment). Taronga is an Accredited Animal Research Establishment under the Animal Research Act 1985.

The purpose of the Taronga AEC is to oversee all animal research at locations under Taronga's management or at locations managed by other scientific collaborators where Taronga-appointed employees conduct collaborative research. 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 (the Code) into the legislation. The Constitution and Procedure of Animal Ethics Committees are outlined in the Animal Research Regulation 2010 - schedule 2. Further details on Taronga AEC's procedures are outlined in *Wildlife 5.1.7 Animal Ethics Committee Terms of Reference* (Appendix 1). 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 "Animal Research Authorities" to Principal Investigators for research and teaching activities associated with an educational outcome in science, after assessing that their programs are in keeping with policies of Taronga and that the individuals caring for and using animals for research and teaching comply with:

- The Act ([http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol\\_act/ara1985134/](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 associated with an educational outcome in science, 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, foetuses 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 embodies the principles of “the three R’s” at all stages of animal care and use:

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

The NSW Department of Primary Industries 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>).

## 2 Summary

The Taronga AEC is a statutory committee through which all projects involving the care and use of animals for scientific purposes must be approved. State and Territory laws and the Australian Code of Practice (Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes) require AECs to scrutinise both the scientific or educational value and the ethics of all proposals to use animals in research or teaching. The AEC may approve only those projects and activities that are ethically acceptable and conform to the requirements of the Code.

## 3 Definitions

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

**Collaborator:** Collaborator means all students and external scientists of an educational, research or conservation management facility, including but not limited to universities.

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

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

**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 Policy

## 4.1 Animal Ethics Committee (AEC) of Taronga

The Taronga AEC is responsible for the processing of animal ethics applications and the monitoring of welfare issues in relation to:

- Research and teaching activities conducted with animals on site at locations under Taronga's management, including the establishment of breed and release recovery programs for threatened species where a research component is involved, or
- Research conducted on free-ranging wildlife or animals held in other facilities 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 associated with an educational outcome in science 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, Welfare Conservation Science, (see Wildlife 5.4 Opportunistic Sample Policy and Wildlife 5.4.1 Animal Sample Request/Licence Agreement).

The Taronga AEC is also responsible for submitting an annual report on its animal use activities to the NSW Department of Primary Industries. The mandatory inspection by Animal Research Review Panel of Taronga's AEC and research locations occurs every four years.

## 4.2 Principal Investigators

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.

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

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.

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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 Taronga), 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 a named 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 and AEC application from the overseeing institution to the Taronga AEC.

The PI is responsible for returning a completed Annual Animal Use Form to the AEC Administrator 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. Under the Animal Research Act 1985, this information must be submitted by all holders of Animal Research Authorities and collated by Taronga for submission to NSW DPI. This information also provides for progress reporting, with regards to the number of animals used in a research or teaching project.

## 5 Procedures

### 5.1 AEC Applications and Reporting Procedures

Principal Investigators wishing to submit a new AEC application must first contact the Taronga AEC Chair ([animalethics@zoo.nsw.gov.au](mailto:animalethics@zoo.nsw.gov.au)) to seek approval for their program. Applications must then be submitted at least four weeks before the AEC meeting to allow appropriate time for assessment by relevant Zoo departments.

Projects are approved for a maximum of 3 years as standard. However, for exceptional cases involving projects with a Taronga employee as the Principal Investigator, approval may be requested for up to 5 years. The extended approval duration must be approved by the AEC Chair and Manager, Conservation Science prior to the application being submitted.

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

#### 5.1.1 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. If the project is supported by the Taronga AEC Chair and

Taronga's Manager, Conservation Science, the application must be sent to the relevant Divisional, Veterinary and Conservation, Population & Welfare managers (or their delegates) for approval. The *Wildlife 5.1.2 – Support for New Animal Research Applications* needs to be signed by the relevant departments, the Manager, Conservation Science and the Director Welfare, Conservation and Science. 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.

#### 5.1.2 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.

#### 5.1.3 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 Taronga and the AEC with information on the progress of the project.

#### 5.1.4 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.

#### 5.1.5 Unexpected Adverse Event Reports

Principal Investigators must inform the Chair of the Taronga AEC, within 48 hours (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 within 21 days (3 weeks in total). 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*.

### 5.2 Grievances Procedures

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 website for guidelines on grievances: [www.animaethics.org.au](http://www.animaethics.org.au).

## 6 Responsibility and Accountability

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| <p>Taronga</p>                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure, through the operation of an AEC, that all activities involving the care and use of animals comply with the Code</li> <li>• Promote compliance with the Code</li> <li>• Ensure and support the effective operation of the AEC</li> <li>• Identify clear lines of responsibility, communication and accountability</li> <li>• Ensure that all people involved in the care and use of animals understand their responsibilities and the requirements of the Code, have the necessary skills and knowledge, and have access to appropriate educational programs and resources</li> <li>• Regularly monitor and review the institution’s compliance with the Code</li> <li>• Ensure appropriate animal ethics committee membership</li> <li>• Ensure the animal ethics committee has terms of reference</li> <li>• Provide the animal ethics committee with adequate resources</li> <li>• Establish procedures for animal ethics committee governance and operation</li> <li>• Submit to DPI an annual review of the operation of the animal ethics committee</li> </ul> |
| <p>Taronga Animal Ethics Committee</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review and approve new and ongoing activities</li> <li>• Monitor the care and use of animals</li> <li>• Take action regarding unexpected adverse events</li> <li>• Take action regarding non-compliance</li> <li>• Approve guidelines for the care and use of animals</li> <li>• Provide advice and recommendations to the institution</li> <li>• Report to the institution</li> </ul>  |
| <p>Investigators</p>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan projects</li> <li>• Obtain approval from an AEC</li> <li>• Conduct and review projects</li> <li>• Maintain records</li> <li>• Reporting</li> </ul>   |
| <p>Animal carers</p>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support animal wellbeing</li> <li>• Avoid or minimise harm, including pain and distress, to animals</li> <li>• Ensure provisions for animals at the conclusion of their use, and disposal of carcasses and waste material</li> <li>• Maintain records</li> </ul>  |

## 7 Version Control

| Version Control | Date Effective | Drafted by | Approved By | Amendment |
|-----------------|----------------|------------|-------------|-----------|
| 1.0             | January 2013   |            |             |           |
| 2.0             | February 2018  |            |             |           |
| 3.0             | February 2020  |            |             |           |

## 8 Approval

|                           |                 |                            |             |
|---------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|-------------|
| <b>Policy Owner</b>       | Justine O'Brien | <b>Divisional Director</b> | Nick Boyle  |
| <b>Approval Authority</b> | Cameron Kerr    | <b>Approval Date</b>       | August 2020 |

## 9 Appendices

Appendix 1: Wildlife 5.1.7 Animal Ethics Committee Terms of Reference

## 10 References

- NSW DPI Animal Ethics Infolink: <https://www.animaethics.org.au/>
- NSW DPI policies on wildlife research: <https://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/content/research/guidelines-for-research>
- NSW DPI guidelines on collaborative research: <https://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>
- NSW Animal Research Act 1985: [http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol\\_act/ara1985134/](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>