

Wildlife and Small Institutions Animal Ethics Committee (WSIAEC)

Guide for describing procedures and activities to the AEC within an application

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1. PURPOSE

This guidance note is intended to provide guidance to applicants as to the WSIAEC's expectations when assessing applications. It covers some of the more common matters where clarification is required by the WSIAEC. It does not replace the requirement for applicants to understand their responsibilities under the conditions of a licence or the [Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes 8th Edition 2013.](#) (Australian code).

2. APPLYING TO THE WSIAEC

The application form is designed to provide guidance to applicants. Please read the questions carefully and fully address all the points to be covered within the application. Except for yes/no responses, if a question is not applicable to your proposal provide a brief justification as to why this is the case.

Information within the application must be consistent throughout, significant errors in consistency may result in the application being returned for correction, prior to the WSIAEC considering the proposal. This may result in delays in the approval process.

The WSIAEC is required to meet its responsibilities in accordance with legislation, including the Australian code. The governing principles, including replacement, reduction and refinement must be considered. The WSIAEC requires a significant amount of information to ensure an understanding of what will happen to the animals and how any known or potential impacts to animal wellbeing will be managed throughout the duration of the proposed animal use. The WSIAEC must be satisfied that any impact on the animals is necessary to achieve the intended outcome and that this impact is

minimised. The benefits of the intended use must be determined, by the WSIAEC, to be outweighed by the impact to the animals.

For additional information applicants are directed to the:

[Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes 8th Edition 2013.](#)

[NHMRC guide to the care and use of Australian native mammals in research and teaching.](#)

[NHMRC Best practice methodology in the use of animals for scientific purposes \(2017\) \(updated July 2018\)](#)

3. KEY DEFINITIONS (AUSTRALIAN CODE)

Activity: any action or group of actions undertaken that involves the care and use of animals, including acquisition, transport, breeding, housing and husbandry of those animals. An activity may involve one or more procedures. Activities are described in an application to the animal ethics committee.

Current best practice: a practice, procedure, method or process that has proven to be most effective in supporting and safeguarding animal wellbeing, and that:

- takes into consideration the relevant aspects of species-specific biology, physiology and behaviour
- is based on the best available scientific evidence (or, in the absence of scientific evidence, accepted practice), which includes the potential adverse impact of conditions and procedures on the wellbeing of the animals
- includes strategies to minimise adverse impacts.

Procedure: a technique employed when caring for or using animals for scientific purposes. One or more procedures may be used in an activity.

4. LANGUAGE

Plain English must be used throughout.

The WSIAEC requires the application and any appropriately referenced attachments to be clear in the intent with no ambiguity. The word 'should' is to be used where an action is optional therefore, 'must' or 'will' are usually more appropriate.

- As examples
 - 'Traps should not be set when rainfall over 3mm is forecast'. This is not acceptable. The alternate language of 'traps will not be set when rainfall over 3mm is forecast' is appropriate.
 - 'Animals should be checked twice daily'. This is not acceptable. The alternate language of 'animals will be assessed according to the animal wellbeing monitoring sheet, see attachment xx, twice daily with at least 5 hours between monitoring time points' is appropriate.

5. ANIMAL USE TABLE

All columns must be addressed. The animal number is the maximum number of individual animals to be used. If one animal is used multiple times (for example in a teaching project – see recurrent use below) this information is required elsewhere within the application.

For wildlife in the field:

- Species, and likely numbers to be encountered, can be based on investigators past experience. The number of animals (per species) approved must not be exceeded without WSIAEC approval. Provide a realistic estimate.
- For wildlife projects only; if location/s is not known, DELWP bioregions the applicant could potentially be operating in will be accepted.

6. RECURRENT USE

The same individual animal being used in multiple procedures or activities is considered recurrent use (re-use). There are circumstances where this may be acceptable, appropriate or unavoidable. However specific justification must be made and the WSIAEC must approve. It is expected, where possible that a lifetime record, of all activities an individual animal has been subjected to, be maintained. As examples:

- A dog used in teaching animal studies. One (individual) dog may be used in four teaching classes per year, and the same dog was used in a previously approved project and additionally in another currently approved project.

This 're-use' must be disclosed and justified, with consideration of rest periods and monitoring against appropriate indicators to determine the suitability for use of the animal to continue.

- Two consecutive nights at any one survey site is defined as recurrent use as there is the potential to catch the same individual twice.
- All methods that have the potential to alter animal behaviour e.g. baited cameras, call playback, rock rolling etc have the potential for recurrent use.

7. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT DESIGN AND PROCEDURES

The application to the WSIAEC must stand alone in terms of what is approved. It must be possible, through reading the application to fully understand:

- how the principles of replacement, reduction and refinement have been applied
- what will happen to the animals at all stages (sufficient detail is required to ensure an accurate understanding of all actual and potential impacts to the animal)
- that proposed activities and procedures are consistent with current best practice (or justification provided where this is not possible)
- who is responsible for the animal at each stage, and this person's competency
- what will be done to minimise the impact to animals, all potential and actual impact should be considered
- how and when the animals will be monitored, the criteria used for assessment of wellbeing and what action will be taken if abnormalities are identified
- how animals will be assessed as suitable to commence, and continue within a project
- how animals will be acclimatised
- time between procedures, and consideration for provision of rest and recovery
- the cumulative impact to the animal throughout the use (also consider, as applicable, use in other approved projects – lifetime use).

8. EUTHANASIA

This section must be filled out if euthanasia may be required in unlikely but reasonably foreseeable circumstances. If there is no-one listed on the project, who will be present to competently and humanely kill the animal, provide details of the process for seeking timely veterinary assistance. It is reasonably foreseeable injured wildlife requiring euthanasia may be encountered with projects in the field.

For privately owned animals where the animals are assessed as fit and healthy, prior to commencement of use within a project, and returned to the owner's care at conclusion, it is accepted that it is extremely unlikely an animal will require euthanasia. It may be appropriate, in the documentation for use of privately owned animals, to specify that the applicant, in conjunction with the owner will ensure timely veterinary attention is sought, and that responsibility for an animal that becomes unwell, for reasons outside of the use within the project, will be that of the owner.

9. REFERENCING DOCUMENTS WITHIN AN APPLICATION

The application to the WSIAEC must be a standalone document. Once approved it describes the approved project, which must be followed exactly. There are limited circumstances, listed below, where attachments, may be approved by the WSIAEC at the same time as the application. In such circumstances, the application must clearly specify when and how information within attached documents will be used within the project, with clear reference to appropriately labelled documents. These documents then form part of the approved application.

- Monitoring forms
 - The WSIAEC expects that animal monitoring sheets, relevant to each phase of a project be developed and submitted to the WSIAEC for approval at the same time as the application. These must be used as the method of monitoring animals and any changes to these documents must be submitted to the WSIAEC for review and approval prior to implementation of such changes.
 - There are examples of monitoring forms provided for reference as appendices to the project application form. These may be edited as required to be suitable for the project, or used for guidance in developing forms. These forms must be relabelled specifically for the project, or removed from the final version of the application.
- Suitability assessment
 - As applicable, it may be appropriate to have a documented procedure for assessment of suitability for an animal to be used within a project. Documents used for such a purpose may be included as attachments to the application, for approval by the WSIAEC.

- Use of privately owned animals
 - As applicable relevant documents must be included as attachments for approval by the WSIAEC.
- Rehoming
 - As applicable relevant documents must be included as attachments for approval by the WSIAEC.

In certain circumstances it may be appropriate to provide additional information to the WSIAEC to aid in consideration of a project proposal.

- Field manual
 - The WSIAEC expects that field manuals, (these manuals may have previously been referred to as standard operating procedures when submitting previous projects to the WSIAEC), are developed for all projects involving the use of wildlife in the field. The exception is for projects with limited animal use (for example one or two species with one or two low impact procedures). These manuals may be provided to the WSIAEC (this is encouraged) however such documents do not form part of the approved project, and are not approved by the WSIAEC. Therefore, **all relevant information must be included within the application to the WSIAEC.**
- Reference documents
 - In limited circumstances it may be appropriate to provide reference documents to the WSIAEC. These must not replace the provision of all relevant information within the application, but can be useful in providing background information. These must be considered as additional, optional reading for WSIAEC members wishing to expand their knowledge. Such documents do not form part of the approved application.

As a rule, the **WSIAEC will not review or approve standard operating procedures** when submitted as attachments to an application. In exceptional circumstances and at the discretion of the WSIAEC, a library of SOPs, specific to the applicant, may be approved. This applies to applicants that consistently submit a relatively large number of similar applications. Therefore, standard operating procedures must not be referenced within an application, except in these limited and exceptional circumstances. **All relevant information must be included within the application** (see section 6 – description of the project design and procedures).

10. INVESTIGATOR DECLARATIONS

Ensure each technique or procedure to be used, including euthanasia (if applicable) is listed.

If the investigator has undertaken the procedure less than 20 times either:

a person, who is also listed as an investigator on the project, must be nominated to be responsible for training. Or details of how competency will be obtained prior to commencing animal use within the project must be provided. For example, a recognised, structured and assessed training course.

11. PROJECTS INVOLVING WILDLIFE IN THE FIELD

11.1 USEFUL DEFINITIONS

- Survey site: The exact location where traps / cameras etc are set up within the study area.
- Study area: The wider area where survey sites are located.

11.2 STATISTICAL JUSTIFICATION AND PROJECT DESIGN

If the project is not endorsed by a statistician / biometrist for wildlife in the field the most current state or commonwealth regulator survey guidelines must be listed.

11.3 WILDLIFE PROCEDURES

The maximum number of consecutive nights the AEC allows for trapping is three unless there are no animals captured on the first night, in which case four nights is acceptable. If a lactating female is captured, the trap must be closed and not reset (i.e. not allow the possibility of capturing on two consecutive nights as this has the potential to cause significant impact on any dependant offspring). Justification must be provided, specific to the species and supported by scientific evidence, for exceptions.

The temperature range for trapping must be specified. Define extreme weather conditions including temperature ranges of heat and cold, as appropriate for the species, when trapping will not occur.

The WSIAEC allows a temperature range of minimum 4°C to maximum 35°C for trapping. If proposing to trap over 35°C, justification must be provided, specific to the species and supported by scientific evidence, for exceptions.

Conditions that would require trap and release activities to cease e.g. rainfall events etc must be specified.

All Elliott and cage traps must be checked within two hours of daylight.

Elliot and cage traps must be protected against inclement weather. Plastic bags may be used to cover the trap but should only cover two thirds of the trap. Calico must not be used as in wet weather it will become waterlogged and not provide adequate protection.

Nocturnal animals should be released early in the morning and must not be released during the day. If it is not possible to release in the morning, state the circumstances under which they may be kept until late afternoon/evening before release. Include how negative impact to animal wellbeing will be managed, how the animals will be held and justification as to why the animals cannot be released in the early morning.

Honey (creamed or not) must not be used in baits. The exposure of honey and allowing access to honey by bees is an offence under the *Livestock Disease Control Act 1994*. This restriction is due to the risk of spreading diseases found in honey, to other bees that consume the honey and take it back to the hive.

The WSIAEC recommends the use of golden syrup.

Dacron and other similar synthetic fibres are not suitable for the lining of traps. The WSIAEC recommends use of leaf litter/plant material.

Call playback must be restricted to two 1-minute periods per species. It must not be carried out during the breeding season of the target species. Justification must be provided, specific to the species and supported by scientific evidence for exceptions.

Log/rock rolling must be restricted to 10-15% of the available habitat within the study area and only those logs/rocks not embedded in the substrate are to be moved. Justification must be provided, specific to the species and supported by scientific evidence, for exceptions.

If harp trapping during the breeding season, the trap should be checked every two hours for pregnant/lactating females, and the trap closed down before dawn so that no pregnant/lactating females are held during the day to be released the following evening.

Tile surveys must include a tile removal strategy. Removal must be staged. E.g. Where <10% of tiles are found to provide habitat for vertebrate fauna, all tiles can be removed concurrently. Where >10% of tiles are found to provide habitat for vertebrate fauna, tile removal will be staged.

The use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) does not meet the POCTA definition of a scientific procedure. The activity must be described in the project application with a statement that the operator is suitably qualified and competent. A co-investigator declaration form is not required for the operator if they are only operating the UAV.

11.4 BIOSECURITY

All gloves used must be single-use, disposable PVC, non-nitrile, non-latex and non-powdered. Gloves must be worn if handling amphibians. If handling frogs, gloves must be moistened with an appropriate aqueous solution.

Where amphibians are to be captured, a description must be provided as to biosecurity measures that will be implemented to prevent spread of chytrid fungus, that accords with current best practice.

Provide information about the specific disinfectant agents (not specific brand names) to be used and their efficacy for the intended purpose of use. Active constituent concentrations are required.