



**Department of Natural  
Resources and  
Environment Tasmania**

**Animal Ethics Committee**

**TERMS OF REFERENCE**

Department of Natural Resources and  
Environment Tasmania  
Policy Branch, Strategy and Business Services  
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## Establishment

The AEC is a committee of the Department and is constituted in accordance with the *Australian code of practice for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes, 8th Edition, 2013* (the Code) as required by section 30 of the *Tasmanian Animal Welfare Act 1993* (the Act).

The AEC considers proposals to conduct scientific or educational activities that involve animals. The AEC services NRE Tas Divisions and may, on request, assess applications to conduct animal research from external institutions who do not have their own AEC, and where there is considered to be sufficient public benefit from the research and a formal AEC sharing agreement is in place.

## Objectives

The primary responsibility of an AEC is to ensure, on behalf of the institution for which it acts, that all activities relating to the care and use of animals within the scope of the Code are conducted in compliance with the Code ([section 2.3 of the Code](#)).

The role of the AEC is to review applications and ongoing reports for projects and approve only those projects that are ethically acceptable and conform to the requirements of the Code. The AEC also monitors the care and use of animals, including housing conditions, practices and procedures involved in the care of animals in facilities. As provided by the Code, the AEC will take appropriate actions regarding unexpected adverse events, and non-compliance, approve guidelines for the care and use of animals on behalf of the institution, provide advice and recommendations to the institution and report on its operations to the institution.

## Responsibilities of the AEC

### Review and approve new and ongoing activities

The AEC provides competent, fair, consistent and timely review of applications, amendments and reports related to the care and use of animals for scientific purposes. The AEC may approve only those projects and activities that are ethically acceptable and conform to the requirements of the Code. Decisions are based on a thorough, fair and inclusive process of discussion and deliberation by AEC members and are only made by those present throughout the discussion.

### **Monitor the care and use of animals**

The AEC monitors the care and use of animals by inspecting animals, animal housing and/or reviewing records and reports. The AEC monitors all activities relating to the care and use of animals (including the acquisition, transport, breeding, housing and husbandry of animals) on a regular and ongoing basis to assess compliance with the Code and decisions of the AEC. Identified problems and issues receive appropriate follow-up and, if necessary, suspected breaches of the Code are referred to the institution.

The AEC determines the frequency and timing of inspections, depending on the number and accessibility of sites, the number and types of projects and activities, and whether inspections can be combined with scheduled AEC meetings. In addition, the AEC may decide that certain projects or activities require more frequent inspection than others. The AEC maintains records of inspections that include the names of attendees, observations, any identified problems, recommended actions, ongoing or outstanding issues, and outcomes.

### **Take action regarding unexpected adverse events**

The AEC takes appropriate action in response to unexpected adverse events to ensure that animal wellbeing is not compromised, the issues are addressed promptly, and activities that have the potential to adversely affect animal wellbeing cease immediately. Actions may include consulting with relevant people and, where necessary, suspending or withdrawing approval for the projects or activities.

### **Take action regarding non-compliance**

When projects or activities that are in breach of the Code are detected, the AEC ensures that actions are taken to ensure that animal wellbeing is not compromised, the issues are addressed promptly, and activities that have the potential to adversely affect animal wellbeing cease immediately. Actions may include suspending or withdrawing approval for the projects or activities.

### **Approve guidelines for the care and use of animals**

The AEC can consider approval of guidelines for the care and use of animals that are referred to it by the institution as outlined in [Clause 2.1.5\(v\)](#) of the Code.

### **Provide advice and recommendations to the Institution**

The AEC can provide advice and recommendations to the institution regarding the care and use of animals for scientific purposes conducted on behalf of the institution, and strategies required to ensure that the requirements of the Code are maintained and that matters affecting animal wellbeing are addressed.

The AEC, through the Chairperson, may recommend to the institution any measures needed to ensure that the standards of the Code are maintained.

On request, the AEC will examine and comment on all institutional plans and policies that may affect the welfare of animals used for scientific purposes. This includes plans and policies drafted by external institutions.

## Reporting Mechanisms

The AEC submits a written report on its operations at least annually to the governing body of the institution(s) for which it acts. The report advises on:

- numbers and types of projects and activities assessed, and approved or rejected
- actions that have supported the educational and training needs of AEC members and people involved in the care and use of animals
- milestones and achievements of the AEC throughout the year
- any matters that may affect the institution's ability to maintain compliance with the Code and, if appropriate, suitable recommendations.

## Institutional Accountability

Responsibilities of the Institution:

### **Provide the AEC with adequate resources ([Section 2.2.19](#))**

NRE Tas provides the AEC with the resources required to carry out its responsibilities and to maintain the AEC and responds effectively to recommendations from the AEC regarding resources and workloads.

### **Establish procedures for the effective governance and operation of the AEC ([Section 2.2.20](#))**

NRE Tas has established procedures for the effective governance and operation of the AEC that enable the AEC to comply with the Code and relevant institutional policies and promote competent and timely review of animal care and use. For further information see the [AEC Operating Procedures](#).

### **Conduct an annual review of the operation of the AEC ([Section 2.2.37](#))**

The institution must conduct an annual review of the operation of the AEC to ensure that it is effective and consistent with the Code and institutional policies. This includes an assessment of the AEC's annual report and a meeting with the AEC Chairperson.

### **Ensure an independent external review of the AEC ([Section 6.1](#))**

An external review must be conducted at least every four years to assess the institution's compliance with the Code and to ensure the continued suitability, adequacy and effectiveness of its procedures to meet its responsibilities under the Code.

## AEC Membership ([Section 2.2 of the Code](#))

The AEC has ensured adequate mechanisms are in place for the appointment and retirement of members.

The AEC is comprised of at least five persons, including a separate person appointed to each of the membership categories set out in the Code and a Chairperson (see also the

[AEC Operating Procedures](#) for further detail on membership categories and the role of the Chairperson).

The Chairperson, a Deputy Chairperson and all members of the AEC will be appointed by the Secretary of NRE Tas as head of the institution, by instrument of writing.

Reappointment of the Chairperson is at the discretion of the Secretary based on a critical assessment of the ongoing needs of the AEC in relation to knowledge, skills, experience, and the need to maintain continuity of process.

The term of membership for those appointed to the AEC will be three (3) years, after which members will be asked in writing to indicate if they wish to continue in the role. On the recommendation of the AEC Chairperson, members may be re-appointed, by the Secretary, NRE Tas, by instrument in writing.

Members of the AEC may resign from the AEC at any time by advising the Chairperson in writing.

Change to membership status will be noted at the next AEC meeting, recorded in the minutes and notified to the Inspector of Animal Research under the *Animal Welfare Act 1993* (the Inspector).

The Inspector, AEC Animal Monitoring Officer (AMO) and the AEC Executive Officer (EO) may attend AEC meetings and routinely brief the AEC members on applications, policy matters, and general advice as needed. These officers are able to participate but they have no decision-making capacity.

Membership of the AEC shall be confidential with the exception of the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson.

The AEC may delegate functions to an Executive, established from existing AEC members ([section 2.2.23 of the Code](#)).

Prior to appointment, AEC members will:

1. Acknowledge in writing that they accept the Terms of Reference and the Operating Procedures of the AEC; and
2. Sign a confidentiality agreement.

All AEC members will be required to declare a real or potential conflict of interest prior to appointment to the AEC or in the event they have any involvement in any of the research or teaching activities being considered by the AEC. In the event any AEC member has a declared or perceived conflict of interest then a replacement will be found for that member, or they will be excluded from the process to approve the application where they have any real or perceived involvement.