

Animal Ethics Committee Terms of Reference

Section 1 - Establishment

(1) The Animal Ethics Committee (AEC) is established pursuant to powers under sections 6 and 15 of the Charles Darwin University Act 2003.

Section 2 - Functions and Responsibilities

(2) The AEC is responsible for ensuring, on behalf of Charles Darwin University (CDU) or any other organisation for which it acts, that all activities relating to the care and use of animals by the University or other organisations are conducted in compliance with the current version of the Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes (the Code), the Animal Welfare Act 1999 and equivalent legislation in each state or territory in which the University is registered or undertakes research and teaching activities involving animals.

(3) The AEC is the principal research ethics approval body for animal research in the Northern Territory, in addition to CDU. External research ethics approval applications to the AEC will be subject to the same conditions as applications from within CDU.

(4) The functions and responsibilities of the AEC are to:

- a. review applications for projects and approve only those projects that are ethically acceptable in accordance with the Code and that conform to the governing principles and requirements of the Code;
- b. review animal research permits and approve only those that meet the requirements of Northern Territory legislation;
- c. ensure the use of animals is justified, the welfare of those animals is considered, and the principles of replacement, reduction and refinement (the 3 Rs) are incorporated;
- d. review applications for activities associated with the care and management of animals in facilities, including procedures applicable to breeding programs integral to the maintenance of an animal line, and approve only those activities that are ethically acceptable and conform to the requirements of the Code;
- e. conduct follow-up reviews of approved projects and allow the continuation of approval for only those projects and activities that are ethically acceptable and conform to the requirements of the Code;
- f. monitor the care and use of animals, including acquisition, transport, housing conditions, practices and procedures involved in the care of animals in facilities and provisions for animals at the conclusion of their use or appoint a suitably qualified person to perform these duties;
- g. take appropriate actions regarding unexpected adverse events, including authorising the emergency treatment or euthanasia by a suitably qualified person of any animal to ensure that animal wellbeing is not compromised, ensuring that the issue is addressed promptly and that activities that have the potential to adversely affect animal wellbeing cease immediately;
- h. take appropriate actions regarding non-compliance to ensure that animal wellbeing is not compromised, ensuring that the issue is addressed promptly and that activities that have the potential to adversely affect animal wellbeing cease immediately;
- i. approve procedures or guidelines as defined by the Code for the care and use of animals on behalf of the

- University, and maintain and publish on the University's website an electronic library of approved procedures and guidelines for subsequent use;
- j. provide advice and recommendations to the University;
- k. report on its operations to the University and to the Northern Territory Animal Welfare Authority;
- l. require that all members declare any perceived, potential or actual conflicts of interest and appropriately deal with such situations; and
- m. perform all other duties required by the code.

(5) "Appropriate action" as mentioned in clauses 2.2.g and 2.2.h may include consulting with relevant people and, where necessary, suspending or withdrawing approval for the project or activity. Actions taken to address the issues must be in consultation with the person(s) involved. If necessary, matters must be referred to the University for action. The AEC will ensure non-compliance receives appropriate follow-up

Section 3 - Membership

Section 4 - Chair and Deputy Chair

(6) The Vice-Chancellor will appoint the Chairperson of the AEC.

(7) The Chairperson of the AEC:

- a. will hold a senior position (Professor or Associate Professor) at the University;
- b. may be appointed in addition to Category A to D members;
- c. will normally preside at all meetings of the AEC;
- d. must impartially guide the operation of the AEC, resolving conflicts of interest related to the business of the AEC; and
- e. will represent the AEC in any negotiations with the University's management or the organisation's management.

(8) When appointing the Chair, the Vice-Chancellor should consider someone independent of the care and use of animals for scientific purposes.

(9) Members of the AEC will elect a Deputy Chair from within the membership of the AEC. In the absence of the Chair, the Deputy Chair will perform all the functions of the Chair.

Section 5 - Secretary and Resources

(10) The Office of Research and Innovation (ORI) will provide the functions of the Secretary at meetings and all necessary administrative services to the AEC and its members.

(11) AEC members will be provided with access to any resources they reasonably require to fulfil their duties as a committee member.

Section 6 - Term of Office

(12) All members, other than the Chair and the AWO-Category A member, are appointed for a term of three years. At the end of their term, the position will be advertised by the ORI. Standing members may reapply.

(13) Reappointed members can serve a maximum of three consecutive terms. On reappointment of the third term, preference will be given to new applicants of equal qualifications, availability, and commitment. It is acceptable for members to subsequently be re-appointed to the AEC after a period of three years' absence. Appointments to the AEC should be in line with the University's commitments under the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Policy wherever possible.

(14) At all times, appointment of members will be made that best serves the AEC's activities.

(15) Replacement of members will be phased to ensure the maintenance of a quorum and expertise on the AEC. Where a replacement member is not able to commence an appointment at the end of a current member's term, the current member will be asked to remain on the AEC until the replacement has been appointed and inducted.

(16) Members who do not attend three consecutive meetings, or a minimum of half of the annual scheduled AEC meetings without approved leave of absence may have their membership terminated.

(17) The office of a member of the AEC becomes vacant if the member:

- a. dies;
- b. absents themselves from 4 consecutive meetings of the AEC of which reasonable notice has been given to the member personally or in the ordinary course of post, except on leave granted by the AEC or unless, before the expiration of 4 weeks after the last of those meetings;
- c. becomes a mentally incapacitated person;
- d. is convicted of an offence that is punishable by imprisonment for 12 months in any Australian jurisdiction;
- e. resigns the office by instrument in writing addressed to the AEC, or
- f. completes a term of office and is not reappointed.

(18) The Chair is taken to have vacated their office as if they:

- a. resign by instrument in writing addressed to the AEC, or
- b. cease to be a member of the AEC.

Section 7 - Quorum

(19) At least one member from each of the membership categories A, B, C and D must be present at meetings to establish a quorum for the conduct of the meeting and must be present throughout the meeting. Categories C and D together must at all times represent not less than one-third of those members present.

(20) If a quorum is not achieved, the meeting will be rescheduled.

(21) When a member is unable to attend an AEC meeting due to unavoidable circumstances, the AEC may use video conferencing or web-conferencing to ensure a quorate meeting. Teleconferencing can only be conducted in circumstances where the meeting cannot be rescheduled, and where video conferencing and web conferencing are not possible. Proxy or alternative membership will not be allowed.

(22) Members unable to attend meetings must advise the ORI as early as possible and may forward comments on the business before the meeting.

(23) Members who leave to undertake professional development will either resign from the AEC or obtain formal leave of absence at the commencement of these activities.

Section 8 - Meetings

(24) The AEC will meet at least seven times per year.

(25) Extra meetings may be called if circumstances or the nature of business is urgent or extraordinary. 8.3. Members must fully prepare for each meeting and read all documentation in advance of the meeting.

(26) Members must make every reasonable effort to attend each meeting.

(27) Minutes of the meeting, specifying each item of business discussed, summarising essential items of discussion and recording the decision reached or advice resolved, will be circulated to all the members as soon as practicable after each meeting. The minutes will be confirmed at the subsequent AEC meeting.

(28) The AEC may invite people with specific expertise to provide advice as required. Any experts so invited are subject to AEC confidentiality requirements.

(29) The ORI will ensure that records related to the AEC's business are maintained, including:

- a. a register of all applications to the AEC, including the outcomes of the AEC's deliberations;
- b. minutes that record decisions and other aspects of the AEC's meetings;
- c. the records of all inspections conducted by the AEC.

Section 9 - Decisions and Resolutions of the AEC

(30) Decisions will be based on a thorough, fair and inclusive process of discussion and deliberation by AEC members and will be made only by those present throughout the discussion.

(31) Decisions should be made on the basis of consensus. Where consensus cannot be reached after reasonable effort to resolve differences, the Committee will explore with the applicant(s) ways of modifying the project or activity that may lead to consensus. If consensus is still not achieved, the AEC should only proceed to a majority decision after members have been allowed a period of time to review their position followed by a further discussion.

(32) In the case of a tied vote, the Chair has the deciding vote.

Section 10 - Agenda

(33) A comprehensive agenda and associated documentation should be distributed at least seven working days before the meeting.

(34) Members will be notified in writing of the location and availability of meeting materials.

(35) All papers must be submitted to the ORI by the specified submission deadline prior to the distribution of the agenda and associated documentation.

(36) Late papers and submissions may be accepted with the permission of the ORI or the Chair.

Section 11 - Conflicts of Interest

(37) Conflict of interest arises when a member has an interest in a matter that may be reasonably construed as having the potential to influence the impartiality of that member in relation to that matter. The conflict of interest may be

reasonably perceived, potential or actual conflict of interest.

(38) Members must declare conflicts of interest to the Chair who will exercise discretion and give direction to resolve the conflict of interest in accordance with the University's Conflict of Interest Policy and Procedures.

(39) If any member is in doubt as to whether conflict may exist, they are encouraged to seek advice from the Chair or the AWO.

(40) The Chairperson must not preside over matters in which he or she has a conflict of interest.

(41) For decision-making, members with a conflict of interest must withdraw from the meeting for the discussion of the particular agenda item. Once such members have withdrawn, the remaining members must constitute a quorum.

Section 12 - Review of Decisions and Complaints

(42) The AEC will follow the University's approved procedures for the fair resolution of disagreements between AEC members, between the AEC and investigators or teachers and between the AEC and any organisation for which it acts.

Section 13 - Reporting

(43) The AEC is responsible to the Vice-Chancellor and reports to the Vice-Chancellor and the Academic Board on all matters affecting animal research at the University.

(44) All routine matters on AEC activities are to be submitted to the Academic Board and the Vice-Chancellor. If necessary, the Chair and/or the AWO may report directly to the Vice-Chancellor on urgent or critical matters.

(45) The AEC must submit a written annual report on its activities to the Vice-Chancellor and the Academic Board for presentation to the University Council. The report includes information on:

- a. Numbers and types of projects assessed and approved or rejected;
- b. The physical facilities for the care and use of animals by the University;
- c. Activities and actions that have supported the educational needs of AEC members, and of people involved in the care and use of animals;
- d. Administrative and other difficulties being experienced; and
- e. Any matters that may affect the University's ability to maintain compliance with the Code and any recommendations on how these matters might be addressed.

(46) The AEC is also held accountable for its activities through the provision of annual compliance and activity reports to:

- a. the Northern Territory Government's Animal Welfare Authority; b. other State and Territory government regulatory bodies as required; and c. relevant funding bodies as required.

Section 14 - Compliance Monitoring and Review

(47) The University will regularly monitor and review its compliance with the Code by:

- a. ensuring the Terms of Reference of the AEC are reviewed by the Vice-Chancellor every four years, at a minimum following the external review of the AEC, or as required;

- b. ensuring that an independent external review is conducted at least every four years to assess compliance with the Code, and to ensure the continued suitability, adequacy and effectiveness of its procedures to meet its responsibilities under the Code (see Section 6);
- c. conducting an annual review of the operation of the AEC; and d. conducting an annual review of the effectiveness of the AEC's processes regarding complaints and noncompliance.

Section 15 - Non-compliance

(48) Non-compliance with Governance Documents is considered a breach of the Staff Code of Conduct or the Student Code of Conduct, as applicable, and is treated seriously by the University. Reports of concerns about non-compliance will be managed in accordance with the applicable disciplinary procedures.

(49) All staff members have an individual responsibility to raise any suspicion, allegation or report of fraud or corruption in accordance with the Fraud and Corruption Control Governance Framework, Fraud and Corruption Control Policy and Whistleblower reporting (Improper Conduct) Procedures.

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