DEAKIN UNIVERSITY
Animal Ethics Committee (AEC)
Terms of Reference

PURPOSE

The Deakin University Animal Ethics Committees (AECs) conduct ethical review of projects involving animals for scientific purposes in accordance with the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (POCTA) Act, Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (POCTA) Regulations, Australian code of practice for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes (the Code) and associated legislation.

Deakin University retain a Scientific Procedures Premises Licence (SPPL), Scientific Procedures Fieldwork Licence (SPFL) and Specified Animal Breeding Licence (SABL) issued by the Victorian government regulator, Animal Welfare Victoria. The Pro Vice-Chancellor Research Planning and Governance is the Licence Nominee.

There are two institutional AECs at Deakin University, permitted to assess applications and oversee the involvement of animals for scientific purposes under the Licences, which function independently and conduct business separately:

- Deakin Animal Ethics Committee Laboratory - Geelong (AECL-G)
- Deakin Animal Ethics Committee Wildlife - Burwood (AECW-B)

The primary responsibility of the AECs is to ensure, on behalf of the institution for which they act, that all activities relating to the care and use of animals are conducted in compliance with the Code as per section 2.3.1.

COMPOSITION

The Chair is appointed by the Pro Vice-Chancellor Research Planning and Governance and Licence Nominee. The chairperson is responsible for impartially guiding the operation of the AEC, resolving conflicts of interest related to the business of the AEC and representing the AEC in any negotiations with the institution's management. A Deputy Chair may be appointed and act as Chair, if the Chair is not available or where a conflict of interest is identified.

As defined under section 2.2.4 of the Code, membership of the AEC comprises at least one person from each of the following four categories of membership:

1. Category A (Veterinarian) - a person with qualifications in veterinary science that are recognised for registration as a veterinary surgeon in Australia, and with experience relevant to the institution's activities or the ability to acquire relevant knowledge.
2. Category B (Researcher) - a suitably qualified person with substantial and recent experience in the use of animals for scientific purposes relevant to the institution and the business of the AEC. This must include possession of a higher degree in research or equivalent experience. If the business of the AEC relates to the use of animals for teaching only, a teacher with substantial and recent experience may be appointed.
3. Category C (Animal welfare) - a person with demonstrable commitment to, and established experience in, furthering the welfare of animals, who is not employed by or otherwise associated with the institution, and who is not currently involved in the care and use of animals for scientific purposes. Veterinarians with specific animal welfare interest and experience may meet the requirements of this category. While not representing an animal welfare organisation, the person should, where possible, be selected on the basis of active membership of, and endorsement by, such an organisation.
4. Category D (Wider community) - a person not employed by or otherwise associated with the institution and who has never been involved in the use of animals in scientific or teaching activities, either in their employment or beyond their undergraduate education. Category D members should be viewed by the wider community as bringing a completely independent view to the AEC and must not fit the requirements of any other category.

Additional members: A person responsible for the routine care of animals within the institution may be appointed as an additional member to assist the AECs (*ex-officio*).

Access to expertise: The Specialist, Animal Welfare shall attend each AEC meeting in an advisory capacity (*ex-officio*).

The AEC may invite people with specific expertise to provide advice, as required.

Appointment

Positions are advertised within and outside of Deakin University. Applicants should be interviewed by the relevant AEC Chair, Specialist, Animal Welfare and AEC Executive Officer and are formally appointed by the Pro Vice-Chancellor Research Planning and Governance (Licence Nominee). Category B members should be nominated by the relevant Head of School. Notwithstanding this, recommendations to the Research Ethics Team can be made without advertising where necessary.

Term of membership

The term of appointment is two years, with members eligible for re-appointment beyond this time. Re-appointment is decided by the relevant AEC Chair and AEC Executive Officer with the support of the Pro Vice-Chancellor Research Planning and Governance (Licence Nominee). A six month probation period applies to all new AEC members.

Training

All new members appointed to an AEC must complete the Animal Welfare Victoria mandatory training approved by the Minister under section 144(3) of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (POCTA) Regulations prior to or within 6 months of their appointment.

Confidentiality

Before appointment, all members must acknowledge in writing their acceptance of the Deakin University AEC Terms of Reference as per section 2.2.11 of the Code and sign the Deakin University Deed of Confidentiality form as per section 2.2.20 of the Code. Meeting attendance and discussion is confidential.

Conduct

All AEC members must conduct business with the highest standards of professional behaviour and integrity in accordance with the Code and the Deakin University Code of Conduct.

Conflicts of interest

Members must declare any perceived, potential or actual conflicts of interest at the start of an AEC meeting. For AEC decision making, members with a conflict of interest must withdraw from the AEC meeting on matters that relate to that conflict of interest. Once such members have withdrawn, the remaining members must constitute quorum as per section 2.3.12 of the Code. If quorum is not available, the matter will be referred to the next quorate AEC meeting with the remaining members.

Resignation

Members may resign from the AEC by notifying the Research Ethics Team in writing.

The Pro Vice-Chancellor Research Planning and Governance (Licence Nominee) has discretionary right to terminate the appointment of any AEC member who is not meeting their membership responsibilities or contravenes the AEC Terms of Reference.

RESPONSIBILITES

As defined under section 2.3 and in addition to the governing principles of the Code, responsibilities of AECs include:

1. Review applications for projects involving animals and to approve only those that are ethically acceptable and conform to the requirements of the Code.
2. 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.
3. Conduct follow-up review of approved projects and activities, and allow the continuation of approval for only those projects and activities that are ethically acceptable and conform to the requirements of the Code. The AEC may suspend or withdraw approval for any project that does not comply with the Code.
4. Monitor the care and use of animals. Including housing conditions, practices and procedures involved in the care of animals in facilities and ensure that the standards of these facilities are maintained and associated guidelines are followed.
5. Take appropriate actions regarding unexpected adverse events.
6. Take appropriate actions regarding non-compliance with the Code and AEC approval.
7. Approve guidelines for the care and use of animals on behalf of the institution.
8. 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.
9. Report to the institution on the activities and operation of the AEC at least annually.

OPERATION

Quorum

As defined under section 2.2.25 of the Code, 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 a meeting and must be present throughout the meeting. Categories C and D together must represent at least one-third of those members present. If quorum is not available, the AEC meeting will be postponed.

The conduct of quorate AEC meetings should be face-to-face or where not possible, by videoconferencing and web-conferencing, or in special circumstances, teleconferencing.

Decisions

As defined under section 2.3 of the Code, the AECs must provide competent, fair, consistent and timely review of applications and reports related to the care and use of animals. The AECs must make a judgement on whether the proposed use, or continued use, of animals is ethically acceptable. This judgement must:

1. Be based on information provided by the applicant that demonstrates the application of the principals outlined in section 1 of the Code.
2. Balance whether the potential effects on the wellbeing of the animals involved is justified by the potential benefits.

Decisions should be based on a thorough, fair and inclusive process of discussion and deliberation by AEC members and should be made only by those present throughout the discussion. Before any deliberations of the AEC, members must declare any interest that could influence the objectivity of their decision making.

Decisions should be made on the basis of consensus. Where consensus cannot be reached in a quorate meeting after reasonable effort to resolve differences, the following steps should be taken:

1. Outcome provided to researchers with the opportunity to explore ways of modifying the project or activity that may lead to consensus.
2. AEC members provided with sufficient time to review any modifications and their positions.

Where consensus cannot be reached in a subsequent quorate meeting, the following steps should be taken:

1. The decision should be made by a majority vote of the AEC members present at the meeting.
2. Any dissenting opinions or concerns should be recorded in the meeting minutes.
3. If the issue is significant and cannot be resolved within the AEC, it may be escalated to the Pro Vice-Chancellor Research Planning and Governance (Licence Nominee) for consideration and resolution.

Decisions of the AEC must be communicated to researchers as promptly as possible and include reasons for its decisions and any conditions to an approval.

In accordance with the Animal Welfare Victoria: Guidelines for the conduct of AECs, the AEC **cannot approve**:

- A group of persons, for example 'all animal technicians' employed by the institution (individuals undertaking scientific procedures within a project must have prior approval from the AEC).
- Projects or activities carried out under other licences, unless the AEC is nominated on the licence or in a formal agreement supporting a collaboration between multiple licences.
- Activities in another state or territory unless registered with the jurisdiction's relevant authority.
- Activities specifically prohibited by the licence conditions, the Act or Regulations or other relevant legislation.
- Testing of finished cosmetic products or their chemical ingredients, under section 7 of the Code.

AEC Executive

The AEC may establish an Executive Committee that consists of at least one member from Category C or D and the AEC Chair.

The AEC Executive may be delegated to approve minor amendments to approved projects or activities, for ratification at the next AEC meeting. The AEC should provide guidance on the type of activity that would be a minor amendment. A minor amendment may include a change to an approved project or activity where the proposed change is not likely to cause harm to the animals, including pain and distress.

The AEC Executive must not approve new applications.

Decisions of the AEC Executive must be unanimous. Where a unanimous agreement is not reached, the matter will be referred to the next AEC meeting.

Records and documentation

A register of all applications to the AECs, including the outcomes of deliberations and records of inspections conducted by the AEC must be maintained by the Research Ethics Team.

Decisions at AEC meetings must be minuted, recorded and be confirmed by the AEC at the following meeting.

Agendas and minutes of AEC meetings will be made available for audit, as required.

Effective: 4th December 2019
Approved by Deakin Animal Management Governance Committee
Acknowledged in writing by every AEC member

Reviewed: No changes required 29th April 2022

Reviewed and updated: 24th June 2026
Approved by Deakin Animal Management Governance Committee
Acknowledged in writing by every AEC member