



AEC 3.1.8 Guidelines for activities involving animals conducted at offsite facilities

Purpose

- (1) The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to researchers on the use of captive animals for research or teaching where the animals are housed and/or procedures are performed in facilities that are not Charles Sturt University Animal Ethics Committee (AEC) approved locations; hereafter “offsite facilities”. Relevant facilities may include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Commercial feedlots and farms
 - b. Zoos and wildlife centres
 - c. Animal shelters
- (2) This document provides guidance on the additional information and considerations necessary to obtain AEC approval for activities undertaken at offsite facilities.
- (3) Charles Sturt staff must apply for AEC approval to use animals for research or teaching activities regardless of their choice of facility.

Scope

- (4) This document provides a guide for researchers considering using an offsite facility for research or teaching involving animals.
- (5) The guidance provided in this document aligns with the Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes (8th edition); hereafter “Animal Code”
 - a. This document is intended as a guide for Charles Sturt University processes and does not in any way replace or supersede the Animal Code.
 - b. This guidance applies only to staff members of Charles Sturt University submitting applications for approval to the Charles Sturt University Animal Ethics Committee.
 - c. This guidance does not apply to Charles Sturt staff using facilities owned and licensed by another accredited Animal Research Establishment provided that a collaborative agreement is in place.
- (6) All University staff members conducting research or teaching activities using animals are advised to seek further guidance from the Animal Ethics Team if unclear about any of their responsibilities under the Animal Code.

Background

- (7) Under the Animal Code (Clause 2.3.2 iv.) the AEC must “*monitor the care and use of animals, including housing conditions, practices and procedures involved in the care of animals in facilities*”
- (8) Animal facilities owned by the University are subject to annual inspections by the AEC. These facilities can only be used for research and teaching activities if they have been approved as fit for purpose by the AEC.
- (9) Offsite facilities are not inspected by the AEC, so the Chief Investigator (CI) must provide sufficient information in their AEC application for the AEC to determine that the housing, care and use of the animals is appropriate.



- (10) The following guidance outlines expectations for CIs and any team members who are employed at the offsite facility, and provides advice on preparing AEC applications for relevant activities.

Responsibilities of team members and animal handlers

- (11) The Chief Investigator (CI) has ultimate responsibility for the care and use of animals in a project, including (but not limited to) ensuring that;
- All protocols and procedures are carried out in accordance with the Animal Research Authority (ARA).
 - Offsite facility animal carers or managers (hereafter “facility staff”) contact the CI promptly in the event of any unexpected adverse events or other events requiring a decision to be made about the care and/or use of the animals. Please note the importance of timely consultation with a veterinarian (see the [Charles Sturt Guideline on Adverse Events](#)).
 - The CI is immediately contactable by any team members or facility staff members. A pre-arranged protocol and alternative contacts should be in place in case the CI is briefly not contactable.
 - The CI may terminate the activity at any time.
 - Animal carers not accustomed to research may not be aware of the importance of adhering to the requirements of the Animal Code. It is recommended that the CI or facility manager makes these requirements clear to all relevant staff.
- (12) The CI or named facility manager (see clause 31) is responsible for ensuring that all personnel involved with monitoring, handling, caring for, or otherwise interacting with the animals under an ARA are aware of their responsibilities and requirements under the Animal Code, and the specific details of the AEC approval for the activity.
- Developing strong, positive relationships with facility staff is critical for the success of activities at offsite facilities.
 - The CI or facility manager should discuss the details of the approved activity with facility staff to ensure that they are aware of any requirements that differ from their day-to-day management protocols.
 - The CI or facility manager should ensure that facility staff are aware that the activity may be subject to inspection by the Animal Welfare Officer and/or a representative/s of the AEC. For offsite facilities, inspections will be by appointment and all required protocols for biosecurity, safety, and other measures will be followed as necessary.
- (13) All personnel must be aware of:
- All reporting requirements for the activity, including animal monitoring.
 - The function of an ARA and all relevant details of the authority for the activity including dates and conditions.
 - The required standard of care for animals under an ARA (see Standard of care below).
 - How to respond to an unexpected adverse event including who to notify, timelines for reporting, what information to record, and where to log reports (see unexpected adverse events below).



- (14) All personnel who are expected to perform procedures on animals that are additional to those occurring as part of routine husbandry must be named as team members in the application.
- If unclear about the distinction between routine husbandry and research procedures, it is recommended that all planned procedures involving animals under an ARA are presented in the AEC application, noting which ones are considered by the research team to be routine.

Unexpected adverse events

- (15) The named Chief Investigator (CI) is responsible for any unexpected adverse events that occur during the activity. This responsibility includes (but is not limited to) ensuring that:
- The event is identified and responded to in a timely manner.
 - The response appropriately mitigates welfare compromise for affected animals.
 - Remedial action is promptly taken, where relevant, to ensure the safety and welfare of other animals.
 - The AEC is notified of the event within 48 hours of its occurrence.
 - A complete Unexpected Adverse Event report is submitted, including the results of a post-mortem investigation as applicable.
- (16) When an activity is conducted at an offsite facility, the CI may not be available onsite to respond directly to adverse events. In this case, another named team member or facility personnel must be competent and available to respond as needed. Regardless of who responds to the event, the CI retains ultimate responsibility and may be held liable for any breaches of the Animal Code.
- It is recommended that a clear communication strategy is established before the activity starts, ensuring that all personnel know who to contact during and after an adverse event.
 - Where possible, the CI should be available in some capacity to contribute to decision-making during an adverse event response.
- (17) It is recommended that an adverse event response strategy is established before the activity starts, ensuring that all personnel know:
- How to seek veterinary guidance in an emergency.
 - Who is responsible for immediate decision-making and how to contact them.
 - What actions are available or not available (e.g. options for isolating, treating, or euthanising animals).
 - What information to record about the animals and response (including photographs and videos).
 - Who to notify after the event, including how to notify the AEC if the CI is not available to do so.
 - Expected timeframes for notifying stakeholders.
- (18) For further information about unexpected adverse events, see the [Charles Sturt Guideline on Adverse Events](#).

Reporting to the Animal Ethics Committee

- (19) The CI is responsible for ensuring that all AEC reporting requirements are met.



- (20) The AEC must be informed of any unexpected adverse events within 48 hours of the event occurring.
 - a. Any team member may complete and submit an adverse event report on behalf of the CI.
 - b. If there is reason to believe that the reporting of unexpected adverse events may not be achieved within the required 48 hours, it is recommended to note and justify this in the AEC application so an alternative reporting strategy can be approved ahead of time.
- (21) The AEC must be informed of all proposed variations to the approved activity through the submission of a Modification Request form. Changes must not be implemented until the request has been approved by the AEC. This includes but is not limited to variations in:
 - a. Named team members
 - b. The number, type/breed, species, or sex of animals
 - c. The specific individuals included (e.g. the addition, removal, or replacement of individual animals or cohorts)
 - d. Procedures to be performed on animals
 - e. Animal housing or husbandry
 - f. Animal monitoring
- (22) Any unexpected or unplanned changes to the protocol should be reported to the AEC as soon as possible.
- (23) In some cases (e.g. wildlife surveys), the target species cannot be definitively stated in the application. In such cases, provide a list of potential species and explain what inclusion and exclusion criteria will apply if additional species are identified.
 - a. If additional species are identified and included following approval, inform the AEC as soon as possible.
- (24) Annual continuation reports and end of project reports must be submitted by the CI. Team members and facility staff who are directly involved in the care and use of the animals should be consulted when compiling these reports.
- (25) Where foreshadowed adverse events have been approved by the AEC, all occurrences of these events should be recorded and tracked. This is to ensure that the research team can identify when the approved threshold is exceeded.
 - a. If the incidence of a foreshadowed event exceeds the approved threshold, all occurrences must be reported as an unexpected adverse event. The reporting schedule will be decided on a case-by-case basis, and applicants should state in their applications how they will report unexpected adverse events above the foreshadowed threshold (e.g. report every event individually, report weekly, etc.).
 - b. All foreshadowed adverse events must be included in the annual report.

Standard of care for animals housed or used at offsite facilities

- (26) When animals are used for research or teaching activities the expected standard of care should align with up-to-date best practice for that species.
 - a. The Australian Animal Welfare Standards and Guidelines outline a minimum standard of care that is not automatically acceptable for animals under an AEC authority.



- b. This includes (but is not limited to) the standard of housing, provision of resources such as food, water, and enrichment, and handling practices.
- (27) For all activities occurring at an offsite facility, provide justification for the proposed standards of care, demonstrating why these standards are required to achieve the research aims (if applicable).
 - a. Consider amendments to routine husbandry for the animals used in the activity to support best practice standards of care.

Animal monitoring

- (28) Monitoring requirements for animals under an ARA may be more comprehensive than routine monitoring undertaken at the offsite facility.
- (29) Animals must be monitored at least once daily unless alternative arrangements are approved by the AEC.
- (30) The CI or a named team member should discuss monitoring procedures and recording with relevant facility staff to ensure that the required standard is maintained for the duration of the project.
- (31) All monitoring should be recorded using a monitoring sheet submitted with the AEC application.
- (32) A plan must be in place for all team members to access veterinary guidance as needed, including during out of hours emergencies.
 - a. Where possible, this plan should allow for in-person veterinary intervention for injured or ill animals if needed. If this is not possible, a justification for an alternative arrangement must be described in the AEC application.
 - b. Where in-person consultation cannot be arranged or may not be reliably available, phone consultations must be available. It is the CI's responsibility to ensure that phone reception at the offsite facility is adequate.
 - c. The submitted AEC application must indicate whether veterinary guidance is available in-person or via phone call.
 - d. For further guidance see the [Charles Sturt Guidelines on Veterinary Care](#)

Advice for preparation of AEC applications

Consent for facility and animal use

- (33) The facility owner or manager must sign section E2 of the AEC application form.
- (34) The owner of the animals must be provided with an Animal Use Information Statement and must sign an Animal Use Consent Form prior to the commencement of the activity.

Description of facilities

- (35) All facilities that will be used to house or handle animals should be described in the application, including paddocks, yards, races, barns, cages, and other spaces where specific procedures are performed.
- (36) The description of the facilities should provide sufficient evidence that they are fit for purpose, and may include consideration of the following as applicable:



- a. The suitability, condition, and state of repair of buildings and fencing
 - b. The suitability of animal enclosures, including cleanliness, temperature, protection from elements, and footing/substrate
 - c. Provisions to animals including access to food, water, social companions, manipulable objects and/or other forms of environmental enrichment
 - d. Food storage and feeding strategy
 - e. Pest control
 - f. Waste management
- (37) All applications for activities conducted at offsite facilities must be supported by photographic evidence that the facilities are fit for purpose and do not pose preventable or unnecessary risk to animal safety or welfare. Photographs must include animal housing and any locations in which animals will undergo procedures for the purpose of the activity.

Associated documentation

[Charles Sturt Guidelines on Veterinary Care](#)

[Charles Sturt Guideline on Adverse Events](#)

[Animal Use Information Statement](#)

[Animal Use Consent Form](#)