

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Section 1 – Overview

- (1) The primary role of the Animal Ethics Committee (AEC) is to ensure that all activities relating to the care and use of animals in scientific research and teaching must comply with legislative and ethical frameworks. The emphasis is on ethical, humane, and responsible treatment of animals with the following key principles:
 - a. Respect for animals: Ensuring their welfare and minimising harm.
 - b. Justification of animal use: Using animals only when necessary and when no alternatives are available.
 - c. Application of the 3Rs: Replacement (using alternatives to animals), Reduction (using fewer animals), and Refinement (minimizing distress and improving welfare).
- (2) The AEC must be satisfied that there is sufficient evidence to support a case that the proposed use of animals is justified.

Section 2 – Purpose

- (3) The AEC is an executive committee of the SCU Vice Chancellor (VC). The AEC reports to the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor (SDVC), as a delegated representative of the VC.
- (4) The AEC must ensure on behalf of the institution for which it acts, that all activities relating to the care and use of animals are conducted in compliance with the Animal Research Act 1985 NSW; the Animal Research Regulation 2021; the Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes 8th edition 2013 (updated 2021) (*Animal Code*) and relevant state statutory bodies and regulations, following established SCU AEC Operating Procedures. The AEC must:
 - i. review applications for projects and approve only those projects that are ethically acceptable and conform to the requirements of the Code.
 - ii. 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.
 - iii. 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.
 - iv. monitor the care and use of animals, including housing conditions, practices and procedures involved in the care of animals in facilities.
 - v. take appropriate actions regarding unexpected adverse events.
 - vi. take appropriate actions regarding non-compliance.
 - vii. approve guidelines for the care and use of animals on behalf of the institution.
 - viii. provide advice and recommendations to the institution.
 - ix. report on its operations to the institution.

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- (5) The AEC may delegate certain powers to an executive committee (Executive) with all decisions made by the Executive reviewed and ratified by the AEC at the next meeting. If established the Executive must:
- a. include the Chair, the Secretary and one category C or D member.
 - b. may be delegated to approve minor amendments to approved projects or activities where the proposed change is not likely to cause harm to the animals, including pain and distress.
 - c. must not approve new proposals.

Section 3 – Membership

Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson

- (6) The institution must appoint a chairperson (Chair) of the AEC. The Chair must hold a senior position in the institution or be an external appointee. If the appointee is external, the institution will ensure the Chair has the necessary support and authority to carry out the role effectively.
- (7) The Chair shall be 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.
- (8) The Chair must be provided with the Deputy Chairperson (deputy chair) appointed from the membership and chosen by the SDVC, in consultation with the AEC. The person must be an SCU employee (i.e. a Category B member). The Deputy Chair will act as Chair, if the Chair is not available. If the Deputy Chair is unavailable to act as Chair then the most senior Category B member will act as Chair.

Secretary to Committee

- (9) The Office of Research is responsible for ensuring that the AEC has appropriate support to ensure it can meet its responsibilities under the Animal Code.
- (10) Support for the AEC must include:
- a. coordinate and provide secretarial support for AEC meetings in a non-voting capacity.
 - b. facilitate communication between the AEC and Animal Investigators.
 - c. recruiting, orientation and education of AEC members.
 - d. Managing all correspondence and maintaining records to meet compliance and reporting requirements.

Members

- (11) Institutions must ensure that membership of the AEC comprises at least one person from each of four categories of membership:
- i. Category A—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.

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- ii. Category B—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.
 - iii. Category C—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.
 - iv. Category D—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.
- (12) Institutions should appoint additional members in the Category “Other” to assist the AEC to function effectively such as:
- a. a person responsible for the routine care of animals within the institution.
 - b. additional members with skills and background of value to the AEC.
 - c. people with specific expertise to provide advice, as required.
- (13) Observers should only be invited to attend a meeting if the AEC considers that their expertise will reasonably be required by the AEC in order to carry out its functions. In most cases observers should only attend AEC meetings on this 'needs' basis rather than on a regular basis.
- (14) The term of office will be for three years. This period may be extended with the approval from the SDVC in consultation with the Committee.
- (15) All membership must be approved by the NSW Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Animal Research Review Panel (ARRP) to ensure they are of acceptable composition. It is a requirement to notify ARRP within 30 days after a change in membership of the AEC.
- (16) All members are required to comply with Southern Cross University’s [Code of Conduct](#) which outlines the use of confidential information by employees and affiliates of the University.
- (17) All members are considered protected persons under the University’s unimutual liability protection. This coverage extends to committee members of the University while they are performing activities under the direction or control of the University, at the University's request, or in relation to their position with the University.

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Quorum

- (18) 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 a meeting. Categories C and D together must represent at least one-third of those members present.

Amendments to the Terms of Reference

- (19) Terms of reference may be amended in consultation with the SDVC and the AEC.