Introduction

The SCU Animal Care and Ethics Committee (ACEC) acts on behalf of the Institution and has the primary responsibility to ensure that care and animal use is conducted in compliance with the Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes (8th Edition) 2013 (the Australian Code) and take action regarding non-compliance. This document outlines the ACEC’s governance and procedures as informed by the Code and Animal Research Review Panel Policy Documents.

Committee Membership

The ACEC will recommend to the Vice Chancellor members for appointment, re-appointment, retirement or dismissal, according to procedures developed by Southern Cross University in consultation with the ACEC and in line with the Australian Code. Normally, membership is for a three-year tenure, renewable. Terms for dismissal will be determined by the Vice Chancellor. All appointments shall be by written notice from the Vice Chancellor. The ACEC will have membership that will allow it to fulfil its terms of reference. It must comprise at least four persons, including a separate person appointed to each of the identified four categories in the Australian Code, and may co-opt members as per the Australian Code. The ACEC will be chaired by a senior academic from Southern Cross University, as an additional appointment to category A to D members. Membership of the ACEC has grown across SCU Campuses allowing for broader professional expertise on the Committee. Also see recruitment procedure (Appendix D).

ACEC Executive Membership and Delegation

The Chair has established an executive in consultation with the members in line with The Australian Code Section 2.2.23. The ACEC Executive will only consider responses to Projects reviewed at a previous meeting and Changes of Protocol for minor project amendments to be ratified at the next available quorate Meeting.

Currently the SCU ACEC Executive comprises the following membership:

- Chair
- 1 x Category B Animal Researcher
- 1 x Category D Independent Member

When the AEC has conditionally approved a new project or amendment at a quorate meeting, pending a satisfactory response from the investigator, the AEC may delegate the Chair or Executive Officer or other AEC members with relevant expertise to confirm final approval. The approval is given by confirming that the requirements, concerns or modifications requested by the AEC have been met.
Meeting Procedures

The ACEC holds six to eight meetings per year according to the Animal Research Review Panel Policy 12 and the Australian Code, Section 2.2.26.

Meetings are held face-to-face and via video conference across Lismore Campus and the National Marine and Science Centre.

An agenda containing new applications, annual reports, completion reports and changes of protocol applications that were approved outside of the meeting for ratification, is distributed at least three weeks prior to the meeting for members review.

Meeting attendance must be quorum. That is Categories A-D must be represented with at least a third being Categories C and D combined.

Where meetings do not achieve quorum attendance, minutes of discussions are sent to the remaining membership category for input after the meeting. This additional input may be held over for discussion at the next available quorate meeting.

All discussions are recorded via minutes and kept by the University for at least seven (7) years, as per the University Records Management Policy.

Apologies for meetings must be received by the Ethics Office at least one day prior to the meeting to enable the alternate in that member’s Category to attend the meeting.

The ACEC Chair must call for members to declare any interest by:

(i) Requesting if Members who have a declaration of interest to declare any items on the Agenda prior to commencing the meeting. Those members with a conflict of interest will have to leave the room for a decision on discussion and deliberation of relevant items. All members will decide whether members with a conflict of interest are permitted to participate at the discussion and whether they will have to leave the room during deliberations. Decisions are recorded in the minutes. Remaining members must represent quorum membership (i.e. Categories A-D, with one third together representing C and D.

The ACEC will be required to review and approve new and ongoing existing approved activities and annual and completion reports as per the Australian Code 2.3.3 – 2.3.16 at quorum meetings only. ACEC will only consider research projects done on behalf of the Institution by affiliated researchers.

Applicants are invited to attend meetings via teleconference or be called in personally to explain and partake in discussion.
Members will judge applications in accordance with the Australian Code and based on their scientific and educational merit as well as their ethical acceptability and application of the three R Principles:

- Reduction
- Refinement
- Replacement

ACEC review outcomes fall within the following categories as per the Australian Code (Section 2.3.9):

(i) Approved without conditions.
(ii) Approved with conditions.
(iii) Deferred and requested to modify and resubmit.
(iv) Not approved (Resubmission required)

In addition to this the SCU ACEC may:

(i) Approve guidelines for the care of animals that are bred, held and used for scientific purposes on behalf of the institution as per the Australian Code (Section 2.3.26).
(ii) Provide advice and recommendations to the institution as per the Code (Section 2.3.27).
(iii) Report annually to the Institution as per the Australian Code (Section 2.3.28 and 2.23.29).
(iv) Monitor the acquisition, transportation, production, housing, care, use and fate of animals. Where possible the Committee will conduct field and laboratory reviews for research being conducted. The committee undertakes to recommend to the University any measures needed to ensure that the standards of the Code are maintained.
(v) Withdraw approval for any project (Australian Code Section 2.3.25). The Committee has the power to stop non-approved activities, and may withdraw approval for on-going work. It can also require that adequate care, including emergency care, be provided, and can authorise the euthanasia of any animal (Australian Code Section 2.1.5).

All decisions by the ACEC are to be made as promptly as possible and by consensus. In the event that consensus can’t be reached, the ACEC needs to explore with the applicants ways of modifying the project that will lead to a consensus view. In times where consensus is still not achieved, the Chair may call to apply a majority decision, only after such time as members have had an opportunity to discuss and review their decisions.
Communication of Decisions

The ACEC will clearly communicate all decisions and reasons for decision to each applicant via email correspondence, including contact details for the Chair for follow-up enquiries. Furthermore the Committee may request the Applicant attend a meeting in order to resolve any issues with applications. All communications must have final approval by the Chair.

Other Procedures:

- **SCU ACEC Inspections and Monitoring:**

  The ACEC is responsible for inspecting and monitoring the care and use of animals in accordance with the Animal Code Sections 2.3.17-2.3.23.

  Inspections of wildlife research in the field or remote locations are carried out by inviting Researchers to attend meetings to present their Research methods.

  Records of inspections include an inspection record sheet, copies of PowerPoint presentations and/or a video. These records are kept electronically by the Ethics Office and are signed off by the Chair.

  Two SCU Animal Facility Managers from the Lismore Campus and Coffs Harbour NMSC Campus have been delegated as Animal Welfare Officers by the SCU ACEC. Their role is to monitor the care and use of animals in the Animal Holding Facilities of SCU.

- **Annual Reporting**

  All ARAs are issued for the calendar year in which they were approved only. They all expire towards the end of February of the following Calendar Year. Annual reporting will fall within the same period for all research in line with state reporting requirements. All ARAs need to be reported on, even if no activity has commenced.

- **Unexpected Adverse Events:**

  The ACEC will take immediate action on any Unexpected Adverse Event reported to the Chair and the Committee as per the Code 2.3.24. Appendix A shows the process in which these reports are handled by the Committee.

- **Collaborative Research Agreements:**

  Where an SCU researcher holds an approval from another ACEC, a collaborative research form must be submitted to SCU ACEC. In the case where SCU ACEC accepts the decision of the other ACEC and chooses to delegate responsibility to the ACEC who approved the research, an ARA needs to be issued, detailing a conditional approval subject to the responsible ACEC approval. There needs to be communication between SCU and the responsible ACEC, clearly stating where the responsibilities lie.
Confidentiality

All Applications, agendas and meeting minutes are stored securely and electronically with the Ethics Office, Office of Research. New and returning ACEC Members are briefed about their responsibilities in upholding confidentiality of ACEC business. This is done via the normal appointment and orientation procedure whereby they are given the University’s policy on the use of Confidential Information under the University's Code of Conduct and under the SCU Volunteer Policy.

Indemnity

Members are afforded legal protection relating to liabilities that may arise in the course of bona fide conduct of duties as a committee member. Members of University committees are covered under the University's general policies of insurance for claims arising from acts committed in the course of their committee duties, while they are acting within the scope of their authority and performing their committee duties.

Records, Documentation and Administrative Procedures

The ACEC is supported by the Ethics Office (Office of Research). The primary role is to ensure that all Committee records, records of applications and associated documentation pertaining to the ACEC are maintained as per the Code Section 2.2.30-2.2.32. This includes administration support for meeting agendas, minute taking, compliance and reporting requirements to all internal and external parties.

Appendix B shows the administration flow for all applications and researcher reports.

Complaints and Non-Compliance

All complaints and issues in regard to non-compliance are dealt with as per Sections 2.3.25 and Section 5 of the Australian Code and in a timely manner and confidentially via the Ethics Complaints officer.

Ethics Complaints Officer
Animal Care and Ethics Committee
Southern Cross University
PO Box 157
Lismore, NSW, 2480
E: animalethics.lismore@scu.edu.au

The Complaints process is outlined in Appendix C.
Appendix A – Unexpected Adverse Events

1. Unexpected adverse event report received by Ethics Office
2. Ethics Office updates Database with details of report
3. Ethics Office contacts the ACEC Chair to discuss report and act upon ACEC Chair’s referral. Outcome could be:
   a. Chair to authorise acknowledgement of report and to continue research. Advise Ethics Office to include report in next Meeting Agenda.
   b. Chair to authorise that the research be ceased as continuing may adversely affect the welfare of the research animals.
4. Ethics Office to act on authorisation of outcome in item 3 (a-b).
5. Ethics Office to enact outcome from next ACEC meeting.
APPENDIX C – Complaints and Non-Compliance Process

ACEC Complaints and Non-Compliance Procedures and Policy according to the “Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes” and the “Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research”

Input

- Direct
- 3rd Party

Complaint relate to either:
- Ethical conduct by researcher
- Animal Care
- ACEC process/decision/members
- Consequences objected by student or Research Assistant
- other

Refer back or onto other entity

Non-ACEC related

Complaint resolved, documented in assesse and categorised

ACEC related

Appellate against ACEC (based on Animal Code)

ACEC Decision

- Resolve between ACEC Chair and Complainant
- Not resolved

ACEC Process

- Resolve between ACEC and Complainant
- Not resolved

ACEC Administrator to develop Memo and recommend to ENVR

- Investigate (if error in initial decision and recommend action to resolve)

Seek recommendation outside ACEC

- Resolved

- Not resolved

Activity conducted in accordance with ACEC approval

ACEC-recommended course of action:
- Change of Protocol Conditional Approval to Continue New Application

Document and Action:
- Caselfe – recording breaches of Code
- ACEC Agenda
- Inform IWC and VC as required
- Communicate to 3rd party and regulatory authorities as required
- Communicate to complainant

Activity found in breach of ACEC Approval

Institution to recommend action

Advice to expert group and public statements as required
APPENDIX D – Recruitment Procedure

PROCEDURE FOR RECRUITMENT AND APPOINTMENT A NEW MEMBER TO THE ANIMAL CARE AND ETHICS COMMITTEE (ACEC)

STEP 1 – RESIGNATION / RETIREMENT

Refer to ACEC:
- The ACEC receives the resignation.
- The ACEC makes recommendation to the Deputy Vice Chancellor Research (DVCR):
  i. That the resignation be accepted; and
  ii. That the DVCR initiate the recruitment of a new Member.

As part of this recommendation the ACEC may choose to nominate suitable persons to the DVCR for consideration. The suitable person(s) must meet the eligibility criteria for appointment as a Member in the relevant category.

DVCR & Ethics Office Chairperson:
- The DVCR is to formally advise the Animal Welfare Unit, NSW Department of Primary Industries of the resignation of the Chairperson and of SCU’s intention to recruit a new Chairperson (formal advice within 30 days).

All membership categories:
- The Ethics Office, Office of Research is to act as a resource to the DVCR for actioning items throughout the process.
- The Ethics Office is to keep the ACEC and DVCR advised of developments throughout the process.
- Ethics Office to progress all communications to DVCR through the Director, Office of Research.
- The DVCR (via Ethics Office) is to prepare a thank you letter for the service to the ACEC (see template, Appendix B - to be signed by the DVCR).

STEP 2 – RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

- The Ethics Office will initiate the search for a suitable candidate on behalf of the DVCR asking potential candidates to detail their suitability to the role based on the Criteria for Assessment of Membership http://www.animalethics.org.au/policies-and-guidelines/operation/criteria-for-assessment in an Expression of Interest (EoI) as well as requesting an updated Resume:
  i. Initiate a selection process for the person(s) nominated by the ACEC (if nominated) involving background checks, interviews, and referee checks; or
  ii. Seek expressions of interest to fill the role on ACEC internally via internal communication throughout SCU; or
  iii. Advertise externally to fill the role via local and regional media.
- A selection process is to be initiated for shortlisted candidates involving background checks, interviews, and referee checks. The DVCR is to consider any real or potential Conflicts of Interest in the selection of a candidate.
- Shortlist to be presented to members of the ACEC for recommendation to the DVCR
- The ACEC Chair to recommend to the DVCR a suitable member using the Brief (see Appendix A) and attach a draft letter of appointment (Appendix B) to be signed by DVCR upon approval. Supervisor in the Office of Research to be copied into correspondence.
STEP 3 – APPOINTMENT

- The DVCR is to recommend a final preferred candidate for endorsement to the Animal Welfare Unit, NSW Department of Primary Industries. This include the signed appointment letter to be sent to candidate requesting their signature for acceptance of the role.
- A term on the ACEC is for 3 years.
- The DVCR is to formally advise the ACEC and the Vice Chancellor of the appointment subject to DPI approval.
- The Animal Research Review Panel (ARRP) of the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) is to endorse the appointment (or otherwise) of the final preferred candidate.
- The new member is to immediately assume the role pending approval from DPI.