Wildlife Animal Ethics Committee
Stakeholder Update – November 2026

Dear Stakeholder

The aim of these stakeholder updates is to provide Chief Investigators (CIs) and animal handlers using animals for scientific purposes in Western Australia (WA) with the most recent information that will assist them to navigate the animal ethics approval process.

The Wildlife Animal Ethics Committee (WAEC) encourages CIs to circulate these updates to all animal handlers in the institution. We see our role as facilitators to enable CIs and animal handlers to comply with the *Animal Welfare Act* 2002 and the Australian Code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes (the Code). We are happy to provide clarification on requirements of the Code and feedback on draft applications prior to WAEC assessment.

The WAEC welcomes feedback from stakeholders on administrative processes or new research initiatives to protect wildlife welfare. Please email suggestions to wildlifeaec@dpird.wa.gov.au

WAEC 2026 snapshot

- 14 meetings held
- 76 new project applications assessed
  - 71% were from commercial – environmental impact assessments. (environmental consultants undertaking EIA and fauna monitoring programs)
  - 25% were from not-for-profit organisations, local government and volunteers.
  - 4% were from conservation and community groups.
- 96 project amendment requests reviewed
- 57 Annual Progress Reports and 72 Project Completion Reports submitted and reviewed
- 62 adverse event reports submitted.

2027 meeting dates

Twelve committee meetings will be held in 2027 with meetings held every 4 weeks, commencing on Tuesday 2 February. All the application submission and meeting dates can be found on the WAEC webpage - WAEC webpage

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The new FAQ document is now available on the WAEC webpage.

This document is well worth a read as it contains all the information you may need if you are considering applying for a scientific use licence or wildlife ethics approval; seeking instructions on the administrative processes for submitting applications, or amendments etc; and how the committee functions in terms of decision-making procedures.

New low impact, observational project application form

An application form for undertaking low impact, observation only projects has been developed and will be available for use from February 2027. The new application form can be used for projects that only use observational methods that result in no or minor interference to animals, such as remote cameras with flashes and lures, repetitive spotlighting, acoustic surveys for birds or bats, nest marking or excavation, aerial surveys using drones, UAVs, aircraft and helicopter, and surveying or monitoring marine fauna. Please contact the executive Officer for further information on what types of projects are covered by this application form. A guidance document will also be prepared.

Importantly, more invasive methods that require the handling of animals must use the full WAEC new project application (NPA) form. Examples include:

- Trapping or capture by hand, followed by release as used in monitoring, surveys and analysis of impact on populations (EIA surveys) e.g. Elliott, cage and pit traps, mist netting, harp traps
- Trapping and humane euthanasia for collection of specimens
- Trapping and humane euthanasia for feral animal control research
- Taking morphometric measurements, quantifying size and shape of animal
- Minor dietary or environmental deprivation or manipulation for short periods e.g. holding animals for identification
- Marking, tagging or banding using temporary or permanent methods, e.g. leg bands, ear tags, non-toxic markers, hair trimming
- Injections (including PIT implants), tissue sampling, hair or whisker sampling, blood collect
- Placement of an external tracking device without sedation e.g. radio-collar, back saddle transmitter.

Which form to use?

If a project, such as a regionally based fauna survey program, proposes the use of both low impact and more invasive methods at the same sites, then all methods should be included in a full NPA form.

If only low impact methods are to be used at some sites, then the low impact form can be used for those sites, and the more invasive methods to be undertaken at other sites should be included as a separate application.

Minor changes will be made to the full NPA form to reduce repetition and better align the methodology with the mitigation actions.

Both application forms will be available on the WAEC webpage **by February 2027**.

New survey technique to consider?

The use of eDNA (environmental DNA) techniques is becoming more popular as part of broadscale fauna surveys preparing species occurrence lists with little or no impact on the fauna. Projects using eDNA techniques and not handling animals may not require AEC approval. Some links below:

- https://doi.org/10.1111/fwb.70312
- https://doi.org/10.3897/mbmg.10.192801?urlappend=%3Futm_source%3Dresearchgate.net%26utm_medium%3Darticle

A reminder to only use the revised templates available on the WAEC webpage.

Ongoing projects that have expired or due to expire

Using animals for scientific purposes must cease once the approved project expiry date has been reached. If a project is to continue to use animals for scientific purposes, you are reminded that under S 2.4.10 of the *Australian Code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes* (8th edition) chief investigators must (i) submit an application to the WAEC, and (ii) obtain written approval from the WAEC. Continuing to use animals for scientific purposes beyond the approved permit expiry date would be considered a major breach of the Code and your approval conditions, and appropriate penalties could be imposed.

If you wish to continue with a project, please submit a new project application and Project Completion Report as soon as possible. Alternatively, you can request up to a 1-year extension on the current project approval via the amendment process, however this must be submitted and approved before the project approval permit expires. The reason for the project extension needs to be made clear.

Please contact the Executive Officer at wildlifeaec@dpird.wa.gov.au for any further assistance.

Annual Progress Reports (APR) and Project Completion Reports (PCR)

The Annual Progress Reports (APR) and Project Completion Reports (PCR) are providing the WAEC with important information that contributes to our ability to monitor approved projects as required under S2.3.17 and S2.3.18 of the Code. Information provided by stakeholders in the APR and PCR allows the WAEC to assess whether the project is progressing in an ethically acceptable manner and complies with the Code.

- An **APR** is required within 30 days of the anniversary of the project approval date. A satisfactory APR is required before the project proceeds into the next year.
- A **PCR** is required within 42 days of the project completion date providing the project is not continuing. If a project is continuing beyond the completion date, another NPA is required and the PCR for that project must be submitted with the NPA

Reporting Adverse Events to WAEC

CIs and animal handlers are reminded to email or phone adverse event notifications to the WAEC Executive Officer (EO) within 24 hours of the incident occurring as well as emailing a full adverse event report to the WAEC EO within 7-10 days.

Photographs are very useful to the WAEC to be able to understand the circumstances and results of an adverse event and encourage animal handlers to take photographs as soon as the adverse event is recorded. While a full post-mortem examination is not always possible, a dead animal can be assessed externally to provide information about the circumstances of death. Factors such as overall condition of the animal (obese, skinny, pregnant), obvious injuries, life stage (juvenile, adult), unusual secretions etc can provide useful information on the cause of the adverse event.

Reporting Adverse Events in the Annual Animal Use Report (SLU)

While the WAEC asks project CIs to report both ‘expected’ and ‘unexpected’ adverse events throughout the year, the reporting of ‘expected’ adverse events is not required when reporting adverse events for the Annual Animal Use Reports (AAURs) submitted to DPIRD’s Scientific Licencing Unit (SLU). CIs are asked to only report the number of ‘Unexpected’ adverse events when completing their AAUR reports.

Management of pitfall traps in the field

Pitfall traps are used extensively for fauna survey projects, and they are sometimes left *in situ* when repeated surveys are being undertaken. It is important that in this case the pits are rendered inoperable while left unattended through filling with soil or affixing a suitable lid and covering with soil/rocks etc. Please ensure pitfall traps are securely sealed and remain so while not being used. If pitfall traps are left *in situ*, they must be checked at appropriate times to ensure that the filling or covering is still acting as it should. Once a year is probably not adequate. The WAEC has recently received reports of lines of uncovered pit traps left unattended. It is also important that pitfall traps are removed when the survey has been completed and sufficient project resourcing must be included to do this.

Pitfall lids sometimes breakdown over time allowing animals to fall into the pit below. Excessive rainfall events can wash out soil filling and move lids. Where off road vehicle activity is possible, for example on active mine sites or survey areas, the location of pit traps needs to be recorded on the site management systems to ensure they are avoided and not inadvertently damaged. Pit traps remaining in the ground should also be marked prominently to avoid accidental damage.

Pitfall traps are often furnished with moist sponges in hot and dry areas to reduce the likelihood of frogs dehydrating while in the pitfall trap. If the sponges dry out, they can exacerbate the dehydration process by drawing moisture out of a frog sitting on the sponge. Only use sponges if they can be kept moist in between trap checks. Using moist soil instead may be a better solution.

Regional Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) fauna survey projects

The regional approach for projects undertaking environmental impact assessments and following the EPA Technical Guidance for terrestrial fauna surveys has been useful for consultants to obtain WAEC approval for projects at multiple sites within a biogeographical area. For projects across multiple sites using a wide range of methods for fauna surveys for different survey types a table showing the survey type (basic, detailed, targeted) and methods to be used for each site is useful for the WAEC to understand the potential impact of the project. For targeted surveys, the fauna being targeted should be included.

An example for a method-based table:

Study Site	Targeted Fauna Species	Aim of Survey	Type of Survey	Potential/Proposed Methods*	
				Method Ref No	Method Description

Source: kindly provided by Ecocene.

Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

The use of SOPs provides the WAEC with confidence that the CIs are following procedures and protocols developed by subject matter experts that have been peer reviewed, and which have the least impact on animal use.

The Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) have prepared several SOPs covering many of the fauna survey and research methodologies used in WA. These are approved by the WAEC for use in new project applications.

Current DBCA SOPs can be found at Animal ethics and the use of animals

CIs must ensure they clearly understand the requirements of the most current SOPs which must be recorded in their applications.

For methodologies not covered by DBCA's SOPs, the WAEC will also endorse the use of other institutional SOPs or reference documents under the following conditions:

- The SOP has been prepared by a competent person and has been through a process of review by the institution.
- The SOP has been approved by the WAEC.
- The SOP is less than 3 years old and is the most up to date version.
- CIs and animal handlers named in the application must be competent to implement the requirements of the selected SOP.
- The relevant information in the SOP is included in the application.

Institutional work instructions or technical guidance documents are not considered to be SOPs. If a CI wishes to use another institution's SOP in an application, a copy of the SOP must be attached to the application for WAEC review and approval. The WAEC maintains a list of other institutions' SOPs it has approved for use in WAEC applications.

Animal ethics training for project personnel

The University of Adelaide and ANZCCART offer free online ComPass animal welfare training modules. Phase 1 covers the training for AEC members and animal users, and completion is mandated by many institutions and AECs in Australia and New Zealand. It is pleasing to note that several of the institutions and CIs that submit applications to the WAEC have completed this course and have also identified staff responsible for animal welfare issues. It is highly recommended that all institutions and CIs undertake this training.

Update - Bird Flu H5N1 virus

As of mid-September 2026, there had been 572 confirmed positive bird flu related deaths of wildlife in Australia. Ten of these were from southern WA.

South Australia reported the most deaths – 301 cases. No cases have been reported in WA since June 2026, however the arrival of migratory waders along the northwest coast in early summer may result in an increase in sightings.

Please maintain vigilance and report unusual behaviour or unexplained deaths of sea and shore birds, migratory waders and marine mammals.

- Avoid contact and keep your distance
- Record the date, time, location and take photos
- Report it to the 24-hour Emergency Animal Disease Hotline on 1800 675 888.

Signs in birds

- Can't stand, walk or fly properly
- Droopy and puffed-up stature
- Breathing difficulty
- Unusual neck and head posture
- Sudden death in large numbers.

Signs in mammals

- Difficulty walking and breathing
- Walking in circles
- Weakness
- Seizures and tremors

- Drooling and runny nose
- Sudden illness or death.

Find out more about the signs and how to report. For more information, visit the Australian Government website at birdflu.gov.au.

Please contact either the Executive Officer Kim Haywood or myself at wildlifeaec@dpird.wa.gov.au if you would like to discuss any of the information mentioned above.

The Wildlife Animal Ethics Committee members wish you all a safe and enjoyable festive season.



Keith Morris
Chair
Wildlife Animal Ethics Committee

November 2026