

## Committee Name: WSLHD Animal Ethics Committee

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### 1. Role of the WSLHD Animal Ethics Committee (WSLHD AEC)

The Western Sydney Local Health District Animal Ethics Committee (WSLHD AEC) Constitution contains the Terms of Reference and sets out the membership, responsibilities, authority and operations of the WSLHD AEC Committee.

The Committee's responsibility is to consider all applications for animal holding, breeding, research, or teaching on the basis of their ethical, scientific or educational value.

The Committee facilitates mitigation of potential breaches of animal ethics and welfare in relation to the Animal Research Act (1985) and the Australian Code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes (8<sup>th</sup> Ed. 2013).

The Westmead Institute for Medical Research (WIMR) nominated the WSLHD AEC to continue to oversee all ethics relating to animal research (as per the Agreement between the WIMR and the WSLHD signed 12 November 2015) undertaken by researchers at the WIMR which holds its own accreditation as an Animal Research Establishment as conferred by the Animal Research Review Panel (ARRP), NSW Department of Primary Industries.

### 2. Responsibilities of the WSLHD Animal Ethics Committee

The WSLHD AEC has the following responsibilities:

- Consider all applications for animal holding, breeding, research or teaching on the basis of their ethical, animal welfare, scientific and educational value and approve them or approve subject to modification or reject any application if not ethically acceptable to the Committee
- Approve guidelines for the care of animals that are bred, held and used for scientific purposes on behalf of the institution
- Monitor the acquisition, transport, production, housing and care of animals
- Monitor the use and disposal of animals
- Authorise the emergency treatment and euthanasia of any animal should it be required
- Withdraw approval of a project
- Delegate authority to the Chair, Executive Officer or the Executive Committee (as appropriate) to carry out a function as directed by the Committee
- Examine and comment on all WSLHD plans and policies which may affect animal welfare; or on the plans and policies of any other institution, body or holder of an animal research licence for which the Committee has responsibility
- Maintain a record of proposals and approved projects
- Recommend to the WSLHD any measures needed to ensure the standards of the Code are maintained
- Communicate with and develop *Memoranda of Understanding* with other institutions where required
- Report at least annually to the WSLHD CE
- Perform all other duties required by the Code

## 2.1. Power of the Committee

The WSLHD AEC exists to ensure that all scientific research, teaching and related education and research undertaken on animals at the WSLHD and WIMR or by its employees, conforms to the current legislation and the *Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes (8<sup>th</sup> Ed., 2013)* as well as pertinent, established guidelines or industry best practice.

The WSLHD AEC is independent of the Institution but is responsible directly to the WSLHD CE, and likewise the CE is the officer responsible for ensuring the effective operation and compliance of the WSLHD AEC with statutory requirements as well as WSLHD policies and procedures; and is the officer to whom the WSLHD AEC regularly and routinely report.

## 2.2. Delegation of authority to a sub-committee (optional)

An executive sub-committee (EC) made up of committee members from each of the four membership categories has been established to allow decisions to be made and actions to be taken on minor matters outside of the regular quorate meetings.

All decisions made by the EC need to be ratified by the Committee at the next quorate meeting. Approvals given by this process may be revoked or modified at the full meeting.

## 3. Structure and Composition of the WSLHD Animal Ethics Committee

### 3.1. Membership

The WSLHD AEC must have a membership that will allow it to fulfil its *Terms of Reference and responsibilities under the Code*. The Committee comprises members who qualify for appointment based on their appropriate qualifications to one of four categories as mandated in the Code (see below):

Category A: a person with qualifications in veterinary science and preferably with animal research experience

Category B: a suitably qualified research scientist with recent experience in scientific research using animals

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

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. This category 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

Note: Categories C and D must together represent at least one-third of the AEC membership.

### 3.2. Expertise

As outlined in 3.1, each category has people with appropriate understanding, skills, qualifications, experience and expertise to satisfy compliance as described in the NHMRC Australian Code (8<sup>th</sup> Ed. 2013).

Each member, to fulfil their responsibility in assessing an application as being ethically acceptable, should be familiar with the Code and other policies and guidelines relevant to the business of the AEC, maintain confidentiality regarding the content of applications and deliberations and declare any interests that could influence the objectivity of their decision making.

The Chair must have a sufficient seniority in the institution and has the responsibility of guiding the operation of the AEC, resolving conflicts related to the business of the AEC, and representing the AEC in any negotiations with the institution's management.

The WSLHD AEC may also invite people with specific expertise to provide advice to the committee, as required.

### **3.3. Appointment**

The process of selection and appointment of new members to the WSLHD AEC is the responsibility of the Chairperson and the Executive Officer. Before appointment, all new members must acknowledge in writing their acceptance of the terms of reference contained in the WSLHD AEC Constitution, the AEC procedures and sign the WSLHD AEC Confidentiality Agreement.

The Term of Office for members is for a minimum of three years however members are welcomed to remain on the Committee for a longer period willing to do so. Also, where an absence of potentially suitably qualified successors exists, members may be asked to serve for longer periods, upon the agreement of the member and the Committee at a meeting.

The position of the Executive Officer (EO) will be occupied by the Director of Animal Care for the term of their employment at the WSLHD in that position. The EO will also occupy a Category A position on the Committee.

### **3.4. Chair**

The Chair of the Committee:

- Will hold a senior position within the WSLHD and be appointed by the CE after acknowledgement by the Animal Research Review Panel (ARRP) that the recommended person is suitable and approved by the Panel
- Will bring impartiality to the role
- Will possess the skills to manage the business of the WSLHD AEC
- Will have the ability to communicate, negotiate and resolve conflict
- Will have an understanding of the ethical and animal welfare issues involved in the use of animals for scientific research and teaching purposes
- Will advise the CE regarding the level of resourcing required for effective operation of the Committee

Note: A Deputy Chair will be appointed if the Chair is to be absent from a meeting or in the case of a declared conflict affecting the Chair.

The Deputy Chair will be a Committee member however, shall cease to occupy membership on the Committee under their prescribed Category while acting as the Chair.

## 4. Operation of the WSLHD Animal Ethics Committee

### **4.1. Secretariat/Committee support/Administration**

All records, including agendas, minutes, reports, correspondence and recommendations relating to the administration/operation of the WSLHD AEC are prepared, processed and kept by the Director and Executive Assistant (Secretary) of the Department of Animal Care.

### **4.2. Frequency of meetings/minimum number of meetings**

Meetings will be held at least seven (7) times each year to enable the effective processing of applications in a timely manner.

### **4.3. Notice of meeting**

Proposed meeting dates for the forthcoming year are circulated to the Committee in the last half of the preceding year (August or October meetings).

Agendas are prepared in advance of each meeting and are forwarded to members two to three weeks prior to the scheduled meeting date to enable Committee members to review applications, modifications and other relevant information pertinent to animal research, ethics and welfare.

Committee members must be present at a meeting to participate in the review and decision making process.

### **4.4. Attendees**

Researchers may be invited to attend an AEC meeting for face to face discussions with the Committee. This provides an opportunity for a researcher to describe to the Committee detailed information and for Committee to further question the applicant regarding areas of concern particularly relating to animal welfare.

Any director of the Board may attend and speak at a Committee meeting.

### **4.5. Quorum for meetings**

The minimum quorum for a committee meeting will be reached with the attendance of at least one member from each of the four Categories (described above – 3.1 Membership). Should more than one member of each Category attend, Categories C and D must together represent at least one-third of the AEC membership present.

### **4.6. Committee members interests**

Members of the WSLHD AEC must declare any conflicts of interest at the commencement of each meeting. Subsequently, they do not participate in discussions and deliberations associated with the decision making process relating to any such submissions in which they have acknowledged that there is an actual or perceived conflict of interest.

### **4.7. Access to advice**

The WSLHD AEC has the authority to investigate any matters within its terms of reference as set out in the WSLHD AEC Constitution. Procedures are in place to examine and investigate grievances, complaints and breaches to ethical animal research as per the Code and Committee's terms of reference. The institution must provide the Committee with the resources it needs to do so and with the right access to information including external professional advice as necessary.

#### ***4.8. Formal mechanism for reporting key matters***

The Chair of the WSLHD AEC provides a summary report on notable issues on behalf of the Committee to the Research and Development Committee at its bimonthly meetings.

#### ***4.9. Formal mechanism for communicating between committees in the case of shared or overlapping responsibilities (optional)***

The Secretary of the WSLHD Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) is invited to attend the WSLHD AEC meetings as an observer and provides advice and information to the AEC on matters relating to compliance to the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR) guidelines.

Similarly, the Executive Officer of the WSLHD AEC attends the WSLHD IBC meetings to provide advice and information regarding animal ethics, husbandry and welfare in applications where the use of animals may affect/impact on decisions made relating to the use of animals in biomedical research.

### **5. Review and assessment of the WSLHD Animal Ethics Committee**

The WSLHD AEC submits an annual **Animal Ethics Report to the CE**, the purpose of which is to inform the head of the establishment of the activities of the institution's AEC and to identify problems that may need to be addressed. The report also provides a means of self-assessment relating to compliance with animal research legislation (Animal Research Act 1985, the NSW Department of Primary Industry) and to identify measures needed to ensure ongoing compliance.

The Office of the CE is required to forward the Animal Ethics Report to the CE to the Animal Research Review Panel (ARRP), NSW Department of Primary Industries, who review the Report and provide comment back to the CE.