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<b>Policy</b> <b>Site Inspections by Animal Ethics Committee Members</b>		

## Introduction

In the section of the *Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition 2013* which deals with responsibilities and operation of Animal Ethics Committees (AECs), the following clauses relate to inspections by AECs.

Clause 2.2.29: 'Members of the AEC should inspect all animal housing and laboratory areas regularly and record their findings. Records of inspections should include the names of those who attended, observations, any identified problems, follow-up and outcomes. Inspections of fieldwork conducted at extremely remote sites, or where access is difficult, may be performed by an agent or delegate and can be facilitated or corroborated with photographic or video imaging'.

Inspections by Animal Care and Ethics Committees (AECs) form a valuable part of the activities of AECs.

### 1. Purpose

1.1 Inspection by AECs may be used to:

- ensure the *Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition 2013* and AEC directions are being complied with
- familiarise AEC members with what is happening "in practice" as opposed to "on paper"
- promote interaction between the AEC members, researchers and animal care staff

### 2. Attendance

2.1 All AEC members should participate in inspections. It is not necessary for every member to attend every inspection. Inspections can be organised on a roster basis to ensure all members participate on a regular basis.

2.2 AEC members external to the organisation, and in particular Category C and D members, are encouraged to participate in inspections. The scheduling of inspections should be arranged to facilitate the attendance of these members.

### 3. Scope

3.1 Inspections should include examination of:

- Animal holding facilities
- Animals (health and welfare)
- Research procedures (on occasion)
- Animal identification and care records
- Research records (on occasion)

- 3.2 It should be ensured animals are held in current and approved protocols and that the procedures being conducted are in accord with the approved protocol.
- 3.3 Discussion with animal carers and researchers during inspections is encouraged as a means of obtaining information and providing an opportunity for contact between these people and AEC members.
- 3.4 Research procedures should be viewed by AEC members on occasion. AEC members are encouraged to view procedures as often as possible as an additional means of assessing the impact of projects on animals. Procedures to be viewed may be chosen on the basis of criteria including:
  - Contentious research project or procedure
  - Convenience (procedure coinciding with inspection)
  - Commonly occurring procedure
  - Operator has not been seen performing procedure by the AEC

#### **4. Frequency**

- 4.1 Frequency of inspections will be determined by factors including number of sites, accessibility of sites, amount of research overseen by the AEC, type of research conducted, variety of research conducted and whether inspections can be combined with scheduled AEC meetings.
- 4.2 As a general rule it is expected that inspections of each active animal research project area would be conducted at least once yearly. In contrast, if a contentious or invasive project or pilot study is being conducted, inspections (by nominated members of the AEC) may need to be as frequent as monthly. The frequency of site visits will be assessed based on the judged risk of the project activity to the animal's health and welfare.

#### **5. Notification**

Announced inspections have the advantage of allowing arrangements for relevant personnel to be available to assist the AEC and answer questions, as well as improving interaction between AEC members and researchers and animal care staff.

#### **6. Records of Inspection**

- 6.1 Records of inspections will be kept.
- 6.2 The type of records will vary with factors such as the complexity of the research being conducted and the frequency with which a facility is inspected. Records may vary from a detailed inventory of animals, procedures and facilities to an entry in the minutes noting that an inspection was conducted and including any significant findings. As a general guide, significant findings (good and bad) and problem areas will be documented. Where problems are encountered, documentation will be kept of how these have been followed up and solved.
- 6.3 Mechanisms are in place to ensure that the findings of inspections are reported back to the AEC by the presentation of inspection reports and that any necessary follow up is instituted.

6.4 Inspection reports will also be issued to animal carers and researchers.

## **7. Research at remote sites**

7.1 Research conducted at farms and research conducted at sites remote from the location of the AEC creates particular difficulties for conducting inspections. The difficulties include organising an inspection to coincide with a project which may be a “one off” trial on a company farm, as well as the expense and time requirements involved in AEC members travelling to remote locations. The need for inspections in these situations will be assessed in terms of the research being conducted and potential benefits in terms of animal welfare to be gained from inspecting.

7.2 The following mechanisms may be considered to assist the monitoring of research in these situations:

7.2.1 Trials on private properties:

- interview researcher
- request video or photographs of procedures, animal holding areas, animals held
- ensure AEC guidelines for animal care are in place and that the farm manager/animal carer is familiar with these
- arrange for an agent or proxy of the AEC to conduct an inspection, and report back to the AEC with their findings

7.2.2 Research at permanent research sites remote from the location of the AEC

- request video or photographs of procedures, animal holding areas, animals held
- arrange infrequent inspections at times that coincide with research being conducted to obtain maximum benefit from the inspection
- arrange for an agent or proxy of the AEC to conduct an inspection, and report back to the AEC with their findings

## **8. Role of individual AEC members**

Where members of AECs have contact with research animals and animal holding areas in the course of their duties (for example animal attendants, researchers, veterinarians), this contact can be used to assist in monitoring of animal care, but should not take the place of AEC inspections.