

Procedure for Handling Complaints or Concerns about the Conduct of an Approved Research Project

If any person, whether a member of the public or staff of the organisation has concerns regarding the care and treatment of any animal on the organisation's property, they may report the matter to any member of the AEC. The operating procedures include a procedure for recording and processing complaints. Complaints relate only to breaches of the *Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes, 8th Edition 2013* and the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, 2018* that have been reported to the Animal Ethics Committee. Procedurally fair investigations will also be conducted based on the practices outlined in the *Guide to Managing and Investigating Potential Breaches of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research 2018*.

Information provided for an investigation is protected by the *Privacy Act 1988* and will not be disclosed to any third parties, except as required by law.

Research misconduct is a serious breach of the Codes which is intentional, reckless and/or negligent.

Breaches of the Research and Welfare Codes include, but are not limited to:

1. Not meeting required research and animal welfare standards, including
 - Concealment or facilitation of breaches (or potential breaches) of the Codes by others
2. Fabrication, falsification, misrepresentation of research documentation
3. Plagiarism
4. Research data management
5. Failure to provide adequate guidance or mentorship on responsible research conduct
6. Failure to acknowledge the contribution of others fairly
7. Failure to disclose and manage conflicts of interest
8. Failure to conduct peer review responsibly and fairly

Procedure

1. The Complainant

The complainant in the case of animal research is normally an individual member of the public, a community or animal welfare organisation, the chief investigator (who refers the complaint on the project to the AEC), another researcher, a staff member or a government department.

2. AEC procedure for handling complaints

(i) Receipt of complaint

- The AEC request a written complaint, if this has not already been submitted
- The Executive Officer records receipt of the complaint
- The complaint is brought to the notice of the AEC Chair

(ii) Establishing details of complaint

The Executive Officer finds out full details of the complaint and examines the complaint in relation to the approved project application

(iii) Assessing complaints at AEC level

- Investigations are thorough, robust and free from bias with AEC members stating any conflicts of interest

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- The respondent will be provided with evidence received and given an opportunity to respond to the allegation and evidence.
- The Committee assesses the evidence including its veracity and considers if more information may be required.
- The Committee may request expert advice to assist the investigation
- The Committee arrives at findings of fact about the allegation
- The Committee identifies whether the principles and responsibilities of the Code have been breached
- The Committee considers the seriousness of any breach
- The Committee provides a report into its findings of fact consistent with its terms of reference
- The Committee makes recommendations as appropriate

(iv) Resolution of complaint at AEC level

- The complaint is resolved at the AEC level if possible
- The action that is taken depends on the nature of the complaint
- If a breach of the Codes is found the Chair of the Board is advised and recommendations made if other institutions should be notified, legal or other expert advice should be sought and any efforts to correct the public record of the research will be determined and taken

(v) Complaint not resolved satisfactorily at AEC level

Appropriate action will be recommended on a case by case basis, but may involve referred the matter to an external body such as a professional mediator

Additional Considerations

If there is a potential breach in a collaborative research project action will be taken on a case by case basis. Taking into considerations issues such as the lead institution, where the complaint was lodged, contractual arrangements or where the events occurred. Institutions should cooperate if there is a potential breach of the Codes to ensure that only investigation is conducted. There should be clear communication between all parties throughout the investigation.

Where potentially corrupt conduct and/or potential criminal behavior these matters require referral to an appropriate agency. Following completion of an external investigation an institution may need to consider if there are outstanding matters relevant to the Codes, the be addressed internally and may decide to initiate further internal processing.

If safety issues that could harm humans, animals or the environment are involved immediate action must be taken to minimise the risk of harm. This action is at the discretion of CHM Alliance and is independent of the *Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes, 8th Edition 2013*.