

## EUTHANASIA POLICY & PROCEDURES

### BACKGROUND

The wildlife rehabilitation licence from the National Parks & Wildlife Service (Dept of Environment & Conservation), instructs that animals which cannot be returned to the wild, released, or retained in captivity as provided in the terms of the licence shall be humanely euthanased.

Animals may only be retained in captivity under certain circumstances:

- a. *If a threatened species, with the Department's prior written consent, animals may be offered to a translocation project that includes captive breeding as part of its recovery approval, or to an appropriate research project, or to a fauna park or zoo.*
- b. *If not a threatened species, they may be offered to a licenced fauna park or zoo.*
- c. *With prior written consent from the local office of NPWS, retained in permanent care for the purpose of providing an essential companion animal to others of its species undergoing rehabilitation or an acceptable resource in an approved educational or scientific program. (Many conditions apply).*
- d. *in the case of a bird species commonly kept as a pet, the Department will consider, on an individual basis, the granting of approval for its retention in captivity as a pet;*
- e. *in the case of an individual bird, reptile or amphibian that is originally encountered well outside of its natural range and cannot be released, it can be assumed that the animal is an escaped pet, or has been inadvertently transported from its natural range, and arrange for the transfer of the animal to an appropriate animal keeping organisation where it may be passed to an appropriate person to keep it as a pet.*

In all other cases, if a native animal can not be released back into the wild for any of the reasons described in the licence, the animal must be euthanased. *Note: For threatened species, even disabled animals may qualify for retention in captivity as per (a) above.*

Wildlife rehabilitators by their nature feel sympathy for the animals in their care. However, the euthanasia policy looks to the quality of life for wildlife, so there are to be no exceptions. No animals may be retained in captivity unless in accordance the conditions of our licence.

### EUTHANASIA POLICIES

- Euthanasia is defined as a gentle death and should be considered as an act of humane killing with the minimum of pain, fear and distress.
- The decision to destroy an animal must be made by a veterinarian, coordinator, or wildlife carer with at least two year's relevant experience.
- Euthanasia must be performed only by veterinary surgeons, appropriately trained personnel, or under the direct supervision of such a competent person.
- Humane procedures must be used. These procedures must avoid pain or distress, be reliable and produce rapid loss of consciousness until death occurs.
- Euthanasia must be carried out without posing any risk to people, property, or other animals in the vicinity.
- No volunteer shall be coerced to perform euthanasia.
- While every attempt should be made to avoid causing distress to members of the public, the wellbeing of the animal must take priority.

## **EUTHANASIA PROCEDURES**

It is not possible to cover every circumstance in which euthanasia may be required. However, the following procedures must be followed wherever possible.

### **1. General considerations for euthanasia**

- a. Inexperienced volunteers must make every effort to consult with a coordinator, a member experienced with the species, or a veterinary surgeon before deciding an animal's fate.
- b. If at a veterinary surgery, preference is for the use of sedatives for the animal prior to euthanasia. This helps reduce anxiety and distress to both the animal and operator.
- c. If possible, animals should be euthanased in a quiet area, away from other animals. Distress vocalisations and behaviour, and the release of pheromones can result in distress to other animals in the vicinity.

### **2. Considerations for euthanasia in the field**

- a. The decision to destroy an animal must not be unduly influenced by well meaning, but inexperienced members of the public.
- b. Every effort should be made to clear the area of people who might find it distressing.
- c. If the animal is diseased, poisoned, or has been euthanased using a drug overdose, the body must be buried, burnt or otherwise disposed of so as to prevent injury or disease to pets or scavengers.

### **3. The method of euthanasia employed should be:**

- a. Painless, rapid, and require minimal restraint.
- b. Appropriate for the age, species and health of the animal,
- c. Designed to minimise distress.
- d. Reliable, safe and performed by trained personnel.

### **4. Post-Euthanasia Considerations**

- a. It is important to establish that death has occurred. You or the veterinary staff must check breathing and heart sounds / pulse.

### **5. Acceptable methods of euthanasia include:**

- a. For all mammals, birds and reptiles the preferred method is overdose with barbiturate injection by a veterinarian, preferably after chemical restraint.
- b. For large animals in the field, gunshot to the brain is an appropriate method.

#### ***If options 5a and 5b are unavailable, other options include:***

- c. Blunt force trauma to the back of the head, provided it is delivered with sufficient force to render the animal immediately unconscious and brings about death rapidly.
- d. For mammals up to 150g and birds less than 350g, cervical dislocation is acceptable if carried out by a person trained in the use of the method.
- e. For birds, and for mammals up to 600g, CO<sub>2</sub> is acceptable if carried out by a person trained in the use of the method.
- f. For reptiles in the field, striking the head against a hard object causing rapid and complete destruction of the brain.

**6. Unacceptable methods of euthanasia include:**

- a. Exsanguination (bleeding to death)
- b. Freezing
- c. Drowning
- d. Injection of Ethanol
- e. CO<sub>2</sub> for any animal over 600g
- f. Decapitation or Cervical dislocation for any mammal over 150g
- g. For reptiles and microbats CO<sub>2</sub> and Ether / Chloroform are unacceptable as the animals can slow their breathing / metabolism.
- h. Vehicle exhaust, as new cars have low carbon monoxide levels and result in a slow death

**7. Shooting**

When an animal is destroyed by gunshot, the following considerations must be kept in mind:

- a. The shooter must be licenced, and operate within all appropriate laws
- b. Firearm and ammunition must be appropriate for the species
- c. Be aware of where the bullet will exit. If there is any danger to people, property or other animals, another method must be used.
- d. If approaching from the rear of the animal, shoot at the base of the skull, midway between the ears along a line that leads to the nose.
- e. If approaching from the front, aim at the middle of an imaginary X drawn from the base of the ear to the outer corner of the opposite eye. Direct the shot downwards along the line of the animal's neck.
- f. Side shots will depend on the species of animal.
- g. The police should be notified if possible so that they know where and when shots will be fired

**References:**

Australian code of practice for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes (2004)  
Monash University Animal Welfare Committee – Euthanasia Guidelines 2005  
University of Melbourne Animal Welfare Committee – Guidelines on humane killing and euthanasia of animals (April 2005)  
Australian Registry of Wildlife Health – Health Investigation Manual  
National Wildlife Rehabilitation Association (USA) Manual

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