

1b.2 Guidelines – Animal Euthanasia

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1. Definitions

In these guidelines, unless the context requires otherwise:

Euthanasia: Euthanasia is the process of inducing a painless death. The Zoo and Aquarium Association requires that if an animal in the care of a member zoo or aquarium has to be euthanased, death must occur with the least possible fear, anxiety, pain and distress (Reilly and Blackshaw 2001). Euthanasia is considered a necessary procedure that supports sound animal welfare outcomes in the responsible application of veterinary medicine and in some circumstances as part of the scientific management of animal populations.

Managed population: A managed population refers to the population of a species that is managed according to a science-based methodology to maintain optimum genetic diversity and demographic integrity. Its aim is to ensure the existence of long-term sustainable populations ‘that’ or ‘to’ support zoo-based conservation outcomes including recovery and advocacy programs.

ASMP: The Australasian Species Management Program is the species management arm of the Zoo and Aquarium Association.

2. Scope

This Guideline specifically covers animals in the care of member zoos and aquariums. It does not cover feed animals, confiscated animals, feral animals or wildlife in rehabilitation. The euthanasia of animals that fall into these categories should also follow best practice and avoid fear, anxiety, pain and distress.

These guidelines provide a framework from which Association members may develop their own organisational policies and procedures.

3. Background

Zoo and Aquarium Association, Australasia (the Association) is committed to supporting good animal welfare. Sound principles of species management are employed by Association members to guide decision-making around animal health care and breeding. For more information on the Association's position on animal welfare see the Animal Welfare Position Statement (Zoo and Aquarium Association 2014).

4. Guidelines

- 4.1 The Association considers euthanasia as a necessary practice in circumstances where:
 - (a) The animal poses a serious and unavoidable threat to human safety, e.g. escaped dangerous animal (noting that in this scenario humane destruction may be applied).
 - (b) In the opinion of the staff responsible for an individual animal's health and welfare, the animal is suffering from a disease, age-related ailments, detrimental psychological state or severe pain and/or stress which cannot be adequately alleviated.
- 4.2 Further, the Association considers that euthanasia may be appropriate where:
 - (a) It enables containment of disease spread to animals or to humans, as prescribed by health authorities, or recommended by veterinarians.
 - (b) Current housing of an animal presents ongoing welfare concerns and the only alternative is permanent transfer to accommodation which cannot assure an acceptable level of welfare for the animal and which cannot be improved within a short or mutually agreed interval.
 - (c) The continued presence of an individual animal within a social unit is unreasonably harmful to the on-going function of that social group.
 - (d) A managed population's demographic or genetic viability is at risk through the continued presence of one or more individual animals (WAZA Animal Welfare Strategy).
 - (e) The longevity of a species in captivity exceeds that of its wild counterparts and prolonging the life of aged animals through intensive health/preventative treatments requires significant and protracted interventions which may unacceptably compromise its welfare state.
 - (f) The potential for breeding to deliver agreed goals of a conservation program is compromised by presence of post-reproductive or other individuals not required for the breeding population, and which cannot be placed at another facility without entraining the problems associated with age-related health issues at that facility. (IUCN/SSC 2014; WAZA Animal Welfare Strategy)
- 4.3 Members are ethically obliged to strike an informed balance between the life of an individual and maintaining the long-term viability of a managed population. Where

those obligations are in conflict, the wellbeing and genetic health of the population over the long-term necessarily should be maintained.

- 4.4 Association members operate in several regulatory jurisdictions, and the need to comply with all applicable regulations and legislation may result in varied approaches to euthanasia by member organisations.
- 4.5 Decision-making relating to euthanasia may be assisted by an institutional or independent committee such as an Animal Ethics Committee.
- 4.6 Association members should refer to these guidelines when communicating with the community on euthanasia.
- 4.7 Members of the Zoo and Aquarium Association should:**
- (a) Develop and implement an organisational euthanasia policy that details the circumstances under which euthanasia can be employed, the alternatives to be explored and the procedures to be followed.
 - (b) Include in their institutional euthanasia policy reference to the handling of wildlife cases, including sick, injured and orphaned wildlife both from outside and within the property.
 - (c) Review the circumstances leading to a decision for euthanasia of an animal and the contributing factors so that any necessary action can be taken to minimise repetition of the causal factors.
 - (d) Implement appropriate species management processes that aim to minimise unnecessary breeding of animals.

4.8 ASMP program species

- (a) Although the decision for euthanasia rests with an individual member zoo or aquarium, in the case of ASMP Program species, endorsement to remove individuals from a breeding population should be sought from the ASMP, unless the decision for euthanasia is the result of pain or suffering that a veterinarian deems significant enough to warrant immediate alleviation of the issue.

5. References

- Reilly, J. (ed.) (2001) *Euthanasia of Animals Used for Scientific Purposes*. 2nd edition (2001). Australian and New Zealand Council for the Care of Animals in Research and Teaching, Adelaide, Australia.
- Zoo and Aquarium Association, Australasia. 2014. *Animal Welfare Position Statement*. Sydney: ZAA.
- Mellor, D. J., Hunt, S. & Gusset, M. (eds) (2015) *Caring for Wildlife: The World Zoo and Aquarium Animal Welfare Strategy*. Gland: WAZA Executive Office, 69 pp.
- IUCN/SSC (2014). *Guidelines on the Use of Ex Situ Management for Species Conservation*. Version 2.0. Gland, Switzerland: IUCN Species Survival Commission.

6. Approval

These guidelines were approved by the Board of the Association on 10/10/2015.

Revision Record

Approved / Amended/ Rescinded / Reviewed	Date	Board / Executive Director	Description
