

Fate planning for animals used for scientific purposes

Forward planning (e.g., how and when to retire an animal from the program) will support animal welfare and wellbeing and ensure that animals used are fit to fulfil the needs of the program.

RETIRING ANIMALS FROM SCIENTIFIC USE

Animals used in activities for scientific purposes should have a retirement plan for the conclusion of their use.

The [Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes, 8th edition 2013 \(updated 2021\)](#) (the Code) and the QSAEC identify the following provisions which may be suitable for animals at the conclusion of their scientific use:

- Rehousing (rehoming)
- Return to normal husbandry conditions or natural habitat
- Humane killing.

Each [QSAEC Standard Operating Procedure](#) (SOP) includes a *Disposal – Fate Planning* section which details the relevant provisions suitable for each animal.

REHOUSING (REHOMING)

Animals retired from scientific use activities can be rehomed through private sale or auction.

The transport of animals between sites must be in accordance with the relevant code of practice as outlined in the relevant SOP.

If animals are rehomed with a student, Section 3.4.3 of the Code requires a written commitment from a parent or guardian for the provision of adequate, ongoing and responsible care of the animal.

RETURN TO NORMAL HUSBANDRY CONDITIONS OR NATURAL HABITAT

Retired animals can remain on school property and continue to be cared for by the school in accordance with current best practice.

Stocking rates, facilities and assets need to be managed accordingly to ensure the animal's wellbeing is maintained.

The catch and release technique for fish allows for their return to their natural habitat. Note: Non-native fish should never be released into waterways.

HUMANE KILLING

Livestock may be consigned to a registered processor/abattoir at the conclusion of their use for scientific purposes, if identified as appropriate in the relevant [SOP](#).

Fish may be humanely killed for sale/consumption/dissection or returned to the supplier.

RETIREMENT CONSIDERATIONS

During an animal's retirement it is important to ensure the animal remains in good health. If their quality of life is being impacted by ill health then a decision to euthanise the animal may be required. It is important to ensure prompt action is taken based on the monitoring and assessment of the animals' wellbeing to ensure all reasonable steps are taken to avoid animals becoming unwell or dying without humane intervention.

Strategies to monitor health may include:

- daily monitoring for signs of ill health or changes in natural demeanour
- regular weighing to check animal condition and ensure weight is maintained
- body condition scoring.

Those responsible for the welfare of the animal must be competent in recognising signs of illness or, if unable to identify and correct the cause of ill health, assistance from a veterinarian should be sought.

Animals showing signs of stress or disease should be isolated until fully recovered. Note: Camelids should have a companion accompany them to reduce stress.

In addition to the above requirements, please see species specific information below.

Alpaca, llamas and other camelids

Alpacas generally live around 15-25 years and llamas around 15-30 years. Camelids need companionship to thrive so, when rehoming or returning camelids to normal husbandry conditions, ensure they have a companion – preferably another camelid, however sheep and goats can also be compatible companions.

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Aquatic animals

Fish have varying lifespans depending on their species.

Fish used in school aquariums, aquaponics or aquaculture tanks cannot be released into waterways.

Cattle

Cattle have a lifespan of around 18-22 years. Consideration of age and health is essential. Monitoring of their [body condition score](#) is an important indicator of health.

Horses and other equines

Horses have an average lifespan of 25-35 years and donkeys 30-50 years.

Donkeys form strong bonds with other donkeys and animals and separation can be stressful. Remaining donkeys (including foals if the mother dies) should be left with the corpse for approximately one hour to help it adjust to the loss.

Pigs

Pigs generally live around 15 years. They should not be kept as solitary animals, with the exception of pregnant sows, adult boars and sick animals.

Poultry

Poultry have varying lifespans dependent on their species, however generally live around 5-10 years.

As chickens are flock animals, when rehoming or returning them to normal husbandry conditions, ensure they have a companion.

Rats and mice

Rats and mice generally live around 1½-3 years. They are to be rehoused at the end of the program and may not be euthanased. If no suitable arrangements can be made to rehouse the animals then the program should not proceed.

Sheep and goats

Sheep have an average lifespan of 10-12 years and goats 8-15 years. Sheep and goats are very sociable and may experience increased stress if separated from their herd.

QSAEC REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Animals approaching old age should be retired from scientific use activities, unless the approved activity includes keeping the animal for its lifecycle before replacement. In this instance, death from old age is expected and an unexpected adverse event report is not required.

Reporting on animal use and unexpected adverse events to the QSAEC is not required for retired animals once they are no longer used for scientific purposes.

USEFUL LINKS

- [Animals in education](#)
- [Animal information](#)
- [Animal welfare and ethics](#)
- [QSAEC Standard Operating Procedures](#)