

# Guidelines and decision framework for euthanasia of wildlife

The *Wildlife Shelter and Foster Care Authorisation Guide* defines the conditions for the euthanasia of wildlife.

During fire events, indicators that suggest an animal may require euthanasia include:

- burns that covers more than 15 % of the total body surface area. this is four feet, including tops, nose/ chin, and partly up one or more arms. suspect that this has occurred when most of the body hair is singed
- deep burns to the face where eyelids and lips are lost
- burns to the genitalia, for example, a burnt penis
- burns to cloaca as bacterial contamination of the burn is unavoidable
- where reasonable return to function is not expected, i.e. loss of digits, fingers or nails
- blindness due to severe eye damage in one or both eyes
- where amputation is required, e.g. severe burns to feet or tail
- advanced age: no teeth left to chew food in:
  - koala with tooth wear class *Via*
  - possums with tooth worn to the gum.
- presence of infection associated with the teeth in macropod, koala or possum
- prematurity of marsupial joeys aged less than age factor of 0.5 (eyes closed and no/velvet fur)
- paralysis due to spine trauma, from vehicle accidents or falls
- open, contaminated fractures more than 24 hours old
- infectious disease is present:
  - Koala with urogenital chlamydia where paraovarian cyst, staining on rump and bladder wall thicker than 4mm is present. Koalas that vocalise with urination, have pus at vulva or in urine are also euthanased
  - Wombat with moderate to severe sarcoptic mange lesions;
  - Macropods with ulceration of gum or cloaca suggestive of macropod herpesvirus;
  - Brushtail possum with exudative dermatitis as well as burns.
- concussion that fails to improve over 48–96 hours
- injured wildlife that cannot be taken into triage and care
- all injured introduced pest species.

Specific criteria for euthanasia for different species is outlined below:

## Koalas

- Loss of digits and/or hand.
- Burns to > 15% TBSA.
- Smoke inhalation pneumonia.
- Renal failure.
- Presence of infectious disease in advanced stages, e.g. chlamydia.
- Blindness or injuries requiring surgery.

## Macropods

- where capture and handling of the animal may pose an injury to wildlife crews or cause further injury and stress to the animal
- In the wild, reluctance to move away, able to be approached within 50m (their flight distance).
- If small syndactylous toes have full thickness burns or are missing, then the foot is likely to have a full thickness burn.
- Burns to the largest nail: this represents an amputation of the first part of the digit. The absence of this joint impairs movement normal gait.
- Exposure of the tendon on the hock as infection will travel along the tendon sheath.
- Deep partial thickness burns over the hock as the bone and tendon become infected.
- Evidence of capture myopathy (temperature >39°C, muscle trembling, elevated CK, myoglobinuria).
- Smoke inhalation: loss of whiskers, sooty nostril, discharge from the nostrils, or difficulty breathing.

## Possums

- Amputation of any part of the tail, feet or limbs is not conducive to an arboreal life, and thus full thickness burns to these areas result in euthanasia.
- Loss of nails from the burn itself or during treatment means the animal cannot climb trees, and should be euthanased.
- Smoke inhalation may be untreatable and euthanasia is indicated.
- Loss of eyelids or damage to lips would require euthanasia.
- Burns to > 15% TBSA will require euthanasia.

### **Echidnas**

- Full thickness burns to feet, especially where exposure of the bone of the claw has occurred.
- Full thickness burns may damage the underlying muscle which permits movement of the spines. If the echidna cannot curl, euthanasia is indicated.
- Loss of the last digits on the toes (the part with the nail) as this will impact on the ability of the echidna to eat.
- Burns to the tip of the beak with loss of skin at the tip: this has the blood supply and nerve sensation required for feeding.

### **Lizards**

- Both blue-tongue and shingleback lizards will tolerate loss of one or more digits and tail. Tails regrow in this species.
- However, loss of a limb, or one which requires amputation, would be an indication for euthanasia.
- Severe burns to face where vomero-nasal organ is lost, i.e. front of nose and mouth.
- Burns to the eyes where eyelids are lost.
- Burns to > 20% TBSA.

### **Birds**

- Loss of patagial membrane – this is the leading edge of the wing between shoulder and wrist.
- Hand necrosis due to damaged blood supply.
- Internal damage (obtunded, not able to stand).
- Damage to the eyes/beak such that obtaining food was compromised.
- Severe feather damage necessitating several moults to return to normal.
- Loss of limbs or the hand/foot.

The decision making framework shown in Figure 7 can also assist in the decision making process.

**Figure 7: Decision framework for euthanasia of wildlife**

