SWP-179 Field assessment of animals

1. Scope/description of job

Undertake assessment of animals in field.

2. Critical safety issues

Potential safety hazard/risk	Control
Manual handling	Ensure appropriate manual handling practices are utilised when carrying and using equipment e.g., utilise team carrying, carry less at a time, and make multiple trips.
Environmental (weather) conditions	Refer to Working in Outdoor Environments Safety Procedure.
Dehydration	Ensure adequate water supplies are carried for the expected work duration.
Injury from animal including strikes, bites and scratches	Avoid direct contact with animals wherever practicable. Whenever animal contact is required, utilise appropriate PPE consistent with individual animal hazards e.g., leather gloves, gauntlet style leather gloves, needle stick resistant gloves and sleeves (flying foxes and bats), long sleeves and pants etc. Ensure appropriate restraint of animal is performed when near the animal to reduce likelihood of strike, bite and scratch injuries occurring.
Transfer of zoonotic disease to staff	Limit direct contact with animals as much as practicable. All wildlife should be handled with the assumption that they are carrying infectious disease, especially if they appear sick. Infectious organisms may be present in both live and deceased animal material. Ensure direct contact with animals with known transferrable disease is undertaken by personnel with appropriate vaccinations using appropriate PPE. These include rabies vaccination for flying foxes and bats, including microbats, and Q fever vaccination and P2/N95 mask when engaging in close-proximity livestock euthanasia.
Driving and four-wheel drive operation.	Refer to Driver Safety Policy, SOI-021 4WD Vehicle (where utilised), and SWP-161 Complex four-wheel driving (when engaging in complex terrain navigation). Refer to vehicle owner manual for vehicle make and model specific operation information.
Injury associated with environmental hazard including slips, trips and falls, tree strike, and scratch or poke injuries from traversing through vegetated environment	Wear PPE appropriate to the environment, including a safety helmet when working under canopy, sturdy footwear, safety glasses, gaiters, and appropriate clothing for field work.

3. Materials, plant, equipment relevant to SWP

- Appropriate transport to reach animal, including appropriate vehicle selection (4WD where needed)
- Binoculars or appropriate substitute

4. Competencies and licenses relevant to SWP

- Familiarisation with this SWP
- Familiarisation with SWP-155 Assessment of Wildlife Impacted by Fire.
- Four-wheel drive training, accreditation and endorsement (four-wheel drive operations only)
- Assist at wildlife emergencies (emergency response only)

5. Personal protective clothing and equipment

Protective clothing details

Protective equipment list is indicative only. The PPE required may be more or less depending on the environment the animal is being assessed in and proximity to the animal. Some guiding principles are:

- Utilise safety boots when engaging in any field-based work.
- Utilise a hard hat when engaging in any field-based animal assessments that takes place under canopy, where the wearing of the hard hat does not significantly interfere with other safety considerations.
- Utilise gloves any time that direct contact is to take place with an animal, and where there is a potential for a bite or scratch to occur on your hands.
- Utilise eye protection when walking through thick scrub to reduce the occurrence of eye-poke injuries.
- Utilise high visibility clothing when engaged in field-based assessment of animals at an emergency event, or where operating environment hazards deem it appropriate for high visibility clothing to be worn.
- Utilise fire rated overalls when engaging in operations on an emergency field.
- Utilise appropriate uniform and other protective clothing including long sleeved clothing to reduce the likelihood of kick, bite or scratch injuries from occurring.
- Utilise appropriate respiratory protection (P2/N95) when dealing with an animal that presents a high risk of Q fever.

6. Definitions

Typical animal behaviour: This is the term given to the expected behaviour of a certain animal based on its species and environment. The fright response of an Eastern Grey Kangaroo may be up to 75m in rural areas, or as little as 20m in areas where they experience high human interaction. It is important that both the animal species and the environment it lives in are both factored when considering typical versus non-typical animal behaviour.
Five Domains: The Five Domains of animal welfare is now commonplace in the assessment of animal welfare. As the name suggests, it considers 4 areas, which all contribute to the 5th area. The five domains are an expansion on the five freedoms and are widely utilised as a more comprehensive assessment of animal welfare. The five domains include:

- **Nutrition:** Animals have opportunities to access unrestricted, sufficient, species-specific, balanced, varied, and clean food and water.
- **Physical environment:** The animal's environment provides comfort through temperature, substrate, space, air, odour, noise, and predictability.
- **Health:** Animals are in good health, and illnesses and injuries are prevented or immediately and appropriately treated.
- **Behavioural interactions:** Animals are able to express a full range of natural behaviours such as exploration, foraging, bonding, playing, retreating, and others.
- **Mental state:** By presenting positive situations and/or solutions in the previous four functional domains, the mental state of the animal should benefit from predominantly positive states, such as pleasure, comfort, or vitality while reducing negative states such as fear, frustration, hunger, pain, or boredom.

7. Reference documents and risk assessments

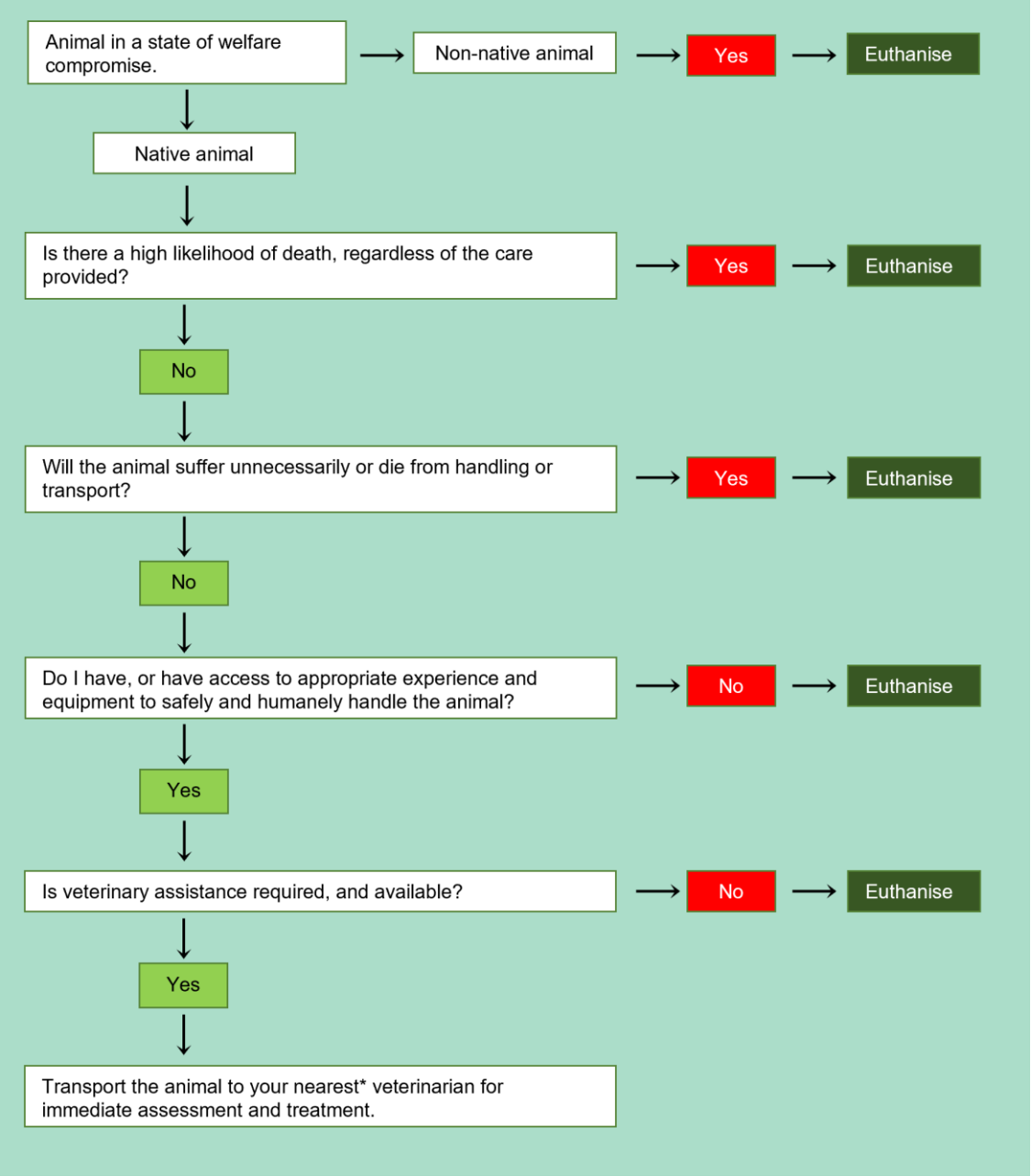
- Assist at Wildlife Emergencies Learner Guide (FFMVic resource)
- Mellor DJ & Reid CSW (1994) Concepts of animal well-being and predicting the impact of procedures on experimental animals. In Improving the Well-Being of Animals in the Research Environment; Australian and New Zealand Council for the Care of Animals in Research and Teaching (ANZCCART): Glen Osmond, SA, Australia, pp. 3–18.
- Mellor DJ (2017) Operational details of the Five Domains Models and its key applications to the assessment and management of animal welfare. Animals 7(8):60. doi:10.3390/ani7080060
- Mellor DJ & Beausoleil NJ (2015) Extending the 'Five Domains' model for animal welfare assessment to incorporate positive welfare states. Animal Welfare 24:241–253. doi: 10.7120/09627286.24.3.241.
- Mellor DJ, Beausoleil NJ, Littlewood KE et al (2020) The 2020 Five Domains Model: Including Human-Animal Interactions in Assessments of Animal Welfare. Animals 10(10):1870. doi: 10.3390/ani10101870.
- 2023, Victorian Wildlife Rehabilitation Guidelines, Part A: General Information, Chapter 2. Welfare-based decision-making, Chapter 3. Euthanasia of wildlife, Chapter 4. Biosecurity and hygiene.

8. Requirements/ procedure

8.1 Assess animal

1. Utilise PPE appropriate to the environment and species.
2. Where practicable, observe animal from a distance utilising binoculars or similar, to minimise animal disturbance.
3. Where information of animal has been received through a report from member of the public, confirm information, including animal taxa, number of animals and general nature of welfare concern (injury, environment or access to food/water).
4. Based on confirmation of animals requiring assessment, proceed, preferably slowly, preferably from down-wind, to reduce the likelihood of animals fleeing.
5. Approaching only as close as is necessary, assess the animal. Assessment should typically be possible without needing to touch the animal. See figure 1.1.
    a. If handling of an animal is to be undertaken for an assessment, take all reasonable precautions, including thoroughly washing hands to remove contaminants. If handling amphibians, clean, rinsed and damp hypoallergenic gloved hands must be used to avoid impacting their sensitive skin. Take additional precautions commensurate to the hazard posed by the animal.
6. Assessment of an animal is expected to be against the Five Domains. Examples of assessment of an animal's welfare may include:
    a. Compromised nutrition, due to a low availability of preferred food and drinking sources within an animals expected movement range. This may be caused by high social competition, or by events such as fires or floods impacting access to nutrition. Typical feeding frequency patterns must also be considered in the assessment of any individual animal.
    b. Compromised physical environment may lead to an inability to shelter from weather, environmental hazards, or predators. The cause of the compromised physical environment may include forest health decline or events such as fires or floods.
    c. Compromised animal health may present as either underlying health decline (e.g., geriatric animals, animal disease such as mange) or as an incurred injury (e.g., burns, vehicle strike).
    d. Compromised behavioural interactions may not conclusively identify the cause of an animal's welfare compromise, however, is likely to suggest underlying issues (e.g., koala sitting at the base of a tree, kangaroo not moving off when people are present and within proximity).
    e. Compromised mental state of animals is difficult to isolate, as it typically presents as a behaviour. An animal's mental state when experiencing compromised nutrition is hunger, where as that of an animal's compromised environment, where the animal is unable to seek refuge from predation, is fear. Mental state compromise will only occur as a result of one of the other four domains being compromised and is not able to be utilised in isolation as an animal welfare assessment, within the operational contexts of the department.
7. During an emergency (fire and flood in particular), there is likely to be an impact on the animal's environment and its ability to readily move through it, and subsequent availability of food and drinking water. This must be considered when deciding on the suitability of certain actions.

Figure 1.1 Decision making process for animal welfare and animal welfare outcomes, as adapted from the Victorian Wildlife Rehabilitation Guidelines, Part A: General Information.



*During emergency events where a Triage Unit has been established, all suitable wildlife are to be taken to the Triage Unit for assessment. If a Triage Unit has not been established, the Wildlife Coordinator will have identified a suitable veterinary practice suited to receiving wildlife.

8.2 Decide on animal treatment

1. Considerations must be given to resource availability. During day-to-day works, there is an expectation that a higher threshold is present before field euthanasia should be utilised. During emergency response events where wildlife welfare is compromised, resources are likely to be limited. This may include the availability of places at wildlife shelters for rehabilitation, resources for veterinary assessment, and viable locations for the successful re-release of animals after rehabilitation. Aligned with this is an expected lower threshold before field euthanasia should be utilised.
2. Where the animal appears as though it may be a domestic animal or livestock, you are required to seek owner's permission. In some cases, contacting a veterinarian for guidance on the most appropriate action may be needed. This may increase the onus to transport the animal to the closest veterinarian.
3. Where the animal is assessed as not requiring any intervention, leave in place.
4. Where the animal is assessed as being suited for euthanasia, refer SWP-180 Field Euthanasia of Animals.
5. Where the animal is assessed as being a suitable candidate for veterinary assessment and treatment, prepare to transport animal (refer to section 8.3).

8.3 Capture and transport animal

1. Where an animal is suitable for assessment and treatment by a veterinarian, capture of the animal should only be undertaken by appropriately trained or experienced personnel.
2. Utilise PPE appropriate to the hazards presented by capturing the animal, including appropriate heavy-duty clothing, gloves, boots, glasses etc as necessary.
3. Establish a plan to capture the animal, and ensure all persons involved are aware of the intended plan.
4. For any questions, seek advice through your chain of command.
5. Ensure all equipment to be utilised is identified, checked and prepared for use to allow a swift capture process. This may include laying out bags or crates, preparing blankets and catch poles.
6. Utilise the minimum number personnel required to safely undertake and complete the capture. Less people involved will typically decrease the stress caused to the animal.
7. As a general principle, approach most animals from down-wind and the rear where practicable.
8. Appropriately restrain limbs which may cause further injury to the animal, such as bird wings which are fragile and may get damaged if inadequately restrained.
9. Ensure animal airways are not covered. Where animals have delicate diaphragms, ensure the restraints prevent movement without compressing the chest area.
10. As swiftly as practicable, place the animal into an appropriate container for transport. Depending on the species, this may include a modified wheelie bin, a pet carrier, hessian sack/pillowcase, or koala box.
11. Ensure the animal is humanely treated from time of capture to time of presentation at a veterinarian. This includes:
    a. Do not leave animal in direct sunlight for a long time.
    b. Place appropriate support items in the restraint device with the animal (e.g., put a leafed branch in the box with a koala, put some soil or mulch in the bottom of the restraint device with an echidna).
    c. Ensure the restraint device is adequately restrained during transport.
    d. Moderate vehicle route selection and travel speed to minimise significant bumps being transferred to the animal.
    e. Ensure noise is limited to greatest extent practicable during transit, and vehicle temperature is appropriate.
    f. Cover the container with appropriate materials to darken the animal's environment, being careful not to restrict any breathing holes.
    g. Transfer the animal to a veterinarian for assessment and treatment as swiftly as practicable.
12. Provide information to veterinarian regarding capture location (grid reference **and** nearest intersection/significant landmark), and particulars of animal condition when found.

8.4 Reporting

1. For observations, utilise the Wildlife Emergency application, available via both Google Play and Apple App Store, or on the Tarnook website. This includes:
    a. Animals during all times where capture and transport to a veterinarian is undertaken.
    b. Animals during all times where euthanasia is undertaken.
    c. Animals during emergency events, observed through the landscape, including where no intervention is required.
2. During an emergency, if the application or Tarnook website are unavailable, a carbon copy Animal Rescue Book may be utilised, though not preferred.