



Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions

DEPARTMENT OF BIODIVERSITY, CONSERVATION AND ATTRACTIONS

SCIENCE AND CONSERVATION PROCEDURE

MANAGEMENT OF FAUNA MORTALITY EVENTS

SEPTEMBER 2017

OBJECTIVE

To ensure a consistent and considered approach to fauna mortality events by Department staff.

SCOPE

This document provides guidance to Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) staff in the event of a fauna mortality incident where disease or intentional harm is suspected. It applies when there is a mass mortality event or when there is a single or a few suspicious mortalities. General advice is provided regarding where to seek assistance in managing a fauna mortality incident, collecting information to support an investigation and the notification process.

CONTEXT

Department staff are often the first to be notified of, and/or respond to, a fauna mortality event. Such events may be caused by disease, poisoning (either intentionally or unintentionally), intentional harm or a natural event. Actions and decisions made around such events can impact the ability to determine the cause, result in additional harm, or impede investigations.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The Department does not have the facilities or required expertise to lead a wildlife disease or poisoning event investigation in isolation. Responses to such events are therefore undertaken in collaboration with other departments and agencies who provide support and assistance. In the event of a fauna mortality event which is suspicious in nature, it is strongly advised to seek assistance and advice from appropriate experts. A list of important contacts is provided below.

If intentional harm to wildlife is suspected, it is important to consult and take advice from the Department's Nature Protection Branch and local Wildlife Officers, as they may be required to lead an investigation.

The following principles and practices should be used as a guide for staff when there is a fauna mortality event. Figure 1 represents this information in a decision tree. Refer to the *Management of marine fauna events* procedure for additional response requirements for non-fish marine fauna events.

- Safety first, always protect yourself. Do not handle sick animals without consideration of personal protection and hygiene. Refer to the Department's [Managing disease risk in wildlife management](#) standard operating procedure for more information.
- Animal welfare is paramount. In situations where there are live sick or injured animals, consider whether the animals should be treated (i.e. can they be safely captured and transported to a local vet (preferred) or experienced wildlife rehabilitator), or euthanased immediately. Guidance on decision-making for euthanasia and appropriate techniques can be found in the Department's [Humane killing of animals under field conditions in wildlife management](#) standard operating procedure.
- Secure the site. If the incident is ongoing, minimise the possibility of exposure to other animals and people. Secure the site and minimise evidence contamination.
- Assess the situation and record the facts. It is critical to record important information such as the species, numbers, location, obvious injuries/symptoms and environmental factors. Use the wildlife disease incident submission form (Attachment 1) as a guide. Also note people or vehicles (registration) in the vicinity.
- Seek further advice. Consult the Department's Nature Protection Branch and local Wildlife Officers. If the incident occurs out of office hours, contact the Duty Wildlife Officer on 9219 9837. Seek further advice as required (see important contacts list below).
- Collect specimens. Seek advice from the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) on specimen collection, storage and analysis (refer to important contacts list). If there is no advice on hand, collect whole specimens and refrigerate, do not freeze, until further advice is available. Where there are multiple whole specimens available, collect at least five, prioritising freshly deceased animals exhibiting the range of injuries/symptoms. Ensure any specimens not needed for investigations are disposed of safely (seek advice from local waste management authorities regarding disposal).
- Facilitate testing and analysis. Engage with DPIRD to facilitate testing of specimens. Review results with experts to determine further actions.
- If intentional harm is suspected: Liaise directly with Wildlife Officers and/or Nature Protection Branch to progress the investigation. A search of the area could be undertaken should be considered by Wildlife Officers authorised to do so to determine a possible cause of the mortality/injury.
- If a disease is suspected: Notify the Principal Zoologist, Species and Communities Branch (fauna@dbca.wa.gov.au). The Principal Zoologist is the central repository for documenting the occurrence of wildlife mortality events and is a State Coordinator for Wildlife Health Australia (WHA). The Principal Zoologist may be able to advise if there have been other similar events or if there are other factors to consider (e.g. research programs that may have an interest), and will liaise further with other experts. Note this is not a 24/7 advice service nor a substitute for seeking advice from experts. If there is an unusual disease event and/or it is outside of office hours, please contact the Emergency Animal Disease hotline on 1800 675 888, or use the helplines and other support contacts provided in the important contacts list.

DIRECTOR APPROVAL

Approved by

Margaret Byrne

Margaret Byrne
Director Science and Conservation

Effective date:16/9/17.....

Important Contacts

Local Wildlife Officers or Nature Protection Branch. In the first instance, a local Wildlife Officer should be contacted. After hours and on weekends the **Duty Wildlife Officer** can be contacted on **9219 9837**.

Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) is the lead State agency for biosecurity and can assist in wildlife mortality events. They specialise in the diagnosis and analysis of mortality events in domestic animals, wildlife and aquatic species for both private and government clients. DPIRD is also a central contact point for WHA.

DPIRD also co-ordinates the WA Fish Kill program in conjunction with the Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DoWER). DPIRD takes the lead in investigating mortality events of marine fish (including fish, crustaceans, molluscs and echinoderms *but not other marine animals including marine mammals or reptiles*) and DoWER takes the lead in investigating river, estuary and inland water ways. DBCA takes the lead in responding to and investigating events in the Swan and Canning Rivers in metropolitan Perth and for marine fauna other than fish (including marine mammals and reptiles).

- **For non-fish fauna mortality events:** Contact your **local office** or the **duty pathologist on 9368 3351** at the Diagnostic Laboratory Service to get advice on how and what to collect. DPIRD may be able to waive the costs associated with laboratory work, however there may be a charge depending on the situation and details on cost should be sought at the time.
For out of hours unusual disease events, please call the **Emergency Animal Disease hotline on 1800 675 888**, which is manned by a DPIRD veterinarian.
- **For fish mortality events:** Report any fish kill to **Fishwatch: 1800 815 507**.

Perth Zoo Veterinary Department have a team of veterinarians who have extensive experience with fauna. They are available to provide advice and assistance where possible. Contact the **duty vet on 0439 953 026** between 8am and 4pm daily. This number is for Department personnel and should **NOT** be shared with members of the public.

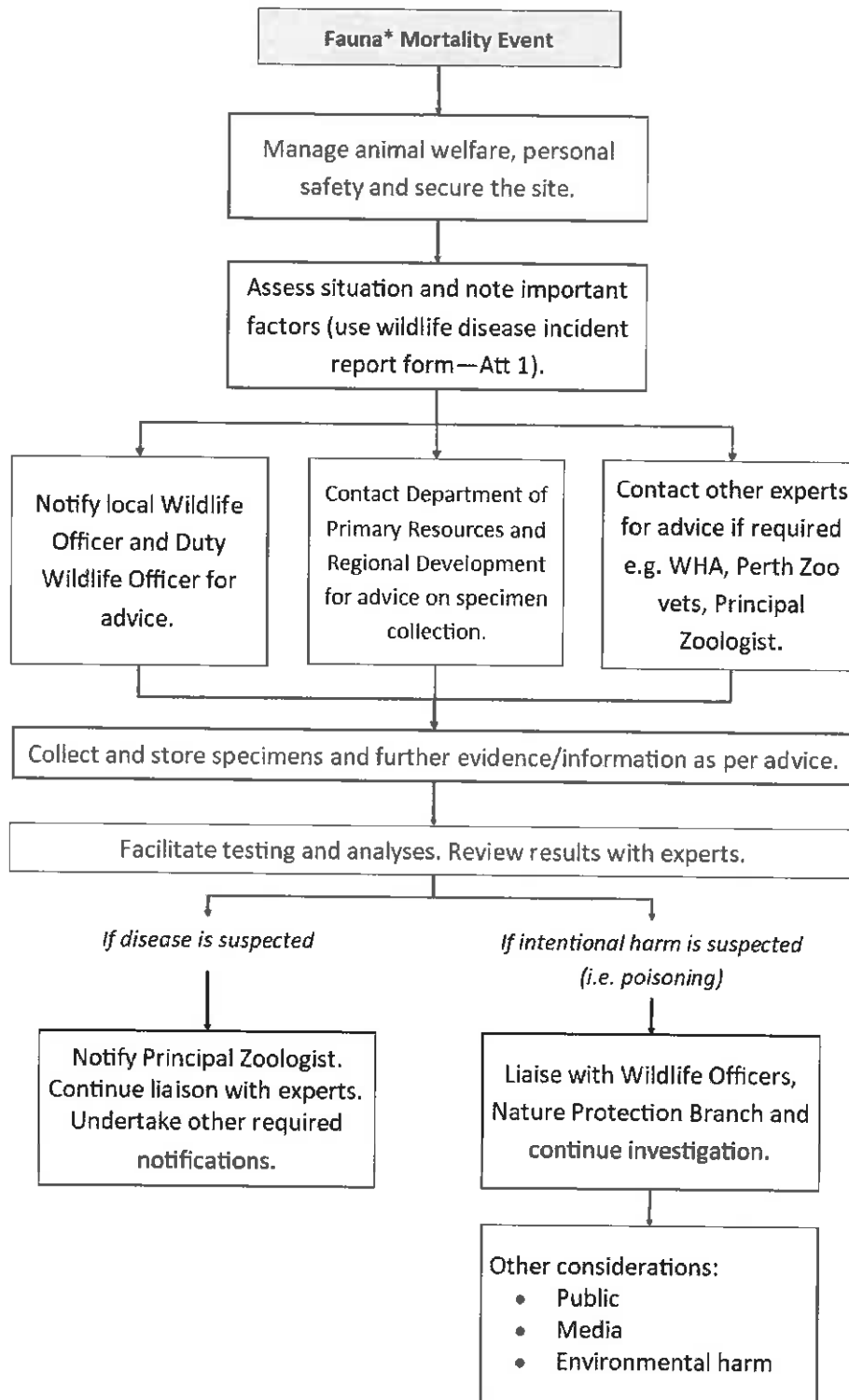
Murdoch University offer a specialised diagnostic service for wildlife. They also actively pursue collaborative research opportunities in the field of wildlife health. Contact James Poynton or Nahiid Stephens on 08 9360 2575, 0420 277 743 or J.Poynton@murdoch.edu.au.

Wildlife Health Australia (WHA) is a national body that provides leadership, coordination, technical advice, facilitation, communications and professional support on wildlife disease matters. The WHA website offers useful information and fact sheets on wildlife health and disease: <https://wildlifehealthaustralia.com.au/Home.aspx>.

Local veterinarians can offer expert advice and assistance. Their dealings with wildlife may be limited but their practices in regards to quarantine and wildlife care are generally excellent. Costs may be incurred if their services are used.

Wildlife rehabilitators may be able to assist in the care of injured animals. Note that wildlife rehabilitator skills and experience vary greatly and Departmental responders remain responsible for the ultimate fate of the animals. If disease is suspected, other animals in care may be susceptible and rehabilitators may not have the ability to adequately quarantine individuals. The decision tree in the Department's [Humane killing of animals under field conditions in wildlife management](#) standard operating procedure may assist with identifying the best option and outcome for the injured animal.

Local Government Authorities (LGA) are best placed to advise on the correct method to dispose of deceased animals and may be able to further advise on the cause of a mortality event.



* Report fish, crustaceans, molluscs and echinoderms events to *Fishwatch*: 1800 815 507. Refer to the *Management of marine fauna events* procedure for additional response requirements for non-fish marine fauna events (i.e. cetacean strandings).

Figure 1: Decision tree to guide actions during a fauna mortality event.

Attachment 1

(Generic) WILDLIFE DISEASE INCIDENT SUBMISSION FORM
(Developed by Wildlife Health Australia)

Submitter details

Name and how involved:	
Telephone:	
Email:	
Address:	

Details of other people in attendance

Names, role/s in the incident and contact details:	
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Details of animal deaths/illness

What species?	
Where? (include GPS or map reference if possible)	
How many animals?	
What signs or symptoms?	
When did this happen?	
Is it ongoing or has the incident stopped?	

Have you noticed anything which might account for the deaths?

Vectors of diseases (e.g. mosquitos)? Are there lots of insects around or very few?	
Water sources?	
Chemicals?	
Extreme or violent weather conditions	
Other comments?	

Who else has been notified of this incident?

For example, wildlife rehabilitators or environment department

Recommended contacts

Please give details (who)

PLEASE ATTACH ANY MAPS AND/OR PHOTOGRAPHS THAT COULD BE RELEVANT