



Wildlife Rehabilitation Standards and Guidelines – Making decisions on the fate of rehabilitated fauna

Objective

The primary objective of wildlife rehabilitation is the successful release of physically and behaviourally fit fauna into the wild. However, there may be a variety of circumstances which prevent release of a rehabilitated animal to the wild.

These guidelines assist in making decisions as to which fate is appropriate for an individual under rehabilitation, if successful release is not possible.

Scope and Context

This guideline pertains only to fauna as defined in the *Biodiversity Conservation Act 2016*. There are additional relevant guidelines in the *Code of Practice for Wildlife Rehabilitation in Western Australia* regarding animals not native to Australia, and/or species that are native to Australia but are outside their natural range or identified as pests.

This document provides a decision-making framework for the management of fauna in Western Australia that is the property of the Crown and has been admitted into care for the purpose of rehabilitation and which requires a management decision about its future. This includes fauna that is:

- sick/diseased; or
- injured; or
- abandoned juvenile fauna.

This document should be read in conjunction with the *Code of Practice for Wildlife Rehabilitation in Western Australia* and *Wildlife Rehabilitation Standards and Guidelines - Management of rehabilitated wildlife that cannot be released into the wild*.

Standards

The following principles must be considered in determining the appropriate management of fauna when admitted for rehabilitation:

1. *Ensure animal welfare is not compromised.*
2. *Protect wild populations*
3. *Consider conservation status*
4. *Cost or logistics of rehabilitation for release into the wild*

Figure 1 outlines the decision-making framework to be used in applying these principles.

1. *Ensure animal welfare is not compromised*

The immediate and long-term welfare of fauna must first be considered to achieve a humane outcome for the individual animal.

As outlined in the *Code of Practice for Wildlife Rehabilitation in Western Australia*, wildlife must be promptly euthanased when:

- it is necessary to alleviate unreasonable and/or incurable pain, distress, trauma, sickness or injury;
- further treatment is not practical, including where extensive veterinary intervention is likely to be required for the animal to be rehabilitated;
- recovery is not expected such that the animal can be successfully released to the wild; or
- an animal requires an extended period in captivity which is likely to be detrimental to its future release.

An animal is likely to be deemed unsuitable for rehabilitation on welfare grounds if: -:

- it is a non-viable orphaned animal;
- the ability to reproduce is lost due to an injury, disease or surgical procedure;
- the ability to move freely or normally (i.e. run, climb, crawl, hop, fly or swim) is permanently impaired due to, for example, a missing or impaired limb, wing, foot or tail, such that it will significantly impair the animal's ability to survive in the wild;
- the ability to sense the surrounding environment (i.e. see, hear, smell, taste or feel) is permanently impaired due to a missing or injured organ such as an eye, ear or nose, such that it will significantly impair the animal's ability to survive in the wild;
- the ability to catch, find or handle food is permanently impaired;
- its advanced age renders it unlikely to survive in the wild;
- resources are not available to provide appropriate care or an acceptable quality of life throughout the likely rehabilitation period.

When embarking on a rehabilitation effort, questions that should be asked are:

- Is the animal suffering from unreasonable and/or incurable pain, distress, trauma, sickness or injury?
- Has the animal lost essential limbs or function of limbs, including tails?
- Does the animal have permanent vital sensory loss (hearing, sight, smell, taste)?
- Does the animal have an incurable (able to be treated but not cured) disease or chronic ill health?
- Does the animal have permanent damage to its nervous system?

- Will the animal likely require extensive veterinary procedures and intervention to survive?
- Is the animal unable to adjust to temporary care?
- Will the animal likely require extended periods in captivity to be rehabilitated?
- Is the animal unlikely to survive or integrate in the wild (e.g. does it display territorial behaviour, flight or fight response)?
- Is the animal under-developed young (e.g. unfurred young or 'pinkies') and chance of survival, successful rehabilitation and integration into the wild is unlikely?

Upon assessment, if you answered yes to any of the above questions, then it is likely that the animal's welfare is unacceptably compromised and euthanasia should be administered rather than undertaking rehabilitation. DBCA has produced standard operating procedures which may provide further guidance, including those relating to care of ejected pouch young, first aid for animals, and managing disease risk in wildlife management. These documents are available on DBCA's website www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/plants-and-animals/monitoring/standards-and-protocols/99-standard-operating-procedures.

2. *Protect wild populations*

Displaced fauna should not be returned to the wild if it poses an unreasonable risk to native populations (through disease transmission, displacement of extant species, or compromising the genetic integrity or behavioural repertoire of wild populations). Fauna should not be released into the wild unless the provenance of the individual is confidently known and release at the location of origin, or suitable habitat in the likely vicinity, is feasible. Release at a new location may jeopardise the genetic integrity or behavioural repertoire of wild populations and put the individual at unacceptable risk if released into inappropriate habitat. Consideration should be made as to whether the individual is likely to have been exposed to disease or novel parasites based on the amount of time and conditions in which it has been held in captivity. Quarantine and health screening may assist in addressing these risks; however, the feasibility and value of this approach should be considered in consultation with a veterinarian with experience in wildlife disease management.

3. *Consider conservation status*

As a regulatory requirement (reg 124, Biodiversity Conservation Regulations), 'anyone who takes possession of species listed as threatened or specially protected or Schedule 6 fauna (e.g. penguins), must give notification in writing to DBCA within 24 hours of taking possession of the fauna.' This must be addressed via completing the Injured or Abandoned Fauna Notification Form available on DBCA's website www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/plants-and-animals/licences-and-permits and emailing it to wildlife.protection@dbca.wa.gov.au.



DBCA assesses these notifications to determine the appropriate requirements for rehabilitation and release in each case.

4. *Cost or logistics of rehabilitation for release into the wild.*

Resources or logistics may limit the feasibility of rehabilitating fauna for release into the wild. For example, if there is no suitable rehabilitation facility, no appropriate release location and/or the release area is situated a significant distance from the point of care (e.g. requires additional resources, such as air transport, that cannot be funded by the rehabilitator).

Transfer to an alternative licence

If the rehabilitation effort does not prove successful, an application for fauna in rehabilitation to be possessed by an appropriate licensee may be considered if:

- rehabilitation for release back to the wild is not possible, and
- the fauna's short- and long-term welfare needs can be met by a lifetime in captivity and
- there is conservation benefit in transferring the fauna to an alternative licence. For details see *Wildlife Rehabilitation Standards and Guidelines - Management of rehabilitated wildlife that cannot be released into the wild.*

Euthanasia

If fauna is not suitable for release into the wild and transfer to an alternative licence is not appropriate, euthanasia is considered the most humane outcome. Euthanasia must be undertaken using approved, humane methods, by appropriately trained and licenced personnel. The DBCA standard operating procedure (SOP) "Humane killing of animals under field conditions" is written from a research perspective but may provide further guidance to wildlife rehabilitators. This document is available on DBCA's website www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/plants-and-animals/monitoring/standards-and-protocols/99-standard-operating-procedures.

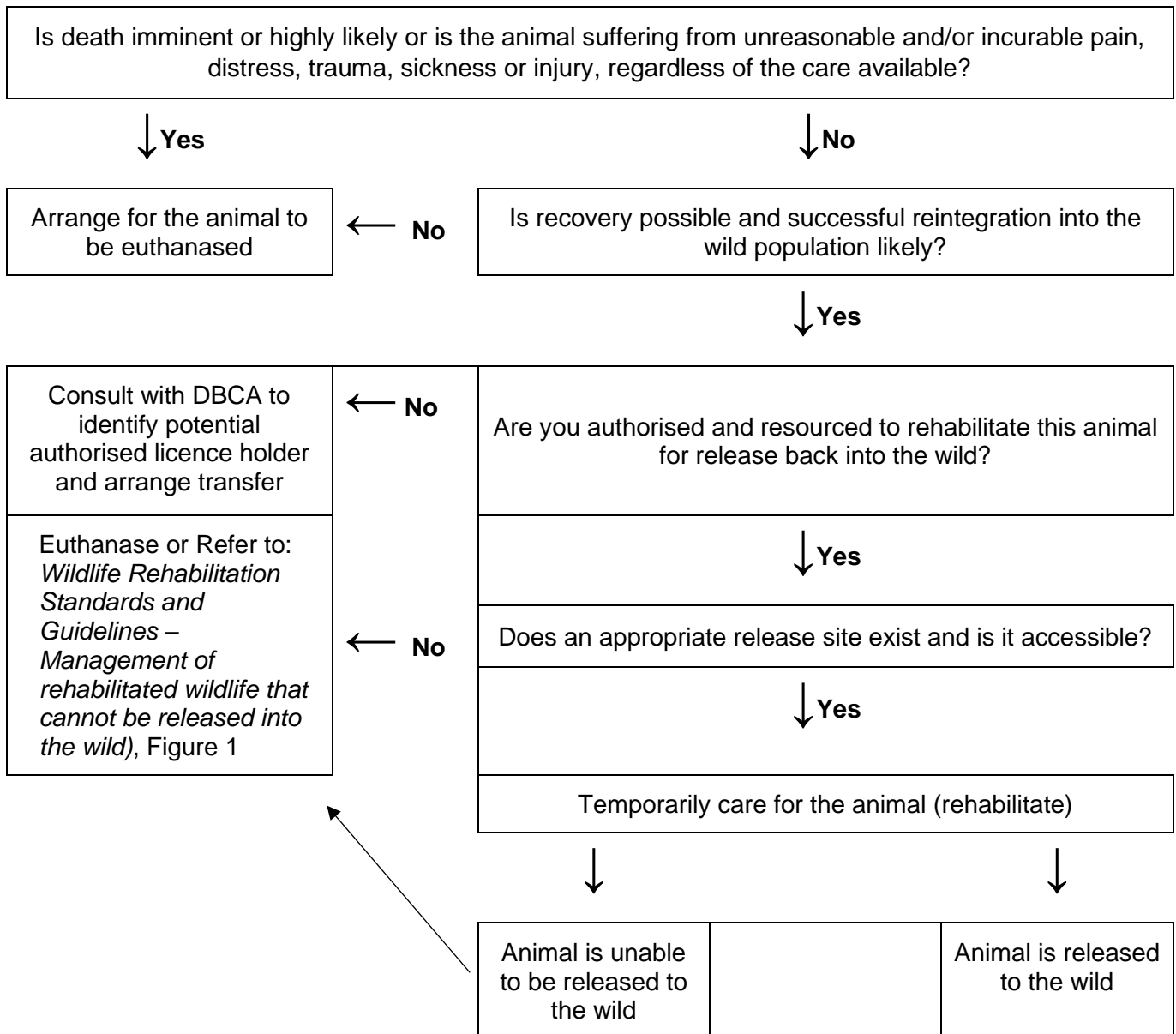


Figure 1: Decision-making framework for the management of fauna in Western Australia that has been admitted into care for the purpose of rehabilitation.