

NSW WILDLIFE COUNCIL INC.

FIREARMS SAFETY BRIEF

**(Operating Guidelines and Procedures for
Wildlife Volunteers)**



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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION.....	4
QUALIFICATIONS FOR WILDLIFE VOLUNTEER SHOOTERS	5
INITIAL AND FOLLOW-ON TRAINING	5
ASSESSING THE SITUATION	6
TRANSPORT AND INCIDENT CONTROL.....	6
CHOICE OF FIREARM	7
POINTS OF AIM	8
Kangaroos.....	8
Wombats	9
SAFETY	9
ANIMAL DISPOSAL	10
PUBLIC RELATIONS	10
ATTACHMENT 1.....	11
NWC Firearms Safety Brief - Knowledge Test	11
ATTACHMENT 2.....	12
CRIMES ACT 1900 NO 40 - Extract.....	12

REFERENCES

- A. National Firearms Safety Code
- B. NSW Police Force: Firearms (Longarms) Users Guide
- C. National Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos and Wallabies for Non-Commercial Purposes
- D. Office of Environment & Heritage (OEH) – Code of Practice for Injured, Sick and Orphaned Protected Fauna

Introduction

The aim of this firearms safety brief is to provide a safe operating environment for both NSW Wildlife Council (NWC) member group volunteers and members of the public when it is necessary to euthanase an injured animal using a firearm.

This brief must be used in conjunction with other instructions and guidelines governing animal rescue, communications and codes of practice. The brief is intended for new firearms licence applicants as part of their application to obtain a NSW Firearms Licence or Permit. The brief may also be used for ongoing refresher training.

The NWC Firearms Safety Brief is to be completed in addition to the NSW Firearms Registry Firearms Licence Qualification Course.

The focus of this brief is on shooting principles and safety. It addresses all aspects of safe working practices to ensure that NWC members provide as safe an environment as possible for wildlife volunteers and members of the public.

This brief covers the following topics:

- Qualifications for wildlife volunteer Shooters
- Initial and follow-on training
- Assessing the situation
- Transport and Incident Control -
- Choice of firearm
- Points of aim
- Safety
- Animal Disposal
- Public Relations

Public safety is of paramount importance when dealing with distressed native animals in public areas. Great care is needed to keep the risk of harming people and property to a minimum.

At any incident an assessment must be carried out with regard to shooting in the proximity of dwellings, public thoroughfares, passers by, stock and other animals. There must be a particular focus on target backdrop and the potential for a bullet to ricochet to the extent of its range. Other factors to be considered include:

- Being aware of potential vehicle accidents when an injured, but mobile animal, is on or near a roadway;

- Never blocking a traffic lane when parking to attend to an animal, unless assistance is available to flag down traffic;
- When attending an animal which is located on a bend or a crest of a roadway, always ensuring that the rescuer's vehicle, is parked completely off the road, or otherwise away from the bend or crest to minimise any chance of an accident;
- Ensure authorities are advised when firearms might be used (this is often done by a wildlife group helpline);
- If in doubt, seek help from other experienced wildlife volunteers, local National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) rangers, veterinarians or the Police; and
- Assess the incident site and consider other options. An incident in a suburban area will require a different approach to that in a rural location. Euthanasia by a firearm may not be safe and other available methods should be considered i.e. referral to RSPCA staff, NPWS rangers and Police. Consider the availability and use of a dart gun.

A knowledge test, covering the contents of this Firearms Safety Brief, is at Attachment 1.

Qualifications for Wildlife Volunteer Shooters

Shooters are authorised to use firearms when necessary to euthanase animals, provided:

- Wildlife volunteers are members of a wildlife group licensed by OEH;
- Wildlife volunteers must be authorised by their wildlife group management committee and carry a current wildlife group identification card;
- Hold the appropriate NSW firearms licence/permit and firearm/s registration/s;
- Wear appropriate clothing to identify themselves and maintain their safety i.e. wear a high visibility safety vest, and appropriate footwear and PPE.
- Comply with the requirements for the safekeeping and transport of firearms;
- Understand the Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of kangaroos, wallabies and wombats; and
- There are serious penalties applicable to the misuse of firearms (see Attachment 2). Maintain acquiescence with the NSW Crimes Act Firearms legislation (section 93G) and comply with wildlife group policies and procedures.

Shooters have a responsibility to ensure local Police are informed of the intention to discharge a firearm in a public place or close to public areas. In situations where this is not possible, e.g. lack of mobile phone coverage in the area where a euthanasia is taking place, the shooter must notify the Police and wildlife group as soon as practicable after the euthanasia.

Initial and Follow-on Training

The NWC Firearms Safety Brief is to be given to all new applicants as part of the firearms licence application process. The experience of a new applicant and the training given must be included in the "letter of support" provided to the Firearms Registry.

The NWC Firearms Safety Brief and follow-on refresher training must be conducted by an experienced wildlife group Firearms Coordinator (minimum of five years experience) or a qualified Firearms Instructor.

Wildlife group management committees should consider mandating a period of on-job-training for

newly qualified shooters depending on the applicant's experience and capability.

The ability of an applicant to accurately fire a firearm at close (point blank) and medium range (25 metres) must be confirmed. This assessment must include a discussion on improving a shooter's accuracy, such as using a solid object to assist stability e.g. leaning on a car door, tree, fence post.

Refresher training is to be conducted at least once every two years for all qualified and authorised wildlife volunteer shooters. This training shall be based on the NWC Firearms Safety Brief, cover safety aspects of firearms, handling and a practical firing.

Assessing the Situation

If an animal to be euthanased is located in a high-risk built-up area and the wildlife volunteer is concerned about safety to members of the public and property, the Police (or RSPCA staff or NPWS rangers) should be asked to attend to carry out the euthanasia. A more experienced wildlife volunteer might also be asked to attend an incident to make an assessment.

If it is anticipated an animal will be euthanased with a firearm, the shooter must ensure where practicable the Police are advised of the incident. Wildlife group telephone duty operator can do this. Details provided to the Police shall include the wildlife volunteer's name, gun licence and permit number, incident location and other useful details such as the volunteer's vehicle make and registration. Details of the Police Officer receiving the report should be recorded for future reference.

The wildlife group telephone duty operator and the Police are to be advised when an incident has been dealt with.

Depending on the situation, it is possible the Police may wish to attend an incident to assist in traffic control or the control of members of the public.

On arriving at an incident site, the wildlife volunteer must decide whether any additional assistance is needed such as from a more experienced shooter/rescuer, a veterinarian, Police, RSPCA staff or NPWS rangers.

When discharging a firearm, it is essential to minimise the risk of damage to third parties and property. Safety first is paramount. If the risks are unacceptable, then alternate methods need to be considered to deal with an injured animal.

All shooters must abide by the National Firearms Safety Code. Shooters should not attempt to euthanase an animal with a firearm at a distance beyond their level of experience and competency.

Transport and Incident Control

All road rules and speed limits must be adhered to.

Firearms are to be handled and carried in accordance with the NSW Police Force regulations and as discussed as part of the Firearms Licence Qualification Course.

On arrival at an incident that is likely to require the discharge of a firearm, a wildlife volunteer must:

- Ensure that the area is safe, in terms of risk and danger to bystanders and other members of the public; road safety; property damage; and animal wellbeing.
- Park well off the road.
- Consider the use of vehicle hazard lights and headlights.
- Wear a reflective vest. Earmuffs and safety glasses might also be used.
- Assess the animal's condition; consider its mobility and risks.
- Move bystanders and any accompanying companion animals away from the animal and ensure others adhere to safety parameters as per this brief.
- If necessary, and where safe to do so (enough people present and given clear visibility), stop or slow traffic until the animal is secured.
- If an animal has some mobility, keep a good distance until all the risks and line of approach are determined.
- Approach on foot in a direction that is less likely to herd the animal onto the road.
- Be aware of other animals in the locality and ensure that they do not present a safety risk.

The wildlife volunteer will need to consider the following:

- Is the animal in pain?
- Can the animal be safely moved off a roadway prior to euthanasia?
- Are the injuries obvious and life threatening?
- Can the animal be saved and successfully rehabilitated?
- Subject to size and mobility, would taking the animal to a vet for assessment and euthanasia cause greater discomfort to an already traumatised animal?
- Do you have the correct firearm, equipment and knowledge to euthanase the animal?
- Is the animal a female that may be carrying pouch young?
- Is it safe to euthanase the animal using a firearm?

Choice of Firearm

Choice of firearm will be a matter of individual preference. The most suitable firearm will depend on the animal species involved and its location. It must be stressed that a thorough understanding of the safety aspects of each situation will be necessary to determine the correct firearm for each situation.

However many shooters may be restricted to either a .22 longarm or a 12 gauge shotgun. Shooters must have an excellent knowledge of a firearm's performance, including accuracy, range, ammunition knockdown capability, noise, and safety. Most of the animals wildlife volunteers are

called upon to euthanase with a firearm e.g. kangaroos, wallabies and wombats, can be euthanased with these firearms depending on a shooter's experience and competency.

Shooters using .22 longarms should use hollow point bullets for the increased knockdown capability and the reduced ricochet and down range risk. Shotgun users should use medium to large shot sizes to maximise the knockdown capability.

Larger calibre rifles, used with soft or hollow point cartridges, can facilitate rapid and relatively painless death and at greater distance. Points of aim will be the same as for users of smaller calibre rifles but knockdown capability will be greater. However down range safety risk will increase, but should not be a problem provided the shooter scores a direct hit.

Points of Aim

We should at all times attempt to be as accurate as possible. This reduces the number of shots needed and makes the job as humane as possible. It also reduces the noise effect and minimises risk and potential safety issues. A good shooter should very rarely need more than two well-placed shots.

Kangaroos

When shooting a kangaroo the primary objective must be to achieve rapid loss of consciousness and death without regaining consciousness. If the animal to be euthanased is a female carrying pouch young, care should be taken to shoot from behind or from the side to minimise the risk of injury to a pouch joey.

The projectile striking the brain of the target animal should achieve sudden and painless death. Shooters must aim so as to hit the target kangaroo in the brain (see Figure 1), except in the case of an injured animal where a brain shot may be impractical.

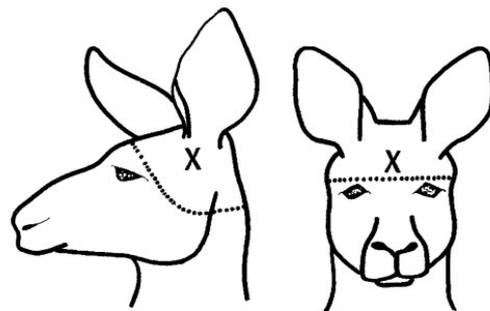


Figure 1

Veterinary advice suggests that the point of aim to ensure an accurate brain shot is the intersecting point of two lines, one drawn between the centre of the animal's left eye and the base of its right ear, and the second drawn between the centre of its right eye and the base of its left ear. This intersecting point represents the best possible guide to the centre of the animal's brain.

No matter how carefully the shooter aims, some kangaroos will not be killed outright. Wounded kangaroos must be dispatched as quickly and humanely as possible.

When killing a wounded animal a brain shot may be impractical. For example, the accurate placement of a shot in the brain may require capture and restraint of the animal; this would increase suffering and be inconsistent with the objective of sudden and painless death. In such circumstances a heart shot may be considered and be the most humane means of dispatch (see Figure 2)

The "*National Code of Practice for the Humane Shooting of Kangaroos and Wallabies for Non-Commercial Purposes*" gives guidance for the humane shooting of kangaroos. Please ignore the section of the Code of Practice that deals with pouch young. The NWC does not support the clubbing to death of animals.



Wombats

Veterinary advice suggests that when shooting a wombat, the point of aim to ensure an accurate brain shot is the intersecting point of two lines, one drawn between the centre of the animal's left eye and the base of its right ear, and the second drawn between the centre of its right eye and the base of its left ear. This intersecting point represents the best possible guide to the centre of the animal's brain. (See Figure 3)

Due to the thickness of a wombat's skull, use a high-powered rifle with soft or hollow point ammunition. A .22 rim fire rifle is only acceptable for euthanising a wombat from a very close point blank range.



Figure 3

Safety

Minimising risk is vital. Wildlife volunteers must at all times ensure that:

- There is no likelihood of hitting another object (i.e. other than the animal being euthanised), either in the near-range or in the projected path of the bullet.
- Do not shoot at an animal if it is moving.
- Reduce the potential for a bullet to ricochet by avoiding having hard or deflecting surfaces in the line of fire, such as rocks, bodies of water (including dams), steel fence posts.
- Consider the firearm's safety trace and ensure a safe line of fire is selected.
- Do not shoot in a direction where someone or something could quickly come into the path of a bullet.
- Do not shoot directly up the crest of a hill or road.
- Ideally arrange the line of fire into soft material.

Animal Disposal

Disposal of euthanased or dead animals is not the responsibility of wildlife volunteers. However a dead body should be pulled off a roadway to avoid other animals eating the carcass and then becoming road kill themselves.

If the animal is on the road surface and cannot safely or easily be moved, call the wildlife duty phone operator to seek assistance and consider referral to the Police and local council.

If the carcass is on private property, disposal is the responsibility of the property owner. However wildlife volunteers can assist property owners to move a carcass depending on the situation.

Public Relations

The use of firearms to euthanase animals in a public place may be traumatic for anyone witnessing the process. Every effort must be made to carry out the euthanasia of animals in a private manner. Members of the public and especially children must be given adequate time to leave the scene before shooting takes place.

Should an animal be injured due to a motor vehicle accident, ensure the driver and passengers are not suffering unduly from shock.

Attachment 1

NWC Firearms Safety Brief - Knowledge Test

1. What are the most important factors to take into account when preparing to fire a firearm in a public place?
2. What other authorities can be contacted to help in euthanasing an animal in a public place?
3. What are the requirements needed in order to be authorised to use firearms in a public place in terms of wildlife group membership, ID, licencing etc?
4. Can you shoot accurately - what are your personal limitations?
5. How often do you need to do refresher training?
6. If you assess the risk of euthanasing an animal with a firearm is too great, what can you do?
7. What circumstance would you consider 'High Risk'. Who would you contact?
8. What are some of the considerations on arriving at the scene of an incident?
9. What is the preferred ammunition when using a .22 longarm to euthanase kangaroos and wallabies?
10. What are the points of aim to euthanase kangaroos, wallabies and wombats?
11. How can you minimise risk in terms of ricochet and missed shot when deciding upon the line of fire?
12. How do you deal with bystanders?

Attachment 2

CRIMES ACT 1900 NO 40 - Extract

93G. Causing damage with firearm or spear gun

(1) Any person who:

- (a) Possesses a loaded firearm or loaded spear gun:
 - (i) in a public place, or
 - (ii) in any other place so as to endanger the life of any other person, or
- (b) fires a firearm or spear gun in or near a public place, or
- (c) carries or fires a firearm or spear gun in a manner likely to injure or endanger the safety of, himself or herself or any other person or any property, or with disregard for the safety of himself or herself or any other person,

is liable to imprisonment for 10 years.

(2) For the purpose of this section:

- (a) a firearm is to be regarded as being loaded if there is ammunition:
 - (i) in its chamber or barrel, or
 - (ii) in any magazine or other device which is in such a position that the ammunition can be fitted into its chamber or barrel by operation of some other part of the firearm; and
- (b) a spear gun is to be regarded as being loaded if a spear, or an instrument or thing similar to a spear, is fitted to it.

(3) A person is not guilty of an offence under this section for possessing or doing anything referred to in subsection (1) if the person satisfies the court that he or she had a reasonable excuse for possessing it or doing it or possessed it or did it for a lawful purpose.