



CONSERVATION FUND AESSMENT ETHICS AND CODE OF CONDUCT POLICY

Contents

1. INTRODUCTION
2. PRINCIPLES OF PEER REVIEW
3. CONDUCT AND OBLIGATIONS DURING PEER REVIEW
 - a. DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST
 - b. UNCONSCIOUS BIAS
 - c. AVAILABILITY OF GRANT INFORMATION
 - d. COMPLAINTS
4. GRANT PEER REVIEW PROCESS
 - a. FLOWCHART OF PEER REVIEW PROCESS
 - b. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Related Documents

1. Application Form
2. Application Guidelines

1. Introduction

The Conservation Fund Committee (CFC) of Birds SA is responsible for managing the Conservation Fund which is sponsored by Birds SA. The Fund is a public fund that supports the objects of the Association (trading as Birds SA) with an emphasis on scientific study and research of Australian birds and their natural habitats¹ to improve their conservation². Expert peer review assists us in fulfilling this responsibility³.

This guide outlines the overarching principles and obligations under which the Grant peer review process operates including:

- Obligations in accordance with the Birds SA Rules, guidelines and policies
- How to disclose interests and manage conflicts; and
- Standards and best practice for the conduct of peer review.

¹ Natural habitats are commonly referred to as natural environments, and they include significant areas such as woodlands and mallee; wildlife and their habitats; issues affecting their habitats such as climate change, water minimisation, soil conservation, and biodiversity and promotion of sustainable development principles. Natural habitats of birds would exclude, for example, human constructions, cultivated parks and gardens, zoos and wildlife parks. Exceptions are made where those human constructions and zoos and wildlife parks are principally carried out for the purposes of species preservation.

² SAOA Rule 27.1

³ See [Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#) and [Peer Review: a guide supporting the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research](#)

The Conservation Fund Committee will notify the Birds SA Management Committee of any change in peer review process.

2. Principles of peer review

The principles are:

1.1. Fairness

- Peer review processes are designed to ensure that peer review is fair and seen to be fair by all involved.
- Peer reviewers have an obligation to ensure that each application is judged consistently and objectively on its own merits, against published assessment criteria. Peer reviewers must not introduce irrelevant issues into the assessment of an application.
- Peer reviewers must only address information provided in the application based on its relevance to the assessment criteria. Any information or issues relating to an applicant outside of the application must not be considered in the peer reviewer's assessment. Applications will be subject to scrutiny and evaluation by individuals who have appropriate knowledge of the bird research fields covered in the application.
- Peer reviewers should ensure that their assessments are accurate and that all statements are capable of being verified.
- All complaints to Birds SA's Conservation Fund Committee relating to the peer review process are dealt with independently and impartially.

1.2. Transparency

- CFC will publish key dates, all relevant material for applicants and peer reviewers, and grant announcements on its website and/or via e-News.
- CFC publicly recognises the contribution of participants in the peer review process, through publishing their names on the Birds SA website.

1.3. Independence

- Peer reviewers must provide independent and impartial assessment of applications. Peer reviewer assessments may be informed by input from other experts but must not be unduly influenced by the views of other researchers or stakeholders.
- The order of merit determined by peer reviewers is not altered by Birds SA.

1.4. Appropriateness and balance

- Peer reviewers are qualified experts within the CFC (or are selected externally if the expertise does not exist internally) to meet the Fund's objectives and to ensure adequate expertise to assess the applications received.
- The CFC endeavours to ensure that peer reviewers are selected with regard to an appropriate representation of diversity in bird research fields, gender and field experience.

1.5. Confidentiality

- The CFC provides a process by which applications are considered by peer reviewers in-confidence. In addition, the Committee is bound by the provisions of the *Privacy Act 1988* in relation to its collections and use of personal information.
- Peer reviewers are to treat applications in-confidence and must not disclose any matter regarding applications under review to people who

are not part of the process.

- Any information or documents made available to peer reviewers in the peer review process are confidential and must not be used other than to fulfil their role.

1.6. Impartiality

- Peer reviewers must disclose all interests and matters that may, or may be perceived to, affect objectivity in considering particular applications.
- Peer reviewers must disclose interests with applications being reviewed, including:
 - research collaborations
 - student, teacher or mentoring relationships
 - employment arrangements, and
 - any other relationship that may, or may be seen to, undermine fair and impartial judgement.
- Disclosures of interest are managed to ensure that no one with a high conflict is involved in the assessment of relevant applications.

3. Conduct and Obligations of Peer Review

3.1. Disclosure of interest

2.1.1. What is an interest?

CFC is committed to ensuring that interests of any kind are dealt with consistently, transparently and with rigour. In particular, an entity who has a material personal interest that relates to the affairs of the entity must disclose details of the interest. This obligation is ongoing and not limited to a particular point in time.

For the purposes of this document, the terms 'material personal interest' and 'interest' are regarded as interchangeable and whilst the term 'interest/s' has been used for ease of reading, this policy includes guidance on each.

2.1.2. What is a Conflict of Interest?

A Conflict of Interest (CoI) exists when there is a divergence between professional responsibilities (as a peer reviewer) and personal interests. Such conflicts have the potential to lead to biased advice affecting objectivity and impartiality. By managing any conflict, CFC maintains the integrity of its processes in the assessment of research and technical merit of the application.

For CFC peer review purposes, interests may fall into the broad domains of:

● Involvement with the application under review	● Collaborations
● Working relationships	● Teaching or supervisory relationships
● Professional relationships and associations	● Financial relationships or interests
● Social relationships or associations	● Other relevant interests or relationships

2.1.3. Disclosure of interests in the peer review process

Peer reviewers must identify and disclose interests they may have with any of the applicants they will be reviewing.

- After appointment as a peer reviewer, but before assessing any applications, peer reviewers are required to disclose their interests in writing.
- While interests must be disclosed at the beginning of the peer review process, new or previously unrecognised interests must be disclosed at any stage of the peer review process.
- Declarations must include details that substantiate when collaborations occurred (i.e. month and year).
- The CFC will use these details to verify and determine the level of conflict.
- Any peer reviewer who has an interest that is determined by the CFC to be a 'high' CoI will not be able to participate in the review of that application. However, they can provide research advice at the request of the CFC.

2.1.4. Failure to disclose an interest

A failure to disclose an interest without a reasonable excuse will result in the termination of the peer reviewer's appointment under the "responsible persons" character of a public fund.

It is important for peer reviewers to inform CFC of any circumstances which may constitute an interest, at any point during the peer review process. Accordingly, peer reviewers are encouraged to consult the Chair if they are uncertain about any disclosure of interest matter.

3.2. Unconscious bias

Unconscious bias is an implicit attitude, action, assumption, or judgement that is controlled by automatic evaluations. Such biases are part of the human condition: they are natural, largely unavoidable, and occur without a person's awareness or control. Everyone has unconscious biases, including people trained for objectivity, such as scientists.

CFC strives to ensure that each application or proposal receives an objective, fair, equitable, timely review that is free of bias. Unconscious biases during peer review could influence thoughts, judgements, interpretations, and evaluations resulting in a score not necessarily reflective of an application's true quality.

Some unconscious biases affecting peer review could be:

- Different performance standards for different groups
- Confirmation bias (e.g., knowing of the excellent work another researcher has done in the past and assuming that the application under review is equally exceptional, resulting in less critical evaluation)
- Racial/ethnic bias
- Gender bias
- Age bias
- Institutional bias

- Cultural preconceptions, e.g., environmentalism subjectivity, anthropomorphism, baby animals,
- Geographic preconceptions
- Language presumptions
- Scientific area (e.g. having more enthusiasm for applications addressing someone’s own area of research)

To minimise unconscious bias:

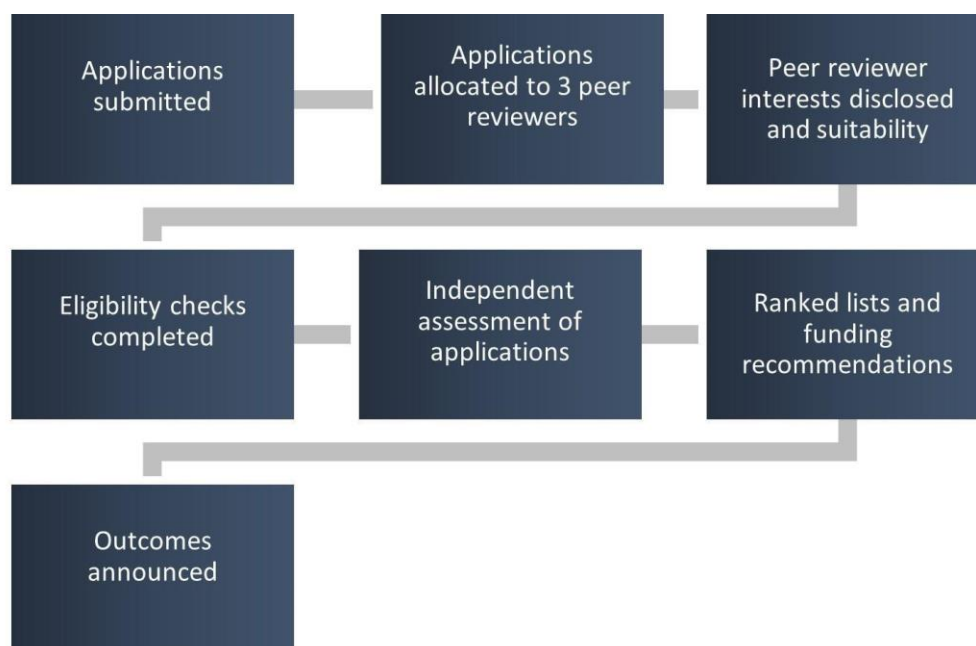
- **Be self-aware:** frequently re-evaluate your judgments for influence of unconscious bias. In peer review
- **Inform yourself** about unconscious biases to help you recognise it in you and others.
- **Change potential pre-existing internal images:** think of non-stereotypical researchers in bird conservation that you admire.
- **Speak up** whenever you observe unconscious bias.

3.3. Complaints

CFC deals with any complaints, objections and requests for clarification on the peer review process. CFC may contact peer reviewers involved to obtain additional information on particular application/s. Further information about the CFC complaints process can be found on the Birds SA website.

4. Grant peer review process

4.1. Workflow of peer review process



4.2 Roles and responsibilities

Roles	Responsibilities
CFC non-experts	CFC non-experts are community observers to observe whether the CFC Ethics and Code of Conduct policy and procedures are being adhered to during the peer review process. They will not participate in the review of any application but will assess the recommendations and the Chair will announce the outcomes.
Peer reviewers	Peer reviewers need to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● familiarise themselves with this Guide and other material as identified by CFC● identify and advise CFC of all interests they have with applications assigned to them● provide a fair and impartial assessment against the Grant assessment criteria and associated category descriptors for each non-conflicted application assigned, in a timely manner● assess track record by taking into consideration research achievements ‘relative to opportunity’, including applicant justification, career context, and any career disruptions, where applicable● assess publication track record focusing on the quality and contribution to bird research rather than the quantity of publications.● provide written single statement summaries for each application assigned to them.