

ANTARCTIC WILDLIFE RESEARCH FUND

Science Advisory Group Terms of Reference

ROLE OF THE SCIENCE ADVISORY GROUP

The role of the Science Advisory Group (hereafter SAG) is to evaluate and prioritise scientific research proposals submitted to the Antarctic Wildlife Research Fund (hereafter AWR). The AWR may decide to follow this evaluation, or not, as it sees fit. The responsibility for funding individual proposals lies with the AWR.

The SAG will base its evaluation upon a number of criteria when selecting and prioritising proposals for funding. Each proposal will be assessed on a numerical scale (0-10) by the SAG. The following criteria shall be used in the assessment (as well as for determining any priority for funding). These same criteria will also be used to guide evaluation of outputs from previously funded projects:

1. EXCELLENCE

There is no simple definition of research excellence. Proposals may build directly on prior work, or may involve a speculative leap forward. It may involve progress along an established research direction or a tangential switch into a new or different area, or may bring together expertise and approaches from different discipline areas. All of these approaches could demonstrate excellence.

A proposal that demonstrates excellence can be characterised by terms such as: novel, ambitious, timely, exciting, at the international forefront, adventurous, elegant or transformative, but need not demonstrate all of them.

2. FIT TO SCHEME

Each grant round will have previously specified objectives and requirements, both scientific and non-scientific. These shall be set out in the grant round announcement of opportunity¹. When assessing a research grant proposal, the SAG members are asked to assess the proposal against the grant round objectives and requirements, as expressed in the specific announcement of opportunity.

Each grant round will be focussed on part, or all, of the AWR Science Plan².

¹ Antarctic Wildlife Research Fund – The first Call for Proposals will be made available at www.antarcticresearchfund.org on March 16 2015.

² Antarctic Wildlife Research Fund - [Scientific Research Plan](#)

3. COST EFFECTIVENESS

The SAG members shall evaluate, to the best of their ability and to the extent possible, the cost/cost effectiveness of requested funds.

4. TRACK RECORD

In making its evaluation, the SAG may consider any past reports from previously funded projects.

PROCESS FOR PROJECT SELECTION

All SAG members will receive each proposal and any additional background information. Using this information for reference, the SAG will be responsible for:

- Providing a final grading and comments on the proposal in a form that is appropriate to be made available to the applicant;
- Providing recommendations for funding and where there are competing proposals, make recommendations on priorities in the context of the funding available;
- Satisfying themselves that the financial resources requested are reasonable to meet the project objectives and recommend any areas of budget adjustment necessary.

EVALUATION OF PROJECTS

The evaluation of project proposals by the SAG will normally take place in response to an advertised call for proposals that will have been advertised on the AWR website. It is expected that such calls for proposals will take place every 6 months.

However, on special occasions, donors to the AWR may provide funds that might allow proposals to be funded outside these regular advertised calls. In such cases, the AWR will liaise with the Chair of SAG in order to determine whether it is appropriate for the SAG to evaluate any extraordinary proposals.

VESTED INTEREST

All SAG members must register any actual or potential conflict of interest. Vested interest is present when any SAG member is associated or involved in any way with: an institution, department or individual that has submitted a funding proposal or would otherwise benefit from a decision; and/or has been involved in the development, or implementation of proposals seeking AWR funds or in the evaluation of research investments.

HOW DOES THE AWR APPLY ITS VESTED INTEREST POLICY?

The chair of a SAG meeting will be briefed on vested interests using the Register of Declarations of Interests (see below), and will draw attention to these before the meeting starts.

The AWR will remove all papers relating to a vested interest from the respective SAG member's meeting papers.

At the start of each meeting the chair should remind the SAG that they should declare if any item on the agenda is likely to give rise to an actual or potential conflict of interest.

The chair should consider if the interest is such as to require that member to leave the room when that matter comes up for discussion, or to remain in the room, but without expressing any opinion on the issue.

If there is any doubt as to whether the member should be asked to leave, the chair may discuss this with the rest of the SAG. The member may be asked to leave the room while the SAG decides.

If the absence of a member who has declared an interest would compromise the SAG expertise, they may be invited to speak on 'matters of fact'.

If the member concerned is the chair, then another member shall chair that item.

If in doubt, the chair and SAG should assume that the actual or potential conflict of interest may call into question the objectivity and impartiality of the SAG consideration of that issue.

All vested interests declared, and actions taken, should be recorded in the minutes of the meeting, ensuring a proper audit trail.

REGISTER OF DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

On taking up their appointments as a member of the SAG, all members must declare any private, professional or commercial interests that could conflict with their membership of the AWR SAG. These interests may be direct or indirect, monetary or non-monetary, which the public might reasonably think could influence the members' judgment.

The AWR will record the declarations of interest centrally and update them every year.

SAG members should, provide updated information as changes occur.

AWR will place the register on its website so the public can inspect it.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF RESEARCH GRANT APPLICATIONS

Research grant applications are submitted to the AWR in confidence and may contain confidential information and personal data belonging to the applicant. The AWR and each member of the SAG undertakes to the applicants to keep applications confidential and not to use or disclose them except as required for the peer review/funding decision process or as is required under any law or regulation to which the AWR or any member of the SAG is or may become subject.

Members may not disclose the fact that any grant applications have been submitted to the AWR or any of the information contained in any of the applications to any person outside the SAG or otherwise involved in the peer review/funding decision process nor disclose or use the information in the grant applications for any purpose other than as part of the AWR peer review/funding decision process. Members should destroy all papers as soon as possible after the meeting at which they were discussed.

The SAG comments on and grading of these applications will be recorded by the AWR staff at the meeting at which they will be discussed.

The AWR will not use the minutes or gradings that result from a SAG meeting nor disclose them to any person or body except:

- As is necessary to record the decisions of the SAG and to inform any other person or body within the AWR or any other body that may be co-funding the applications as part of the funding decision process;
- To the applicant as part of the AWR feedback to successful and unsuccessful applicants; or,
- As may be required under any law or regulation to which the AWR is or may become subject. The AWR will not attribute any comments that are disclosed by any individual member of the SAG, but the fact that an individual is a member of the SAG is publicly available information.

ROTATION OF MEMBERS OF THE SCIENCE ADVISORY GROUP

There will normally be 8 Members of the Scientific Advisory Group. Members of the SAG are appointed by the AWR for a term not exceeding 4 years. No Member may serve for more than two consecutive terms. The SAG may advise the AWR of other appropriately qualified individuals who may also then be invited to join the SAG.

Where Members wish to leave the SAG before the end of their appointed term, they should notify the Chairman of the SAG by email with at least 30 days notice so that the search for a replacement Member can begin.

Where Members are inactive or are unable to fulfil their role, the Chair, after consultation with the individual concerned, may advise the AWR that the Member should no longer be part of the SAG.

ROTATION OF THE CHAIR OF THE SCIENCE ADVISORY GROUP

The Chair of the Scientific Advisory Group is elected by the Members of the SAG for a period not exceeding two years and no individual may sit as Chair for more than two consecutive periods.