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British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquariums
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BIAZA Euthanasia Policy

If, it is deemed necessary to euthanise an animal, the euthanasia technique used **MUST** ensure a quick death without suffering. Defra (2003) Circular Guidance (Annex G) provides a useful decision tree to help decide if an animal should be put down, this is reproduced in Appendix 1.

The following has been adapted from EAZA policy statement on euthanasia (26 September 2011):

Preamble:

1. BIAZA members take seriously the responsibility for their animals' wellbeing while they are under their direct care, and every reasonable effort is made to ensure that when an animal moves to a different institution, this same level of responsibility is maintained by the receiving collection.
2. BIAZA members strive to ensure that their animals are held in appropriate, species specific circumstances that enable the expression of as wide a range of natural behaviours as possible. It is therefore important that they should be able to exercise the full range of normal and regular breeding behaviours on a natural cycle.
3. BIAZA members aim to maximise the physical and psychological wellbeing of the animals in their care. That is to say, we strive to provide standards of housing and husbandry that satisfy the animals' behavioural and physical needs, e.g. enabling animals to fully express reproductive and parental behaviours. As a consequence of this, maintaining the health and vitality of a group or population of animals may, in appropriate circumstances, take precedence over the duty of care to maintain the life of individual animals in BIAZA collections.
4. BIAZA members' responsibility for the survival of species may, under certain conditions, exceed that for individual animals, as is often the case for conservation bodies working in the wild

Having this in mind, euthanasia should be considered:

1. Where the animal poses a serious and unavoidable threat to human safety, e.g. escaped animals.
2. For injured animals, donated or otherwise acquired, that cannot be rehabilitated
3. Where, in the opinion of the staff responsible for the individual animal's health and welfare, an animal is suffering from a disease, detrimental psychological state or severe pain and stress which cannot be adequately alleviated.
4. Where the only alternative is permanent transfer to substandard accommodation.

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5. For hybrids and animals of an unknown or undefined subspecies in cases where this is considered of importance in the context of a managed programme.

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6. Where the continued presence of an individual animal is disruptive to the natural dynamic of a group within an individual collection and/or the demographic or genetic health and development of a BIAZA/EAZA approved ex situ conservation programme. Consequently, young animals (e.g. at weaning or when normally leaving parental care) and animals that are past breeding age or are senile (groups that are prone to deleterious geriatric conditions) may be considered for euthanasia as part of a balanced population management strategy.

Euthanasia as a management tool

The application of a considered culling policy is appropriate on welfare grounds, at an individual and group level, and helps to mirror species specific population structures. While this may at first appear to be somewhat contradictory, we are ethically obliged to strike an informed balance between the life of an individual and maintaining the long term viability of a managed population. If a female’s opportunity to breed and rear offspring regularly is limited, it can frequently result in the premature and permanent cessation of her reproductive cycle and/or abnormalities within her reproductive tract, all of which can negatively impact upon that specific management programme. In addition, limiting the opportunity to breed, by definition, reduces an individual animal’s opportunity to express one of the most important and complex set of behaviours and will thus lead to a decrease in welfare. Where local legislation allows, the culled animal can also provide enrichment for the institution’s carnivores by being fed to them and increasing their welfare.

Inevitably there are a finite number of suitable enclosure spaces available for the animals within our programmes and outside of BIAZA/EAZA. This therefore limits the number of offspring we are able to suitably house. The problem of space is compounded by the presence of individuals that are no longer part of the breeding population or individuals that result from ‘accidental’ matings within structured breeding programmes, e.g. hybrids.

When all options have been thoroughly investigated and the decision is made to euthanise an animal, which must be made on a case by case basis, care will always be taken to ensure that it will be carried out humanely. Euthanasia may be influenced by local customs or subject to laws but should always be considered in preference to keeping animals under conditions which do not allow them to experience an appropriate equality of life.

BIAZA zoos will judiciously act according to the above principles. We are committed to providing a full explanation and justification of these principles to the public and the media and to support the actions of colleagues in other BIAZA member collections within the limits of the applicable national legislation.

N.B. In the case of proposed euthanasia, careful consideration and discussion with those directly involved MUST be undertaken for each individual animal (Appendix 1)

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Appendix 1: Decision Tree (Defra, 2003) on the Placement of Surplus Stock and the Decision to Cull

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- If after contacting organisations such as BIAZA , the British Association of Leisure Parks, Piers and Attractions, the National Farm Attraction Network; the RSPCA; and European Association of Zoos and Aquaria or other international bodies no home can be found for the animal that is compatible with its conservation and welfare needs;
- The Taxon Advisory Groups (contacted through BIAZA/EAZA) decide the animal cannot be used in a managed programme;
- The owner of the animal (where it was loaned to the zoo) cannot or will not find a home for it or consents to the disposal

The animal should enter the flow chart to decide whether or not euthanasia (E) is an appropriate option:

