



T A S M A N I A N
QUOLL CONSERVATION PROGRAM

Governance Framework 2023

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Governance Framework

Purpose

The Tasmanian Quoll Conservation Program (TQCP) began in 2008, with the aim of establishing a network of captive breeding facilities within Tasmania to manage genetically robust populations of eastern and spotted-tailed quolls for conservation projects in Tasmania and nationally.

The TQCP comprises a group of institutions that work together to manage a genetically robust captive population of eastern and spotted-tailed quolls to directly support both wild populations within Tasmania and endorsed conservation programs for these species nationally.

Supported projects have included 'wild' reintroductions (such as Booderee National Park, NSW) and introductions to fenced enclosures (such as Mt Rothwell, Victoria). Breeding of both eastern and spotted-tailed quolls is managed annually between institutions using studbooks (ZIMS).

The five-year strategic objectives of the TQCP (to 2026) are to:

1. Manage the captive quoll population based on robust science and practical experience, leading to effective management of genetic diversity in the quoll population.
2. Consider and record options for improved management of quoll releases and re-introductions.
3. Secure funding to coordinate the TQCP and ensure the long-term viability of the program.
4. Develop administrative processes that ensure the TQCP is managed effectively, efficiently, and transparently – resulting in improved decision-making capacity and outcomes for quoll conservation.
5. Define the role of the TQCP in managing spotted-tailed quolls in Tasmania.

The *Tasmanian Quoll Conservation Program Five Year Management Strategy* (NRM South, 2021) outlines the key challenges for the current program, including inconsistent and insufficient funding, uncertainty in processes within the program, minimal oversight of the program, potential future inbreeding of captive individuals, and limited communication between key stakeholders. Overall, the program would benefit from more secure funding, improved application processes, greater independent oversight, and further collaboration with researchers and 'end user' conservation organisations.

The Strategy also outlines specific administrative, research/knowledge building, and on-ground actions. These actions were identified in partnership with the Steering Committee, stakeholders, and experts. Some of the actions are long-term, and may not be achieved within the scheduled five-year timeframe of the strategy. Chapter 3 of the "Action Plan" should be used as by the Steering Committee when developing an annual work plan for the TQCP. The Steering Committee should also refer to the key indicators and methods identified in the Strategy to ensure there is progress on the implementation of this strategy to provide for the review and development of the strategy going forward.

The TQCP utilises a collaborative governance framework. Secretariat and administrative support has traditionally been provided by the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania (formerly Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment). In addition to participating partners (Partners), the TQCP may collaborate with other stakeholders, end users and funding organisations to deliver strategic actions and outcomes.

Overview

The TQCP governance framework aims to ensure that collaboration is a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into to achieve the common goal of supporting the network of captive breeding facilities within Tasmania to manage genetically robust populations of eastern and spotted-tailed quolls for conservation projects in Tasmania and nationally.

The relationship includes a commitment to:

- mutually agreed goals (as defined in the Strategy);
- a jointly developed structure;
- shared responsibility and mutual authority;
- shared accountability for success; and
- shared resources and benefits.

The TQCP governance framework will:

- bring together stakeholders with common objectives;
- share, pool, or use resources efficiently;
- share ideas, information, talents, and capabilities;
- limit overlap of new services and in the coordination of existing services;
- deliver outcomes that are more expansive than those done by a single organisation; and
- optimise funding attraction.

This framework and the Terms of Reference aim to provide clarity on how the Steering Committee, and other partners, will work together. The governance of the TQCP may evolve and adapt as the partnership and organisation matures, strategic direction evolves, and as evaluation of the TQCP's success informs the need for change.

The initial framework is represented in Figure 1.

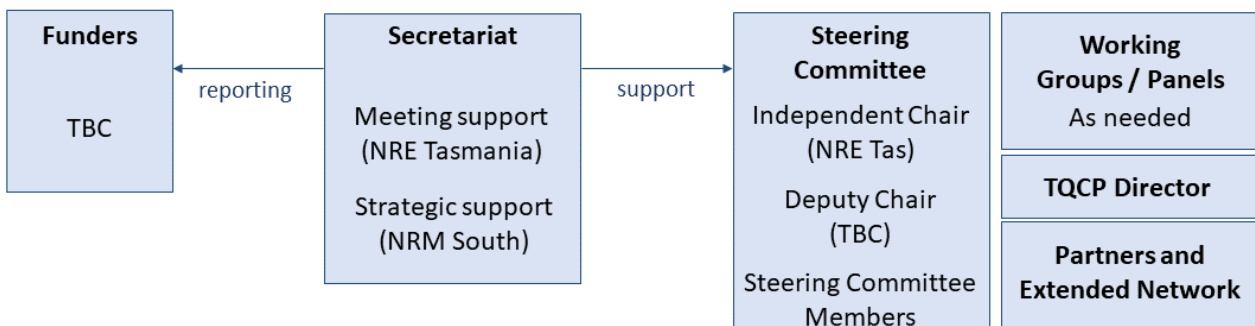


Figure 1. Tasmanian Quoll Conservation Program governance framework

Steering Committee Terms of Reference

1.0 Purpose

The Steering Committee for the Tasmanian Quoll Conservation Program (TQCP) provides oversight of the program of activities conducted by the TQCP from start to completion to ensure it is correctly targeted and serves the intended purpose. The Steering Committee is guided by the *Tasmanian Quoll Conservation Program Five Year Management Strategy* (NRM South, 2021).

The purpose of the Steering Committee is to ensure effective delivery and governance of the TQCP, including:

- review and adoption of strategic and operational plans, engagement and communications strategies, guidelines and criteria for the assessment of project proposals, and oversight of strategy implementation;
- provision of strategic direction and advice on the program of activities – including methodology, progress, communications, risk management, compliance and finances;
- ensuring collaborative processes and effective communication with partners, stakeholders, end-users, and funders; and
- oversight of monitoring, evaluation, and learning of the program of activities to demonstrate accountability to funders and for continual improvement to maximise conservation outcomes.

The key principles of the Steering Committee are:

- to encourage and support participation as a key cornerstone of good governance;
- to aim for consensus – encouraging various view points, but good governance requires mediation of the different interests;
- to ensure the TQCP Steering Committee members are accountable to each other, and the broader network of partners, stakeholders, end-users and potential funders;
- to ensure that decisions are taken in a manner that follows rules and regulations, and are transparent (information is freely available and directly accessible to those who will be affected by such decisions);
- to ensure that the TQCP responds to and serves all stakeholders;
- to acknowledge that the species that form the program are subject to state and national legislative obligations that may influence prioritisation and approval processes;
- to ensure the TQCP is effective and efficient;
- to ensure the TQCP is equitable and inclusive – that all members and partners feel that they have a stake in it and do not feel excluded; and
- to ensure there are clear and fair rules and frameworks that are enforced impartially.

2.0 Role and functions

TQCP Steering Committee functions in three key areas:

1. Strategic direction and planning;
2. Program delivery, communications, and engagement; and
3. Monitoring, evaluation and learning.

The Steering Committee oversees the co-development, provides strategic advice for, and endorses the following plans:

- a. the *Tasmanian Quoll Conservation Program Five Year Management Strategy* (including Action Plan); and
- b. work, activity, or operational plans, including: program logics; research and development priorities and activity plans; communications plans; risk assessment and management plans; budgets; and, monitoring, evaluation and learning plans.

The Steering Committee:

- a. monitors strategic and operational issues and provide advice on issues that may present a risk to the TQCP or the TQCP's activities, or have impact on its success;
- b. actively and overtly supports the TQCP or the TQCP's activities, and acts as an advocate for its outcomes;
- c. reviews and endorses the TQCP or the TQCP's activity or milestone reports prior to submission to funding agencies; and
- d. reviews and endorses communications in the public domain that have potential to trigger stakeholder sensitivities.

Specific tasks for SC members may include but are not limited to:

- e. providing technical advice to ensure effective implementation of the program and satisfaction of program outcomes;
- f. providing specialist advice on threatened species conservation, quoll biology and ecology, best-practice captive breeding approaches and, appropriate management of population genetics;
- g. ensuring thorough consideration of compliance requirements related to program operations, including but not limited to legal requirements for breeding, possessing and importing/exporting threatened species;
- h. assessing and prioritising requests for captive bred animals.

3.0 Structure

The elements of the governance structure for TQCP include:

- TQCP Steering Committee (consisting of Members, Independent Chair & Deputy Chair)
- TQCP Working Groups/Panels (as required)
- TQCP Director
- TQCP Partners and Extended Network (including end users)
- Secretariat and staff
 - Meeting support (NRE Tasmania)
 - Strategic and delivery support (NRM South)

3.1 Steering Committee membership

The Steering Committee consists of between five (5) and eight (8) members and is likely to be a subset of the TQCP Partners and Extended Network (including end-users). Steering Committee members will be sought via a public Expression of Interest process. Membership will consist of individuals that provide an appropriate mix of skills required to perform the functions of the Steering Committee. Applicants for Steering Committee membership must have relevant skills or experience related to working with or researching quolls (eastern quolls or spotted-tailed quolls), including in one or more of the following:

- Conservation program operation, management and oversight
- Population genetics
- Captive breeding / studbook management
- Translocations / reintroductions / rewilding
- Threatened species legislation, permitting and administration
- Financial management, grant management and investment planning

A working knowledge of stakeholder engagement, community liaison and education or animal ethics requirements and issues will be a secondary consideration as will representation from various sectors and interests. Applications for membership will be assessed by an independent panel.

Steering Committee membership will include a representative from the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania (NRE Tas) and a representative from NRM South. If unable to attend a Steering Committee meeting, organisational representatives must nominate a proxy. Proxies will have voting rights.

All members of the Steering Committee are expected to:

- understand the strategic implications and outcomes of the program of activities to be conducted by TQCP;
- facilitate input from stakeholders and end-users into the program priorities of the TQCP;
- assist in the communication of the TQCP information to stakeholders;
- appreciate the impact of the program of activities on stakeholders, particularly end-users;
- raise, and assist in addressing, any issues which have major implications for the program of activities; and
- actively support Steering Committee's decisions once these have been made.

3.2 Independent chair

The Steering Committee is convened by an independent Chair. The Independent Chair plays a crucial role in establishing an effective Committee and in providing an important link between the Committee, the partners and stakeholders, and the management of the TQCP.

The Independent Chair is responsible for leadership of the Committee, including:

- consulting with the Director to set the agenda for the matters to be considered by the Committee;
- ensuring proper information flow to the Committee, partners, stakeholders and end-users;
- harnessing the talents and energy contributed by each of the individual Committee members;
- facilitating open, fair and constructive communications among Committee members;
- encouraging contributions by all Committee members during deliberations;
- facilitating the effective functioning of the Committee including managing the conduct, frequency and length of Committee meetings;
- setting the tone for the Committee, including the establishment of a common purpose;

- seeking to ensure that the Committee as a whole has the opportunity to maintain adequate understanding of the strategic performance of TQCP, operations and affairs generally, and the opportunities and challenges facing TQCP;
- liaising with and counselling Committee members, as appropriate;
- ensuring Committee members comply with expected standards of behaviours which may be documented and referred to as necessary;
- seeking to ensure that communications from TQCP to stakeholders and the public are accurate and effective;
- reviewing the Committee's effectiveness; and
- planning for the succession of the Independent Chair.

The Independent Chair is appointed by the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania (NRE Tas), who will review the performance of the Chair over time. If more than half the members have concerns about the conduct or performance of the Independent Chair, they may refer the matter to NRE Tas.

3.3 Deputy chair

The Chair may appoint a Deputy Chair from the SC membership who may:

- act for the Chair when necessary;
- provide a sounding board for the Chair; that is, to test out ideas and seek a second view;
- serve as an intermediary for Steering Committee and partners or stakeholders, particularly where there is an issue concerning the Chair; and
- to be available to TQCP stakeholders if they have concerns that have not been resolved by their regular contact with Chair, or that would be inappropriate to raise with them.

3.4 Working groups or panels

The Steering Committee may establish subordinate working groups or panels on an 'as needed' basis to undertake specific work or address specific issues related to the operational scope of TQCP.

Working groups will report back to the Steering Committee with any findings or recommendations.

Working groups do not have decision-making authority.

Working groups may include membership from the Steering Committee, or more broadly, other partners, stakeholders, external experts, industry members, or community participants. Any working group will be chaired by a member of the Steering Committee.

3.5 TQCP Director

The TQCP Director provides operational oversight and management of captive breeding of Tasmanian quolls, including management of the studbook and provision of breeding recommendations and the annual report. The TQCP Director holds voting rights.

3.6 Partnering organisations, stakeholders and end-users

TQCP partners, stakeholders and end-users are committed to maintaining the network of captive breeding facilities within Tasmania to manage genetically robust populations of eastern and spotted-tailed quolls for conservation projects in Tasmania and nationally.

TQCP partners, stakeholders and end-users may be called upon to provide input to the strategic direction of the TQCP, including identification of implementation and funding pathways, research activities and priorities, and to contribute to the development of key governance processes and documents.

3.7 Secretariat, administrative support, and staffing

The TQCP Director is responsible for coordinating secretariat services, administrative support and staffing to support the operations of the Steering Committee and broader partners, stakeholders and end-users.

The Secretariat roles are split into two key responsibilities:

- (a) coordination and support for TQCP meetings (logistics, venues, agenda papers, minutes etc); and
- (b) strategic support, implementation, program delivery (funding dependent).

Coordination and support for TQCP meetings is provided through in-kind support from the Department of Natural Resources and Environment Tasmania. Strategic support, implementation and program delivery is funding dependant.

NRM South is providing strategic and administrative support to establish transparent delivery and governance structures, and a self-sustaining funding model for the program. This work is funded by the World Wide Fund for Nature until June 2024.

4.0 Decision-making

4.1 Quorum

The quorum for the Steering Committee is half the number of members (rounded up). If a quorum is not achieved, the Chair, in consultation with the Director, can postpone a meeting or defer a decision if it is considered that there are insufficient committee members available for a consensus, or members with specific expertise or knowledge are not available to attend.

4.2 Definition and responsibilities

In general, deliberations of the Steering Committee will reach agreement through consensus decision making.

General consensus means an opinion, position or decision reached by, and accepted by a group as a whole; general agreement or concord; harmony. Decision-making through consensus consists of:

- Full deliberation among meeting participants;
- Consideration of all points of view;
- Resolution of differences of opinion through discussion;
- Identification of areas of agreement and disagreement through discussion; and
- Dialog until the sense of the group is clear.

The Steering Committee Chair is responsible for assessing overall agreement through:

- Summarising the sense of the discussion;
- Articulating the specific decisions;
- Asking whether there are other concerns, and if necessary, returning to deliberations; and
- Articulating the finally agreed to decision.

4.3 Reaching consensus decisions

The following terms describe the level of support for a decision:

- Unanimity: All participants agree.
- General Consensus: No participants object (but some may abstain).
- Dissent: At least one participant objects.

Where unanimity is not possible, the participants should strive to make decisions where there is at least consensus with substantial support (i.e. few abstentions) from all members. To avoid making decisions with respect to matters that might be product of apathy or non-objection by the participants (i.e. with little support and substantial abstention), participants are encouraged and expected to participate actively and to express affirmatively their agreement or disagreement with the matter under discussion before a decision is recorded. The appropriate percentage may vary depending on the size of the group and the nature of the decision. Decisions may be made during meetings (face-to-face or online) as well as through email, teleconferences and any other medium, so long as the principles expressed in these Terms of Reference are adhered to. Any out-of-session decisions that are agreed by consensus will be recorded in the minutes of the subsequent Steering Committee meeting.

5.0 Duration and term

The Steering Committee will remain in effect for the life of the TQCP unless the collaborative governance structures are amended to sunset the Committee.

Steering Committee members are appointed for a three-year term initially and can nominate to sit for subsequent terms. There will be no limit on the number of terms a member can sit.

6.0 Meetings

6.1 Frequency

The Committee will meet at least two (2) times per year, or as required. Subsequent meeting dates will be confirmed at the conclusion of each meeting. Meeting dates will be scheduled via email and/or calendar invitation a minimum of four (4) weeks before the meeting date, where possible. Timing and scheduling of meetings is by agreement between the parties and should be scheduled to ensure maximum participation by Steering Committee members. The Steering Committee will continue to meet until such time as the parties agree to alternative arrangements.

6.2 Agendas, minutes, reporting and communication

Standing agenda items will include:

1. Welcome, acknowledgement of country and apologies
2. Confirmation of previous minutes
3. Declarations of Conflict of Interest
4. Review of actions register
5. Program update
6. Other business
7. Next meeting

Minutes of the previous meeting and supporting papers will be distributed by the Secretariat at least five working days prior to each meeting, where possible. Draft Minutes will be sent to the Committee Members for comment, by the Secretariat, within seven working days of the meeting. At the next meeting, the Minutes should be ratified by the Committee.

6.3 Attendance

Members may attend meetings virtually. Members may be asked to consider issues out-of-session.

6.4 Observers and guests

Non-members may be invited to attend committee meetings to observe or contribute to specific agenda items from time to time, as appropriate. Guests must be invited by the Chair or their representative, and notice provided to other Committee members as early as practicable in advance of the meeting.

6.5 Fees and expenses

Membership of the Steering Committee is voluntary, no sitting fees will be paid, and positions are on an honorary basis. Members of the Steering Committee must be supported by their institution to participate in the committee. Costs associated with travelling to meetings will be covered by the individual or their organisation, unless other arrangements are made.

Costs and expenses for in-person meetings (i.e. room hire, catering) will be borne by the host. Offers to host the in-person meetings will be made to the Chair.

7.0 Communication

The Steering Committee will work to establish processes for the frequency, methods and purpose of communications, including:

- communication between meetings;
- communication with partners, stakeholders, end-users, or subordinate working groups;
- communication with the secretariat service host organisations and/or funders.

8.0 Conflict of Interest

Steering Committee members are required to adhere to the *TQCP Conflict of Interest Policy*.

In short, members must be mindful of and declare any conflict of interest for any agenda items or decision that may benefit their individual organisation(s) or interests. This declaration is to be made directly to the Chair using the Col Declaration Form or at the beginning of each Steering Committee meeting. Members will be required to abstain from any vote where a real or perceived conflict of interest is identified, unless otherwise agreed by the majority of the Steering Committee. Relevant Committees or Working Group members will have the opportunity to provide input into the development of any governance processes established to define activities undertaken by the TQCP.

The Steering Committee must review the *TQCP Conflict of Interest Policy* annually to ensure it is fit for purpose. Review of the policy should be undertaken prior to the final Steering committee meeting of each financial year so that it can be ratified in the final meeting.

8.1 Conflict of interests register

A Conflict of interests register will be maintained for the Steering Committee by the Chair or a nominee from the Steering Committee.

Direct disclosures can be made to the Chair, upon request. The Chair maintains the right to decide whether the disclosure is recorded in confidence in the register.

9.0 Recovery Team representation

There is a position for a representative of the TQCP on the National Eastern Quoll Recovery Team and the National Spotted-Tailed Quoll Recovery Team. This representative will be nominated from the TQCP Steering Committee, TQCP Director, and Secretariat and staff as listed at item 3.0 Structure.

10.0 Confidentiality

The Committee will agree on matters that should remain confidential to the Committee and how these matters are to be documented.

11.0 Behaviour policy

The TQCP values a friendly, supportive and collaborative culture. All Steering Committee members are required to adopt this culture, which includes:

- Respecting all individuals and organisations involved in the Steering Committee
- Respecting the safety and wellbeing of all people
- Respecting differing perspectives
- Raising concerns about the values, behaviour or work of other people respectfully with them or the Chair
- Respecting the confidentiality, conflict of interest and communications principles outlined in herein
- Neither engage in nor fail to report to the Chair, behaviour that constitutes workplace bullying or harassment. Workplace harassment is defined as unreasonable behaviour directed towards a person or group of people that creates a risk to health, safety and wellbeing. Unreasonable behaviours include actions and language that frightens, intimidates, insults, belittles, or mocks another person as well as those that isolate, freezes-out, over-scrutinises, over-criticises, withholds information, spreads misinformation, perpetuates rumours, or makes activities deliberately inconvenient for another person. Workplace harassment does not include reasonable management action, including legitimate disciplinary action, protection of intellectual property, supervisory practices and allocation of work following employment conditions.
- Neither engage in nor fail to report to the Chair, behaviour that constitutes scientific misconduct or breaches of animal welfare or ethics. Scientific misconduct is identified as practices including, but not limited to: data falsification, misrepresentation of results, plagiarism, theft of intellectual property, and inappropriate attribution or withholding of authorship. Breaches of animal permits, welfare or ethics include, but are not limited to: unreasonable deviation from relevant Animal Ethics Committee (AEC) approvals or relevant permits, failure to appropriately report adverse incidents to the relevant AEC, or failure to address known issues likely to impact animal health and wellbeing within a reasonable timeframe.

12.0 Resources

The TQCP Director is responsible for supporting the operations of the Steering Committee. The Secretariat is responsible for the delivery of specified outputs of the program of activities within agreed constraints of cost, time, risk, resource, quality, and scope. Funded support will be sought for administrative support and staffing.

13.0 Review of the Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference of the Committee will be reviewed annually. This review should be undertaken prior to the final Steering committee meeting of each financial year so that it can be ratified in the final meeting. For transparency, the Terms of Reference must be shared with partners or stakeholders, on request.

These Terms of Reference may be amended, modified or varied after consultation and agreement by the Steering Committee.