

EAZA Culling statement



Approved by EAZA Council
30 April 2015

Preamble:

1. For the purpose of this document EAZA defines culling as the removal of animals from a population in human care by humane killing carried out by appropriately qualified and experienced staff.
2. EAZA defines humane killing as the absolute minimisation of suffering of the animal during the process of ending its life within the limits of the technology available and the opinion of recognised welfare science. Any culling procedure by an EAZA member must conform to the national legislation of the country in which it is located.
3. EAZA members represent a broad range of cultures, legislative systems and opinions, and so it is recognised that population management techniques will differ across the EAZA region. Despite these differences, EAZA members recognise that a common statement on culling of animals is desirable, even if the practice is not currently open to some members for legislative or cultural reasons.
4. This common statement in no way obliges any member to undertake culling; nevertheless, EAZA members must take seriously their obligations to population management, and must take full and sole responsibility for any decision which damages the viability and health of the overall population of the species both within the institution and across the region under administration by the relevant breeding programme.
5. EAZA 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. EAZA members will review the suitability of institutions to receive animals on a case by case basis according to relevant EAZA policies.
6. EAZA members strive to ensure that their animals are held in appropriate, species specific circumstances that ideally enable the expression of as wide a range of normal 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 where rearing of juveniles forms part of that behaviour.
7. While EAZA members are ethically obliged to maximise the physical and psychological wellbeing of individual animals in their care, their responsibility for the fulfilment of defined conservation goals and the viability of the overall population may, under certain conditions, take precedence over the right to life of specific individual animals. This reflects recognised *in situ* conservation practice, and notes that modern welfare science regards lack of life as a neutral position.
8. EAZA recognizes the challenges posed by discussion of culling, even among scientifically educated experts; the Association also recognises the challenges of explaining best practice and the role of culling in conservation to the public (see Methodology and Responsibilities below).

EAZA considers culling to be standard operating procedure where:

1. The animal poses a serious and unavoidable threat to human safety, e.g. escaped animals
2. In the opinion of the veterinary staff responsible for the individual animal's health and welfare, the animal is suffering from a disease, detrimental psychological state or severe pain and/or stress which cannot be adequately alleviated.

EAZA considers that culling may be appropriate where:

1. The only alternative is permanent transfer to accommodation which cannot assure a proper level of welfare for the animal and which cannot be improved within a short interval agreed by the responsible EAZA authority.
2. The continued presence of an individual animal is unreasonably disruptive to a functioning social group within an individual collection.
3. The maintenance of a population's demographic or genetic viability is at risk through the continued presence of one or more individual animals.

Culling 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. Members are ethically obliged to strike an informed balance between the life of an individual and maintaining the long term viability of a managed population, and where these obligations are in conflict, the welfare and genetic health of the population both locally and regionally over the long term must take precedence. EAZA considers culling to be one of several appropriate methods for maintaining this precedence.

Culling for maintaining welfare and normal and natural behaviours

If a female's opportunity to breed and rear offspring regularly is limited, this may in some species result in the premature and permanent cessation of her reproductive cycle and/or abnormalities within her reproductive tract, all of which can compromise the health of that individual. In addition, limiting the opportunity to breed in species which display nurturing parental behaviour, by definition, reduces an individual animal's opportunity to express one of the most important and complex set of natural behaviours and can thus lead to a decrease in welfare.

EAZA considers culling of offspring an appropriate tool for maintaining the welfare of parent animals provided that the procedure does not in itself compromise that welfare.

In addition, culling is an appropriate measure where offspring numbers are unpredictable and large populations develop; where these numbers compromise the individual welfare of breeding programme precedent animals within the enclosure; and where animals may not be reasonably rehoused without negative consequences to the viability of the overall population.

Culling for maintaining long term population viability

EAZA and approved non-EAZA institutions can only provide a finite number of suitable enclosure spaces for the rehousing of animals not required for breeding. This therefore limits the number of offspring members are able to suitably house without risk to the viability of the breeding programme. Priority for housing within enclosures should always be given to animals which can play a positive role in the success of the breeding programme, according to the goals set by Regional Collection Plans and/or the EEP Coordinator.

Methodology and responsibilities

All options for disposition of animals not required for a breeding programme or collection must be reasonably considered on a case by case basis and a decision to carry out a cull will be taken by the relevant managers in the member institution. Responsibility for this decision, even after consultation with external agents (e.g. EEP coordinators) lies exclusively with the member institution. If the decision to cull an animal is taken, every institution must ensure that it will be carried out humanely as per the definition above.

Culling is influenced by local customs and subject to local laws but should always be considered in preference to keeping animals under conditions which compromise animal welfare. Where the local culture and legislation do not allow the use of culling as an *ex situ* population management tool, EAZA members commit to plan the breeding of their animals according to the EEP coordinator's recommendations, and in case of surplus, to maintain their animals in good welfare conditions until an alternative and permanent appropriate solution is found. This must be done without jeopardising the work of EEPs and without using space that should be devoted to priority animals. Any decision to cull an animal belonging to an EEP must follow the relevant procedures outlined in the EAZA Population Management Manual.

In accordance with EAZA standards, post-mortem examination should be performed and biological material preserved for research and gene conservation. The results of the post-mortem examination should also be passed to the relevant programme coordinator, and full records of any results and outcomes should be archived. 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.

EAZA zoos will act judiciously according to the above principles and within their local laws and customs. Members commit to providing a full explanation and justification of these principles to the public and the media, whenever an inquiry is received (IE not only when there are high levels of media or public interest in a specific case). Members undertaking culling for management purposes have a responsibility to explain the practice to the public in terms that are both scientifically correct and reflective of public sensibilities. Members not undertaking culling for population management also share the responsibility to explain the scientific basis for the practice within the terms of this policy, regardless of national legislation or local cultural sensibilities.

Culling of animals which can reasonably be expected to cause a strong public or media reaction should be communicated by the member responsible and/or the EEP coordinator to the EAZA Communications and Membership Manager.