



Australian Government

Department of the Environment and Energy

CONDITIONS FOR THE OVERSEAS TRANSFER OF PLATYPUS

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The following conditions have been formulated to ensure the welfare of platypus involved in overseas transfers. The conditions provide the framework within which it is determined whether the statutory requirements of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) have been met regarding transport, accommodation and care during transport to and from, and in, overseas facilities.

These conditions have been developed in consultation with a number of stakeholders and technical experts including the Zoo Aquarium Association, zoos and sanctuaries, and field and behavioural biologists. The Department of the Environment and Energy (the Department) would like to thank the contributors for the work and effort they put into the compilation of this document. A list of contributors is available from the Department.

While the Department reserves the right to amend these conditions without prior notice to an affected person, every reasonable effort will be made to notify of any amendments prior to coming into effect.

For further information, please contact

Wildlife Trade Assessments

Department of the Environment and Energy
GPO Box 787, Canberra ACT 2601 Australia
phone: +61 2 6274 1900 (option 2)
email: wta@environment.gov.au

PREAMBLE

The platypus *Ornithorhynchus anatinus* is an endemic Australian monotreme. Living in freshwater streams of eastern Australia, it tends towards crepuscular or nocturnal lifestyle. Presumably using electroreceptors located within their bills to locate food, platypus feed on a wide variety of invertebrates found largely in the benthos. Holding their prey in their cheek pouches, once returning to the surface of the water, platypus grind their food with keratinised plates within their bill. Platypus construct complex burrow systems in stream banks in which they sleep and raise young.

Female platypus lay eggs, and when the young hatch 11 days later, she feeds them milk released directly through pores in her skin. Platypus breed irregularly in captivity, and other than a successful breeding in 1943 (Fleay, D. 1944), breeding successes have only been recorded under intensive levels of management since 1998 (Holland and Jackson 2002). Semi-wild platypus have been bred successfully in artificially created streams and ponds into which they have been introduced. The factors which are required to facilitate regular breeding in captivity are not fully determined, though data collected from each successful breeding are shared across institutions so that successes can be replicated.

Male platypus produce venom in spurs on their hind legs. Envenomation causes humans great pain, and is not easily treated, though not known to be fatal to humans. Sanctuaries and zoos in which platypus live have stringent work procedures around the manual restraint of male platypus, especially within the breeding season of late winter and spring.

Mounting evidence of recent local platypus population declines and extinctions highlight a species facing considerable risks (Lintermans 1998, Lunney et al. 1998, Serena et al. 1998, Rohweder and Baverstock 1999, Otley 2001). In testament, the platypus's conservation status has been recently elevated to "Near Threatened" under the IUCN Red List (Woinarski and Burbidge 2016), given localised declines and extinctions in populations, particularly in the state of Victoria (Woinarski et al. 2014). Even so, legislated protection via a conservation listing is limited to South Australia where the platypus is nearly extinct and considered 'Endangered' (National Parks and Wildlife Act 1972—1.7.2015).

Accurate estimates of population sizes are difficult to obtain given low recapture rates and significant entailed effort (Grant 2004, Serena and Williams 2012). Relying on only a few long-term studies investigating densities, reproduction, age structure and survival (Grant 2004, Gust and Griffiths 2011, Serena et al. 2014) hinders assessing impacts of threatening processes and detecting declines across the species' range. Nonetheless, the platypus' range coincides with Australia's most highly regulated and disrupted rivers (Kingsford 2000b, Grant and Fanning 2007) and the species faces a range of threats resulting from human activities, including agriculture, forestry, mining, urbanisation and fragmentation by dams and other in-stream structures (Grant and Temple-Smith 2003, Kolomyjec 2010, Furlan et al. 2013); by-catch mortality in fishing gear (Grant and Fanning 2007, Serena and Williams 2010) and predation by foxes and feral dogs (Serena 1994, Connolly and Obendorf 1998, Grant and Fanning 2007). As those available habitats are further fragmented, then there is increasing concern by field ecologists for the long-term security of this extraordinary species.

1. SELECTION OF EXPORT STOCK

- 1.1 Captive bred platypus should be chosen in preference to those of wild origin for export. Wild origin platypus will only be approved for export in exceptional cases (for example, where the animal has been brought into permanent care and is not suitable for release; and it can be demonstrated that there are no available captive-bred specimens equally, or better suited for the export).
- 1.2 If of wild origin, platypus to be transferred must
 - a. not have been removed from the wild for the purpose of export; and
 - b. be surplus to Zoo Aquarium Association Regional Census and Plan requirements and have no breeding recommendations; and
 - c. have been in captivity for at least 12 months; and
 - d. demonstrate appropriate behaviours comparative to captive counterparts (i.e. showing behaviours suitable for captivity as described in Table 1).
- 1.3 Platypus must be 12 months of age or older at the time of export. This should ensure that animals are fully weaned and behavioural suitability for export can adequately be determined.
- 1.4 Platypus should be no older than 66% of modelled survivorship ($L_x = 0.01$) of platypus according to the Australian Species Management Program studbook at the time of export.
- 1.5 The Department must be advised of the specific role each animal proposed for export will play at the receiving institution (e.g. display only, breeding).
 - a. If the animal is proposed to become part of a breeding group, the exporter must provide written evidence to this effect from the Zoo and Aquarium Association's Australasian Species Management Program (or other person with experience in the genetic management of captive populations) that it will genetically complement the existing population.
- 1.6 Animals selected for export must meet the essential behavioural criteria outlined in Table 1 and should meet the desirable criteria also outlined in Table 1. The animal should display positive selection indicators and not display negative selection indicators. The exporter must provide written expert advice to this effect.

Table 1

Essential criteria	Positive selection indicators	Negative selection indicators
The platypus is habituated to people and captivity.	Animal willingly and regularly enters display tanks during period when visitors present.	Platypus stays off-display for extended periods, or displays high levels of stereotypic behaviour
The platypus behaves in a species appropriate manner with conspecifics.	Can time-share exhibit space with conspecifics	The platypus is overly aggressive to conspecifics.
The platypus shows appropriate responses to any stimulus, whether negative or positive.	Unless animals behaviourally conditioned, the platypus flees in response to keeper presence: it enters water if out of tunnel, or retreats to tunnel chamber if within tunnel system.	Outside the breeding season, the platypus consistently retreats to nest-box for prolonged periods after keeper presence / interaction.
The animal is feeding normally on the proposed diet of the receiving institution.	The platypus is exclusively eating the proposed diet.	The platypus is not eating the proposed diet and is not maintaining TVI.
Females must not be caring for young.	The female does not have dependant young and is unlikely to be gravid.	The female is caring for young or is believed to be gravid.
The platypus is habituated to captivity.	The platypus is a suitable display animal, spending appropriate time feeding, resting and swimming.	The platypus shows excessive and repeated escape behaviours from enclosures known to be accepted by conspecifics.
Platypus defecates and urinates away from the nest box.	Platypus 'toilets' normally.	Platypus urinates and defecates excessively in its nesting box.
Desirable Criteria		
The platypus should spend suitable time outside its burrow and nesting boxes outside the breeding season.	Males in zoos and sanctuaries are expected to be active for 11 ± 3 hours per day, and females for 7 ± 3 hours per day.	The platypus is rarely seen or recorded in the water body or outside of the nest box.
The platypus should not have stereotypic behaviours.	The animal shows normal levels of self-grooming The animal moves freely around the pool without displaying excessive repeated movements	The animal displays self-directed behaviours such as excessive grooming The animal displays repetitive movements or swims in a repeated pattern in the pool for more than an hour at a time.

2. PRE EXPORT REQUIREMENTS

- 2.1 Platypus to be exported from Australia must be isolated from non-export platypus for a minimum of 28 days prior to export.
- a) If more than one animal is being exported, they should preferably be housed separately in a manner that would prevent transmission of pathogens between animals. Alternatively the animals may be housed in a group, however should an animal fail pre-export health screening due to the detection of an infectious disease, it may preclude the others from being exported.
- 2.2 Each platypus to be exported must be implanted with a microchip/transponder identification system. The identification system must record, at a minimum, a unique identification number for the animal. Details of the data recorded on the implant must be supplied to the Department for inclusion on the export permit.
- 2.3 Within the period of isolation, each platypus must be examined by a veterinary surgeon experienced in the care and treatment of platypus. The examination should be conducted early in the isolation period to ensure that results are available well before the export date.
- 2.4 If the animal has been examined by a veterinary surgeon without evidence of disease being detected, then a Certificate of Health will be issued by the examining veterinary surgeon in respect of each platypus to be exported. The Certificate of Health for each platypus to be exported must be provided to the Department before the animal is exported.
- 2.5 The certificate shall indicate:
- a) age ¹
 - b) gender
 - c) the average weight and body condition (using the Tail Volume Index scoring system) based on measurements taken every seven days during isolation²
 - d) that the animal is free of endoparasites based on faecal sample screening or has no history of endoparasitism
 - e) that the animal is free of blood parasites or they are present at very low levels
 - f) that the animal is free of ticks
 - g) that the platypus is free from clinical signs of disease or abnormalities.
 - h) that the animal was examined under anaesthesia by a veterinarian experienced in platypus medicine including the results of a complete haematological and serum biochemical examination with comments on interpretation
 - i) that the platypus does not have any unresolved health problems (a medical record for the animal must be supplied to the receiving institution and to the Department).
 - j) that the oral secateuring ridges and grinding plates are normal
 - k) that the platypus is not caring for young

¹ (or where age is unknown, estimated age for males based on spur morphology [assessable to the age of 2 or 3], or other morphometrics at time of admission)

² An interpretation of any significant changes should be given. The optimum tail volume index for transfer is 1 or 2.

3. TRANSPORTATION REQUIREMENTS

- 3.1 During transfer to and from the airport, the platypus must be accompanied by personnel familiar with the individual animals being transferred.
- 3.2 The quickest route possible should be taken when transferring animals. Noise, and the time from crating to destination, must be kept to the absolute minimum.
 - a) If long stopovers or delays are anticipated during transfer, provisions should be made to have personnel accompanying the animals on the entire trip.

Note: If it is intended that the accompanying personnel will be staff from the overseas receiving institution, then approval will be required from the Department. This approval will only be given where the personnel spend time in Australia with the individual animals prior to departure AND the receiving institution currently houses platypus OR the selected personnel are experienced in platypus care.

- 3.3 Any road transport both from and to the airport will be required to be undertaken in fully air-conditioned vehicles with the temperature maintained at a minimum of 18°C and a maximum of 20°C.
- 3.4 Platypus are to be transported in either the cabin of the plane, or in a climate controlled hold. The accompanying keeper must have access to the animal air-side within Australia, and where possible, in the receiving country.
- 3.5 All efforts must be made to facilitate the separation of platypus from all other animals in the transport vehicle/aircraft. Preferably, there should be no other animals traveling in the same hold of the transport vehicle or aircraft. If this is unavoidable, platypus must be transported in a separate compartment.
- 3.6 Platypus must not be removed from the crates or handled in transit unless it is considered essential by the accompanying keeper.
- 3.7 Should the platypus be held within the crate for longer than 48 hours, arrangements must be made to give it access to food and water.
- 3.8 All available medical and species management documentation must have been made available to the receiving institution zoo prior to export.

4. CRATES / BOXES

- 4.1 The platypus must be conditioned to a nest box prior to transport. This nest box will become the box in which the platypus travels. Once the platypus uses this nest box regularly, access to all other nest boxes should be denied.
 - a) The nest-box with which the platypus is familiar should be placed inside a transport box during transport. Foam padding should be used to reduce movement between the inner and outer box whilst taking care that appropriate ventilation is maintained. Ventilation holes should be at least 10% of the surface area of the crate.

b) Alternatively, the nest box may be designed so that it is robust enough to be the travel crate as long as it meets all other requirements of these Conditions.

- 4.2 The temperature in the box must be maintained between a minimum temperature of 18°C and a maximum of 20°C for the duration of the journey. A thermometer monitoring internal temperatures must be readable from the outside of the crate.
- 4.3 The crate must facilitate monitoring and security screening without requiring opening of the transport container. Minimum requirements include an internal camera (with external monitoring) and suitable illumination to facilitate easy viewing of the platypus while inside the crate.

5. ACCLIMATISATION

- 5.1 If the personnel accompanying the platypus are from the sending institution, they must remain with the receiving institution for the period required for acclimatisation of the platypus.
- a) The length of the period of acclimatisation shall be determined by the exporting institution, but will not be less than fourteen (14) days.
- 5.2 Upon arrival the nest-box should be removed from the transport box and placed in the enclosure. The animal must be allowed to exit the transport container of its own accord unless there are concerns for its well-being. The platypus must have access to feed tanks and be offered the diet it is familiar with at the sending institution.
- 5.3 During the acclimatisation period:
- a) Disturbance and noise must be reduced to a minimum
- b) The receiving institution must ensure that the platypus' food intake, behaviour and general health are observed, including where possible via video monitoring in addition to keepers' observations.
- c) All monitoring results should be recorded and those records made available to the sending institution.

6. RECEIVING INSTITUTION – EXHIBIT REQUIREMENTS

- 6.1 The receiving institution must have a suitable enclosure for the platypus, ensuring that the following parameters have been addressed:
- a) The exhibit must prevent escape by platypus and protect the platypus against interference from other animals and the public.
- b) Any furniture which can be moved by platypus must be non-injurious if it is moved.
- c) All grates across drains must be securely fastened.
- d) Ambient temperatures in water and nest boxes must be maintained within the normal range platypus experience in the wild. Both should be kept below 25°C.

- e) Tunnel systems should be at least 1.5m long, with a slope of no greater than 30°, and are long enough to ensure platypus are dry before entering their nest box.
 - f) Water bodies and land areas must include natural materials.
- 6.2 The exhibit must allow platypus to
- a) engage in natural foraging behaviour;
 - b) have a choice of protected feeding and grooming sites;
 - c) interact with other platypus as appropriate;
 - d) access a dynamic water body that has varying flow patterns; and
 - e) access a dry nest box.
- 6.3 Water bodies for platypus should meet or exceed the minimum standards outlined in the New South Wales *Exhibited Animal Protection Act 1986* 'Standards for Exhibiting Australian Mammals'.
- a) Water bodies should be at least 6m² and 0.4m deep. Additional animals require an additional 4m² per animal.
 - b) Water should be filtered.
 - c) Water should be easily drained from pools through securely fastened grates.
- 6.4 Artificial tunnel systems should be dynamic and include a series of slides so that platypus may be variously granted and denied access to pools, nesting boxes and other platypus as required.
- 6.5 Facilities should be shielded from electrical currents, excessive noise and vibration from pumps and filters.

7. RECEIVING INSTITUTION – FEEDING REGIME

In captivity, platypuses feed largely on a wide variety of invertebrates. Wild platypuses feed mainly on benthic insects at all life stages and will feed on crustaceans if the opportunity arises (McLachlan-Troup *et al* 2010). Platypus have high energy requirements and can eat the equivalent of 20% of their body weight daily.

- 7.1 Platypus should only be given live food. The receiving institution must provide evidence that it has a guaranteed supply of fresh live food suitable for platypus.
- 7.2 Prior to export, the sending institution should acclimatise platypuses to be exported to the diet to be fed by the receiving institution.

8. RECEIVING INSTITUTION – STAFFING

- 8.1 If the receiving institution does not currently house platypuses, it must send staff to the exporting facility to be trained in platypus management prior to any export taking place. A minimum of one veterinarian and two keepers from the recipient institution must be trained.

- 8.2 A veterinarian must undertake a platypus training program for a minimum of two weeks at the sending facility, or at a facility holding platypus if veterinary work is scheduled there. Training must include participation in scheduled health checks, pre-export screening, and could include time working in the field if the opportunity arises.
- 8.3 Keepers must be trained for a minimum of 2 weeks working with platypus and their life support systems at the sending institution; and spend an additional 5 days working with platypuses at another institution.
- a) Keeper training should also include training on the platypus facility life-support systems within the receiving institution. The receiving institution must provide the sending institution documented evidence that the keepers are fully conversant with the daily operation of pumps and filters, water quality, and including the ability to successfully manage a system failure.
 - b) Keepers must have demonstrated and extensive experience in directly applicable roles. Examples include experience with managing aquatic life support systems and work with other fresh water aquatic mammals.
 - c) Keeper should also ideally undertake field work to learn about the ecological role of platypus.
- 8.4 Staff training must have been completed no earlier than 3 months from the planned date of export to ensure that staff are familiar with the individual platypuses being exported.

9. GENERAL ITEMS

- 9.1 Arrangements must be made between the receiving institution and the exporter, sufficient to ensure the establishment and maintenance of a close liaison and regular communication on matters affecting the management and health of the platypus in the overseas receiving institution's facilities.
- 9.2 The receiving institution is required to enter into an Ambassador Agreement that stipulates a number of conditions that must be met and maintained for all specimens held at the institution. This document is a three-way agreement between the receiving institution, the Australian exporter and the Department of Environment and Energy.
- 9.3 The receiving institution must provide data as requested to the Australasian platypus studbook keeper.
- 9.4 Australian sanctuaries, zoos, universities and wildlife ecologists strive to work together to help ensure effective conservation of platypus. Overseas institutions holding and displaying platypus are expected to contribute to this body of knowledge through freely sharing information relevant to the conservation and captive care of this species.
- 9.5 The receiving institution and the sending institution should liaise to ensure that the receiving institution utilises literature specific to platypuses. Recommendations include relevant chapters in:

- Jackson S M (2003). Australian Mammals: Biology and Captive Management. CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne, Australia.
- Vogelnest L, Woods R (2008). Medicine of Australian Mammals, CSIRO Publishing, Melbourne, Australia.
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eastern New South Wales through community-based surveys. *Australian Mammalogy*, 20, pp.239-250.

McLachlan-Troup, T.A., Dickman, C.R. and Grant, T.R., 2010. Diet and dietary selectivity of the platypus in relation to season, sex and macroinvertebrate assemblages. *Journal of Zoology*, 280(3), pp.237-246.

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Rohweder, D.A. and Baverstock, P.R., 1999. Distribution of platypus *Ornithorhynchus anatinus* in the Richmond River catchment, northern New South Wales. *Australian Zoologist*, 31(1), pp.30-37.

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Checklist for Satisfying Conditions

This checklist is designed for the use of applicants to ensure that all conditions have been met. Evidence that these Conditions have been met should be provided in writing to the Department of the Environment and Energy, including (as relevant) supporting documents.

Required information will also be requested on the export permit application form.

1. SELECTION OF EXPORT STOCK

- Platypus captive bred (Condition 1.1)
- If of wild origin (1.2)
 - Not removed from the wild for export
 - Surplus to ZAA requirements
 - Held in captivity for at least 12 months
 - Demonstrate appropriate behaviours
- 12 months of age and no older than 66% of modelled survivorship in studbook (1.3 and 1.4)
- Role of animals at receiving institution advised to the Department (1.5)
- Behavioural criteria met (1.6)

2. PRE EXPORT REQUIREMENTS

- Quarantine conditions met (2.1)
- Suitable microchip implanted in each animal to be transferred and microchip data supplied to the Department (2.2)
- Veterinary examinations performed (2.3)
- Certificate of Health, satisfying all relevant conditions, supplied to the Department (2.4 and 2.5)

3. TRANSPORTATION REQUIREMENTS

- Details of personnel selected to accompany platypus supplied to the Department (3.1)
- Personnel familiar with transit and post-flight conditions (3.2 – 3.8)

4. CRATES/BOXES

- Details of crates supplied to the Department (4.1 – 4.3)

5. ACCLIMATISATION

- Personnel accompanying platypus familiar with acclimatisation conditions (5.1 – 5.3)

6. RECIPIENT – EXHIBIT

- Information for facility assessment submitted to the Department, demonstrating the recipient's facilities are adequate to meet these Conditions (6.1 – 6.5)

7. RECEIVING INSTITUTION – FEEDING REGIME

- Information for facility assessment submitted to the Department, demonstrating that the recipient has adequate food supply and methods in place (7.1 and 7.2).

8. RECEIVING INSTITUTION – STAFFING

- Information for facility assessment submitted to the Department, demonstrating that the recipient's staff are trained in line with these Conditions (8.1 – 8.4)

9. GENERAL ITEMS

- Liaison and communication arrangements made between recipient and exporter (9.1)
- Ambassador Agreement signed by exporter, recipient, and the Department (9.2)
- Recipient agrees to provide data to Australasian platypus studbook keeper and cooperate with other institutions to help ensure effective conservation of platypus (9.3 and 9.4)
- Receiving institution and sending institution agree to liaise to ensure access to relevant literature (9.5).