



**JAMES COOK  
UNIVERSITY**  

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**AUSTRALIA**

## **Animal Ethics Committee**

# **GECO Training Booklet**

*Using the JCU Online Ethics System for Animal Research Applications*

*Issued by:*

**Animal Welfare and Compliance Officer**  
Office of Research Ethics and Compliance  
James Cook University, Townsville QLD

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*Booklet 1 of 2 in the AEC Compliance Retraining Series*



## Contents

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*This booklet is organised into eleven modules. Each module is a self-contained workflow you can complete in GECO. Page numbers below are indicative; use Word's navigation pane for cross-referencing.*

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## About this booklet

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GECO (Ethics Module) is the JCU online ethics management system through which all animal ethics applications, amendments, annual animal use reports, annual project progress reports, and final project reports are lodged and tracked. Investigators are responsible for using GECO competently — including initiating and submitting their own applications and amendments, monitoring and responding to AEC queries, and acting on the system's automated reminders for upcoming expiries.

This booklet is the GECO-platform module of the AEC Compliance Retraining Series. It is designed to take you from novice to confident, independent submission of an animal ethics application in GECO, with the supporting workflows you will use throughout the life of an approval (amendment, annual report, final report, annual animal use report, and pre-expiry renewal).

It is paired with the AEC Approval Lifecycle and Continuous Coverage of Animals Held Under a Scientific Approval booklet, which covers the regulatory and ethical content that GECO is built to capture. The two booklets are intended to be read together: GECO is the tool; the lifecycle booklet is the obligation.

### How to use this booklet

- Each module begins with a short **Learning Outcome** statement and ends with a **What you should be able to do now** checklist. Work through the modules sequentially the first time you use this booklet.
- Screen-by-screen, the booklet describes what GECO will show, what fields you must complete, and the common decisions you will make. Take notes in the margins; the booklet is designed to be a working reference, not a one-off read.
- A link to the step-by-step articles for each GECO workflow is available in each section.
- A glossary of GECO terms and a set of quick-reference checklists are provided at the end.

### Who this booklet is for

Principal Investigators (PIs), co-investigators, technical and animal-care staff named on AEC applications, and any JCU personnel who needs to lodge or maintain animal ethics records in GECO. New staff should complete this booklet as part of induction. Existing staff are required to complete it where targeted retraining is imposed under the JCU AEC Non-Compliance Procedure.

**Important**

No animal work — including holding or routine husbandry of animals previously held under a scientific approval — may continue under an expired approval.

If an approval is approaching expiry, the renewal or replacement application must be submitted in GECO in time for AEC review before the expiry date. This is a Code obligation and a JCU non-compliance trigger.

If you are unsure whether your activity requires AEC approval, contact [ethics@jcu.edu.au](mailto:ethics@jcu.edu.au) BEFORE starting. Do not assume an exemption applies.

# Module 1 — GECO at a Glance - Ethics Module

## Learning Outcome

By the end of this module, you will be able to describe what GECO is, what it is used for in the animal ethics lifecycle, and who has visibility of the information you lodge in it.

**GECO knowledge base Link:** [Research - GECO at a Glance — Ethics Module](#)

## 1.1 What is GECO?

GECO is the JCU online ethics governance and compliance system. It is the single point of entry for all human and animal ethics submissions and the system of record for Human Ethics Low Risk Panel-Australia (HE-LRP-AUS) and Animal Ethics Committee (AEC) approvals at JCU.

Every application, amendment, annual report, final report, animal use report, and ethics determination on your project is stored in GECO and is auditable by the Office of Research Ethics and Compliance, and by external regulators where required.

## 1.2 What you will use GECO for

- Lodging a new ethics application.
- Submitting an amendment to an approved project.
- Completing an Animal Use Report.
- Filing the ethics progress report on an in-force approval, and the final report at project close.
- Notifying the Ethics Office of an ethics application that has been approved externally to JCU.

## 1.3 Who else sees what you put into GECO.

Your application is not stored in isolation. The following roles have visibility, depending on the application stage:

- The **Animal Ethics Officer (AEO)**, **Human Ethics Officer (HEO)**, and the **Manager, Research Ethics and Compliance (MREC)** — for review, queue management, and AEC documentation.
- The **Animal Welfare and Compliance Officer (AWCO)** — for pre-review, compliance assessment, and post-approval monitoring.
- Reviewing **Committee members** assigned to your application — for scientific, housing and husbandry, welfare, lay, and category-D review.
- Internal Collaborators (JCU staff and students and non-JCU investigators who have been given GECO access and can access the application). — for their declarations and training-record uploads.
- Facility Managers — for facility viability assessment, housing and husbandry oversight, and post-approval monitoring of animals held in their facility.

- Ethics Monitors — for monitoring activities across the life of the approval.
- Ex-officio Members — in accordance with their standing role on the Committee.
- Deans — where access is required to support faculty oversight and institutional responsibilities.

### **If GECO holds information you believe is incorrect**

Contact the Ethics Office ([ethics@jcu.edu.au](mailto:ethics@jcu.edu.au)) in writing and ask for a correction. Do not work around it. Working around an inaccurate record in GECO can create downstream non-compliance issues even where the underlying activity is properly conducted.

### **What you should be able to do now**

- State**, in one sentence, what GECO is and what it is the system of record for.
- List** at least four ethics-lifecycle tasks you will complete in GECO.
- Name** the roles (other than yours) that have visibility of your application in GECO.
- Identify** the correct contact point to request a correction to information held in GECO.

## Module 2 — Completing an Application for an Animal Project in GECO

### Learning Outcome

By the end of this module, you will be able to initiate, draft, and submit a new animal ethics application in GECO from the Home screen through to declaration, and resolve common pre-submission errors.

**GECO knowledge base Link:** [Research - Completing an application for an animal project in GECO](#)

### 2.1 When this module applies.

This module applies to any new animal ethics application — research, teaching, breeding, holding or display, observational use of animals, or for an exemption to Ethics Review — being submitted under JCU's AEC. For amendments to an existing approval, see Module 3. For external ethics ratification, see Module 5.

### 2.2 Before you start.

Have the following ready before you log in. Drafting an application directly in GECO without these in place is the most common cause of returned submissions:

- A clear **project title**.
- Evidence of completed training is required for every named investigator. This may take the form of the ANZCCART ComPass Core completion certificate or an equivalent training record from another institution, provided the training covers the Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes and relevant Australian legislation. Applications will not proceed to approval without this documentation.
- The **Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)** you intend to reference. There is a complete range approved SOPs available in GECO. If a SOP does not exist for what you propose, you can write one and submit it with your application.
- A clear scientific or educational justification, statistical rationale for animal numbers, and humane endpoints for each procedure.
- Identification of any conflicts of interest and any collaborators (internal or external).

### 2.3 Step-by-step in GECO

1. Log into GECO using **JCU SSO** (single sign-on).
2. Navigate to **Grants/Ethics** in the top menu.

3. In the left-hand menu, select **Ethics Review**.
4. Click the **New Ethics Application** button.
5. Enter a **Project Title**.
6. In the **Application Type** dropdown, select **New**.
7. Select **Animal** as the Project Type.
8. Select the appropriate **Animal application type** from the list:
  - Research
  - Teaching
  - Breeding
  - Holding or Display
  - Observational
9. Complete the **remaining tabs** of the form. These typically include: Project Information; Collaborators and Funding; Animal Housing, Care and Husbandry; Methods and Experimental Design; Attachments and Comments.
10. Use the **Save** button as you go *before* moving between tabs.
11. Use the red **Errors** button on the left-hand side of the screen to see which mandatory fields remain incomplete. Incomplete fields are highlighted with a red box.
12. Once all required fields are entered correctly, the blue **Submit** button will appear.
13. Click **Submit**. You will be redirected to a declaration page — toggle to accept the declaration and click **Submit** a second time to lodge the application.

## 2.4 Resolving errors and missing information.

The most common reasons a submission cannot be completed:

- A **mandatory field has been left blank** — open the Errors button, click the linked field, complete it, then save the tab.
- A **training certificate** for a named investigator has not been uploaded — upload via the Attachments and Comments tab. The application cannot proceed without all named personnel evidenced.
- A **SOP** referenced in the application has not been approved or has lapsed beyond its 3-year review — replace with an approved SOP or submit the SOP with the application.

## 2.5 Monitoring your application.

The research team is responsible for monitoring the progress of a submission and, where a stage is delayed, following up with the relevant approver. An application has not reached the Ethics Office for review until its status shows “**With Ethics Office**”; until then it is still moving through the preceding workflow stages (for example, Facility Manager or Supervisor) and no review by the Ethics Office has begun. Check the workflow status regularly rather than assuming a submitted application is under review.

Clicking the person icon on the application row allows you to view who is assigned to the approval workflow and who the submission is currently with for review.

Any comments made on your application are also visible on this screen. If the application is returned to you, the Comments will indicate what changes are requested.

A recurring issue is applications being submitted without all required attachments. Where an attachment has been omitted, it can still be uploaded via this screen as well — there is no need to recall or recreate the application. Confirm that all training certificates, and supporting documents are attached before, and if necessary, after submission.

### **Common pitfall: drafting in GECO instead of in a template.**

GECO sessions can time out. If drafting in GECO save your work regularly or use the GECO Drafting Templates available from the Animal Welfare and Ethics webpage ([Resources, Downloads and Links - Research and Innovation Services - JCU Australia](#)) to draft your application offline, then paste responses into GECO. This also makes collaborative drafting easier when multiple investigators are contributing.

### **What you should be able to do now**

- Initiate** a new animal ethics application in GECO from the Ethics Review screen.
- Select** the correct Application Type and Animal application type for your project.
- Identify** which tabs are mandatory and use the Errors button to diagnose blockers.
- Submit** the application and complete the declaration page.
- Locate** your submission in the Ethics Review section and check the current workflow stage.

## Module 3 — Creating an Amendment to an Ethics Application in GECO

### Learning Outcome

By the end of this module, you will be able to lodge an amendment to a previously approved animal ethics application in GECO, including selecting the correct parent project, applying the correct title prefix, and submitting through the appropriate workflow.

**GECO knowledge base Link:** [Research - Create an Amendment to an Ethics Application in GECO](#)

### 3.1 When this module applies.

Use this module when you need to change a previously approved animal (or human) research ethics application. Typical amendments include: changes to personnel; addition of procedures; change of animal numbers; change of housing or location; extension to the approved end date; or any other deviation from the approved protocol that has not yet been actioned.

Certain fields can be amended directly within the relevant tab — specifically, adding or removing investigators, changing the Principal Investigator or updating PI information, and adding or removing animals, research sites, or research facilities. All other changes must be entered in the Amendment tab. Where personnel, research locations, or facilities are added or removed in their respective tabs, the corresponding changes must also be listed and described in the Amendment tab. You will be asked to describe each amendment in the relevant sections of the form and to provide justification for the changes proposed.

### **No amended activity may commence until approved.**

An amendment must be approved by the relevant HREC or AEC committee before any of the amended activities may commence. Work conducted under an unapproved amendment is a non-compliance event and must be self-reported.

### 3.2 Step-by-step in GECO

1. Log into GECO using the **JCU SSO** button.
2. From the Home page, select the **Grants/Ethics** tab at the top of the screen.

3. Select **Ethics Review** on the left-hand-side menu.
4. Select the **New Ethics Application** button.
5. Select **Amendment** for the Application Type.
6. Select the **parent project** from the list of available projects. This list includes all projects and previous amendments that have been approved. If the project you wish to amend is not listed, submit a request to the Ethics Office. The amendment will retain the same reference number as the application.
7. Unless you are amending the title, use the same title as the approved application but add the prefix **AM**. You can copy and paste from the title in the existing application list or type it in. For the second or third amendment to the same application, include the sequence number, e.g. *AM02 Rainforest Frog Survey*.
8. Describe all amendments in the **Amendment Details** section and complete all other required fields. The red Errors button on the right-hand side of the window will show any required fields not yet actioned.
9. Once all required fields are completed, the blue **Submit** button will appear. Select Submit, complete the declaration, then select Submit again to lodge the amendment.

### 3.3 Amendment workflow

If the amendment is associated with an animal ethics submission, the Facility Manager will be able to view the amendment in workflow prior to the Ethics Office (where relevant). All other amendments go straight to the Ethics Office in workflow.

#### What you should be able to do now

- Identify** the parent project on which to lodge an amendment.
- Apply** the correct AM (or AM##) title prefix.
- Complete** the Amendment Details section with a clear description and justification for each change.
- Submit** the amendment and complete the declaration.
- State** the rule about commencement of amended activity prior to approval.

## Module 4 — Reviewing and Approving Research Ethics Applications in GECO

### Learning Outcome

By the end of this module, you will be able to act on an application that has reached you in the GECO approval workflow — open it, review it, record your decision, and (if applicable) delegate during periods of leave.

**GECO knowledge base Link:** [Research - Review and approve Research Ethics applications in GECO](#)

### 4.1 Who this module is for

Facility Managers, Ethics Advisors, Student Supervisors, College Deans, and AEC reviewers. PIs do not action approval steps; PIs respond to comments returned via this workflow (see Module 2).

### 4.2 Opening and reviewing the application.

Applications assigned to you appear on your GECO Home Screen task list. To open and review an application, click the approve hand icon on the relevant task. Review the application against the criteria for your role (see §4.4).

### 4.3 Approving or returning the application.

Typically, you will see two options:

- **Return to the Principal Investigator (PI) with feedback** — use the comments box to indicate what needs to be updated. The PI will see your comments and must address them before resubmitting.
- **Grant approval** — for example, *College Dean Approval*, to forward the application to the next stage in the workflow.

Select the relevant option in the approval and comments box, add any comments, then save.

### Comments are visible to the applicant.

Comment boxes in GECO are typically marked with a caption such as "Comments entered here will be visible to all, including the applicant." Do not enter information or comments you do not want

the applicant to see. If you need to record a private note for the committee, do so outside GECO and reference it during AEC deliberation.

#### 4.4 Approval workflow at a glance

When an application is submitted, it moves through a list of reviewers and approvers depending on the application type. The standard workflow stages are:

Stage	Role and conditions
<b>1. Facility Manager</b>	Animal ethics applications or amendments where the application has not been externally approved by another ethics committee.
<b>2. Student Supervisor</b>	Applications submitted by students; new applications only (not amendments); not engaged where the application has been externally approved.
<b>3. Ethics Advisor</b>	Required for new human applications (not amendments); optional for animal ethics applications; not engaged where the application has been externally approved.
<b>4. College Dean</b>	New applications only (not amendments); not engaged where the application has been externally approved.
<b>5. Ethics Office</b>	Determines next steps — return to applicant; refer to a high/low risk panel; approve and forward to committee meetings.
<b>6. Ethics Committee</b>	Approve with no further review required. Holds final approval or rejection authority.

#### 4.5 Delegating approval authority

If you are going on leave or otherwise unable to review applications within the workflow window, contact the Ethics Office. They can update the approvals to a nominated alternative reviewer. Do not leave applications stalled in your queue — this directly contributes to PIs missing expiry windows.

##### What you should be able to do now

- Open an application assigned to you in the workflow.
- Decide whether to return the application with feedback or grant approval.

- Write reviewer comments that are clear, actionable, and appropriate to share with the applicant.
- Identify your position in the approval workflow and what the next stage is.
- Arrange delegation of your approval authority through the Ethics Office before going on leave.

## Module 5 — Notifying the Ethics Office of an Externally-Approved Ethics Application

### Learning Outcome

By the end of this module, you will be able to notify the JCU Ethics Office of an ethics application approved by another institution, attach the supporting documents required for administrative review, and understand the limits of JCU's recognition of an external approval.

**GECO knowledge base Link:** [Research - Notify the Ethics Office of an Ethics Application approved externally to JCU](#)

### 5.1 When this module applies.

If you have ethics approval from another institution for a project being conducted at JCU, you do not need to apply for additional JCU approval — but you do need to request ratification or recognition of the external ethics approval through GECO.

#### **Recognition is not JCU approval to conduct the research.**

JCU's recognition of an external ethics approval is not approval from the University to conduct the research. The external ethics committee remains solely responsible for the ethical conduct of the research, and you must continue to comply with the terms and conditions of the approving ethics committee.

To conduct research under JCU auspices, you must have your external HREC/AEC approval ratified by the relevant JCU Ethics Committee.

### 5.2 What you need before you start.

Have the following ready to upload. The submission cannot be reviewed without them:

- The external notification of approval (the approval letter from the other institution).
- The original ethics application submitted to the external committee.
- All documents that were reviewed by the external ethics committee with the application (for example, recruitment material, surveys, PISCFs, SOPs).

### 5.3 Step-by-step in GECO

1. Log into GECO and select the **JCU SSO** button.
2. From the Home page, select the **Grants/Ethics** tab at the top of the screen.

3. Select the **Ethics Review** tab from the left-hand menu.
4. Click the **New Ethics Application** button.
5. Provide a Project Title.
6. Select **New** as the Application Type.
7. Select whether your project is **Human** or **Animal**.
8. If Animal, select from the following categories: Research, Teaching, Breeding, Holding or Display, or Observational.
9. Select **This project has previously been reviewed by an Ethics Committee external to JCU** using the radio buttons.
10. Complete the remaining tabs of the form.
11. Save information as you go *before* moving to the next tab.
12. Ensure you add all the approved documentation to your application. This may include (but is not limited to): External Research Ethics Committee Application; External Research Ethics Committee Approval Letter; Responses to the Ethics Committee Review; and any external approval documents that were reviewed by the Ethics Committee with the application (e.g. recruitment material, surveys, PISCFs).

## 5.4 Resolving errors and missing information.

The Errors button on the left-hand side of the screen provides tips on what needs to be actioned before submitting. Once all fields are entered correctly, the blue Submit button will appear. If the Submit button is present but not working, scroll through the application and look for incomplete mandatory fields — these will be indicated by a red box.

## 5.5 Workflow

Externally approved applications go directly to the Ethics Office, who will determine how the application will proceed. The Ethics Review section will show all your previous submissions and the approval status of each. Clicking the person icon allows you to view who is assigned to the approval workflow and who the submission is currently with for review. Comments on your application are also visible there; if your application is returned, the Comments section will indicate what changes are requested.

### What you should be able to do now

- Identify** whether your project requires ratification of an external approval rather than a new JCU application.
- Assemble** the external approval letter, application, and supporting documents prior to submission.

- Select the correct radio button so the application routes directly to the Ethics Office.
- Articulate the limits of JCU's recognition of an external approval (recognition ≠ JCU approval to conduct).

## Module 6 — Changing the Principal Investigator on an Ethics Application

### Learning Outcome

By the end of this module, you will be able to request a change of Principal Investigator on an existing ethics application via the correct channel and supply the information required for the change to be actioned.

**GECO knowledge base Link:** [Research - Changing the Principal Investigator on an Ethics Application](#)

### 6.1 Who can change the PI.

Only staff in the Ethics Office can change the Principal Investigator on an Ethics Application. The PI cannot self-transfer the application in GECO, and a co-investigator cannot make this change from their own login.

### 6.2 How to request the change.

Send an email to the Ethics Office at [ethics@jcu.edu.au](mailto:ethics@jcu.edu.au) requesting the change of Principal Investigator. To minimise back-and-forth and avoid delays in approval workflows, ensure the request includes:

- The title of the application.
- The reference number of the application.
- The current Principal Investigator's name.
- The proposed new Principal Investigator's name and JCU email.
- Confirmation that the proposed new PI has completed the mandatory ANZCCART ComPass training (or equivalent recognised prior learning, evidenced by certificate).
- The effective date of the change.

### Why this matters for compliance

Informal, undocumented transfer of ethics responsibilities — for example, a senior academic taking over a teaching approval without the PI record being formally updated — is a recurring point of vulnerability identified in JCU non-compliance investigations. The person named as PI in GECO is the person with ultimate responsibility for the oversight of the project. Update the record promptly when responsibility changes hands.

### **What you should be able to do now**

- State** who can authorise a change of PI on an application (Ethics Office only).
- Lodge** a complete Service Request that allows the Ethics Office to action the change without follow-up.
- Explain** why documenting the change in GECO matters for compliance.

## Module 7 — Reporting Unexpected Adverse Events (UAEs) and non-compliance.

### Learning Outcome

By the end of this module, you will be able to distinguish a UAE from a non-compliance, decide when each (or both) pathways apply, and prepare a report that meets the AEC's expectations the first time.

**GECO knowledge base Link:** [Research - Reporting Unexpected Adverse Events \(UAEs\) and Non-Compliance: What, When and How](#)

### 7.1 Why this module exists.

Both pathways exist to protect animal welfare, support transparent research practice, and meet JCU's obligations under the Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes (8th edition). They are mechanisms of assurance, not punishment.

### 7.2 What is a UAE?

An Unexpected Adverse Event (UAE) is an unintended and unanticipated outcome of an approved procedure that causes greater impact to animal welfare than was anticipated in the approval.

UAEs require prompt notification to the Ethics Office and the AEC, regardless of whether the procedure that produced the event was otherwise within the scope of approval. The defining feature of a UAE is the welfare impact, not the compliance status of the underlying procedure.

Common examples include:

- Mortality outside expected rates or under unexpected circumstances.
- Clinical signs (pain, distress, morbidity) more severe or more frequent than predicted in the application.
- Anaesthetic or surgical complications outside the anticipated range.
- Equipment, environmental, or husbandry failures resulting in welfare impact.

### 7.3 What is a non-compliance?

A non-compliance is a deviation from the approved protocol, the Code, applicable legislation, or institutional policy.

Examples include:

- Conducting work outside an approved procedure.

- Housing or using animals under an expired approval.
- Exceeding the approved animal numbers.
- Failing to meet a condition of approval (monitoring frequency, training requirements, reporting deadlines).
- Personnel not listed on the approval undertaking regulated activities.

A non-compliance must be self-reported under §5.5 of the JCU AEC Non-Compliance Procedure as soon as it is identified.

## 7.4 How to report a UAE.

Send an email to [ethics@jcu.edu.au](mailto:ethics@jcu.edu.au) with the [UAE Report Form](#) properly completed. Your report must include:

- Clear contextual information about the project, approval number, and personnel involved.
- A thorough explanation of the circumstances surrounding the event, including timeline, monitoring sheets, and contributing factors.
- Unambiguous identification of the animal(s) involved (species, ID/tag, sex, age, source).
- Post-mortem photographs where applicable.
- A complete post-mortem report, including any findings that may be associated with the event (gross pathology, histopathology where available, clinical observations leading up to the event).

This level of detail is essential for the UAE to be accurately assessed and documented by the AEC. Incomplete reports delay assessment and may trigger requests for further information that prolong the matter unnecessarily.

### **If you are unsure whether a death qualifies as a UAE**

Report it. The AWCO will assess it. Over-reporting carries no penalty; under-reporting may constitute non-compliance.

Support is available. If you do not have post-mortem capability, are uncertain about handling, or work in a remote facility, contact the AWCO before the cadaver is committed to the freezer. Early contact almost always produces a workable plan.

## 7.5 How to report a non-compliance (self-report)

Send an email to [ethics@jcu.edu.au](mailto:ethics@jcu.edu.au) explaining all factors relevant to the non-compliance. Include, at minimum:

- The approval number and project title.
- A clear description of what occurred, when it was identified, and how it was identified.

- All personnel involved and their role in the matter.
- The animal(s) affected, if any, and the welfare impact (or confirmation that no welfare impact occurred).
- Contributing factors — procedural, training, supervisory, environmental, or systemic.
- Immediate corrective actions already taken.
- Proposed preventive actions to avoid recurrence.

The AWCO is notified and will open a case under the Non-Compliance Procedure.

## 7.6 When both pathways apply.

A single event may engage both pathways — for example, an unanticipated welfare outcome arising from an unapproved deviation from the protocol. In these cases, and based on a thorough self-analysis, lodge both reports. Do not choose one. The UAE pathway addresses the welfare event; the non-compliance pathway addresses the procedural deviation. They serve different purposes and produce different records.

## 7.7 Self-reporting credit: what it does and does not do.

Voluntary self-report of a non-compliance, BEFORE the matter is detected by monitoring, audit, or complaint, attracts a –1 step modifier on the Sanctions Ladder for Minor and Moderate matters (JCU Non-Compliance Procedure §7.2 and §9.2).

Acknowledgement provided AFTER detection — even prompt and fully transparent acknowledgement — does not satisfy this definition and does not attract the formal credit. It remains a mitigating factor recorded in the Intent score during the investigation, but it is not a substitute for early disclosure.

Scenario	Self-report credit?
PI identifies the issue and reports it before any external party becomes aware	Yes — –1 step modifier applies
PI reports the issue after being contacted by the AWCO, AEO, or following a complaint	No — recorded as cooperation/mitigation only
PI reports the issue after an audit or monitoring activity flags it	No — recorded as cooperation/mitigation only

The message is straightforward: if you identify a non-compliance, report it immediately. Delay erodes both the welfare response and any credit available under the Procedure.

## 7.8 Why this matters

UAE reporting allows the AEC to refine risk assessments, update procedures, and improve welfare outcomes across the institution. Non-compliance reporting allows JCU to demonstrate to regulators that its self-monitoring is functioning — a core expectation under the Code and a condition of JCU's Animal Research Authority.

A culture in which researchers report early, completely, and without fear of disproportionate consequence is the single strongest indicator of a healthy ethics framework.

### What you should be able to do now

- Distinguish a UAE from a non-compliance and identify when both apply.
- Assemble a UAE report with all required clinical and contextual detail.
- Lodge a non-compliance self-report that supports a proportionate AWCO response.
- Identify what counts as a self-report (and what only counts as cooperation/mitigation).
- Explain the institutional purpose of both reporting pathways.

## Module 8 — Navigating to the Project Reporting Section in GECO

### Learning Outcome

By the end of this module, you will be able to find the Project Reporting tab of an approved animal ethics application in GECO so that you can begin a progress report, final report, or animal use report.

**GECO knowledge base Link:** [Research - Navigate to Project Reporting section in GECO](#)

### 8.1 When this module applies.

Progress, final, and animal use reports are all initiated from the Project Reporting section of the GECO application record. The same navigation applies regardless of which report type you intend to start. Progress reports are required annually.

### 8.2 Step-by-step

1. Log into GECO.
2. Navigate to the **Grants/Ethics** menu on the top menu bar.
3. Navigate to the **Ethics Review** menu on the left-hand menu bar.
4. Filter on **Approved Applications** using the filter on the right-hand side.
5. Open the application that requires a report.
6. Navigate to the **Project Reporting** tab on the top menu of the application record.

### Report on the latest version/amendment of your application

For projects with amendments, navigate to the most recent amendment/version of the application — not the original or older amendments — before adding report details. Reports added against superseded versions cause downstream reconciliation problems and may not be recognised by the AEC.

### 8.3 Where to go next.

Once you have reached the Project Reporting tab, choose the report type you need:

- Module 9 — Animal Use Report
- Module 10 — Progress or Final Report

### **What you should be able to do now**

- Navigate** from the GECO home page to the Project Reporting tab of an approved application.
- Filter** the Ethics Review list to show only approved applications.
- Open** the correct (most recent) version of the application to lodge a report against.

## Module 9 — Completing an Animal Use Report in GECO

### Learning Outcome

By the end of this module, you will be able to lodge an Animal Use Report in GECO for the calendar year of use, with the correct Year of Use and Jurisdiction of Use entered, and animal numbers reported against the approved species in your application.

**GECO knowledge base Link:** [Research - Complete an Animal Use Report in GECO](#)

### 9.1 When this module applies.

Animal use reports are required to be completed before 31 January in the year following the reporting year (1 January to 31 December of the year before) for ongoing projects. When the project is complete and you are submitting the completion report, submit a report for the current calendar year (animal use since 1 January of that year). The data is reported to state government regulators each year as a condition of JCU's Animal Research Registration.

#### Nil reports are still required.

If no animals were used in the previous calendar year on a project that was open during that year, a Nil report is still required. Do not skip the report on that basis. Failure to lodge any required report is itself a non-compliance.

### 9.2 Step-by-step in GECO

1. Navigate to the **Project Reporting** section of the most recent amendment/version of your application (see Module 8). Do not complete the report on the original or older amendments.
2. Click **+ Add Report Details**.
3. Answer **Yes** to "Are you submitting an Animal Use Report?". Note: start the new year's report here.
4. Click **Submit**.

The year's report will be created in the table below. Select the three lines and pencil icon to open the report. You should have one animal use report for each year of your project in the table (do not add animals from the new year to a previous year's report).

### 9.3 Opening and completing the report.

When you open the report, you will see line listings for each animal type originally approved. The animals listed in this table should all be for the same year (do not add your new year's report as an animal in this

table — start a new report from the previous screen). Animal numbers entered in your application will be prepopulated into the Animal Numbers table from the animals approved.

Select each animal/entry to complete the information for how many of each animal type were used in this reporting period. Click on the three lines and pencil icon to edit each animal entry. The number that appears is the number approved; over-type that number with the number actually used.

- If you have not used any of an animal type in the last calendar year, **over-type 0** for that animal.
- If the animals in the Animal Numbers table align with what you have used, then once you have updated the numbers, you have completed the report.
- Only if you have used *different animals* to those requested in your application — or the animals you used are not listed in the Animal table — click + **Add Animal Numbers** to open a new form for that animal.

## 9.4 Required fields.

Enter or edit the form fields to complete your Animal Use Report. The fields are required for government reporting. An asterisk is shown against mandatory fields.

### Year of Use

Choose the Year of Use for the calendar year you are reporting:

- the **previous calendar year** for projects that are Continuing.
- the **current calendar year** if you are submitting a final 'Completed' progress report.

Note that the Year of Use refers to the year in which the animals were used, not necessarily the year you are submitting the report.

### Jurisdiction of Use

Include the location of use — Country + State (if Australia) — where the animal use occurred. JCU reports to each Australian state individually and must be able to identify which uses were conducted in overseas jurisdictions.

## 9.5 Completing the report.

Once you have entered all animal use information for the past calendar year, answer Completed to the question "Please choose the completion status of your report". If you have partially completed the report and want to come back to finalise it later, answer Draft.

### Counting animals that span calendar years.

If a cohort of animals was used across more than one calendar year — for example, 10 cattle used from October 2019 to February 2020 — the same 10 cattle must be reported in BOTH the 2019

report and the 2020 report. Each annual report reflects the number used during that calendar year, not new acquisitions only.

### **What you should be able to do now**

- Lodge** an Animal Use Report in GECO against the most recent version of your approval.
- Enter** the correct Year of Use and Jurisdiction of Use.
- Update** each species line with actual numbers used (including a zero where applicable).
- Add** new species lines only when the animals used are not already in the table.
- Lodge** a Nil report when no animals were used in the reporting year.

## Module 10 — Completing your Ethics Progress or Final Report in GECO

### Learning Outcome

By the end of this module, you will be able to lodge an annual progress report or a final report on an animal ethics approval in GECO, choose the correct completion status, and upload supporting documents where the project is operating under an external acknowledgement.

**GECO knowledge base Link:** [Research - Complete your Ethics Progress or Final Report in GECO](#)

### 10.1 When this module applies.

Progress reports are required annually on the anniversary of the original approval date. A Final report is required on (or before) the expiry date of the ethics approval and serves as the closing report on the project.

### 10.2 Step-by-step in GECO — Animal Ethics

1. Navigate to the **Project Reporting** section in GECO (see Module 8).
2. Click **+ Add Report Details**.
3. Answer **No** to "Are you submitting an Animal Use Report?" — it routes you to the progress/final report form.
4. Select the **progress of your report** (Continuing, Completed or Abandoned).
5. Click **Submit**.

### 10.3 Step-by-step in GECO — Human Ethics

1. Click **+ Add Project Status**.
2. Select the status of your project from the dropdown.
3. Click **Submit**.

### 10.4 Editing and completing the report.

The report will be created in a table. Select the three lines and pencil icon to edit. To identify the report, look for a blank entry in the Report Status field and the created date of the report. Complete the sections in the report. Mandatory fields are designated by an asterisk.

#### Choose the status of your report.

- **Draft** — report is not yet completed.

- **Completed** — report is completed and ready for processing.

## 10.5 Projects that have received an External Acknowledgement

If your project operates under JCU's recognition of an external ethics approval, you are required to submit a copy of the reports that are submitted to the authority HREC or AEC for your project and have been approved. After entering the report details using the steps above and referring to the below attached external reports:

1. Navigate to the project in the **Grants/Ethics > Ethics Review** area.
2. Select the Person icon to the right of the project title.
3. Scroll down and click on **Upload Attachments**.
4. Upload the relevant attachments. File names should clearly indicate the nature of the document and the corresponding reporting year — for example, Annual Report 2025 — to support accurate identification and record-keeping.
5. Click **Upload**.

You can now close and/or exit this record.

### Final report at expiry

A Final report is due on the expiry date of the approval. After the expiry date, research activities involving animals cannot continue under that approval. If you have not lodged the final report and have not submitted a renewal or replacement application, you are operating outside approval — this is a non-compliance event and must be self-reported.

### What you should be able to do now

- Initiate** a progress or final report for an animal ethics project in GECO.
- Distinguish** the Animal Ethics and Human Ethics routes from the Project Reporting tab.
- Choose** between Draft and Completed status correctly.
- Attach** the approved external authority report where the project operates under external recognition.
- State** what happens to your authority to operate at the expiry date of the approval.

# Module 11 — GECO Notifications: What You'll Receive, When, and What to Do

## Learning Outcome

By the end of this module, you will be able to identify the automated notifications GECO sends, why they are sometimes missed, and how to build a personal control layer so that your reports and renewals are lodged on time even if a notification is filtered or overlooked.

**GECO knowledge base Link:** [Research - GECO Notifications: What You'll Receive, When, and What to Do](#)

## 11.1 Why this module exists.

Failure to submit reports or renew an approval on time may constitute a non-compliance event under the Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes (8th edition) and JCU's Animal Ethics Non-Compliance Procedure. Understanding the notification workflow will help you trigger reports and renewals on time and avoid the operational and welfare consequences of an expired approval.

## 11.2 Who sends GECO notifications?

GECO notifications are issued automatically by the ethics management system. They are not sent from a JCU email address and will appear in your inbox from an external sender (noreply@academic.ie). Because the sender is not a recognisable JCU domain, these messages are frequently filtered to junk, clutter, or rules-based folders.

Add the GECO sender address to your safe-senders list and check your junk/clutter folders periodically. If you are unsure of the current sender address, contact the Ethics team at [ethics@jcu.edu.au](mailto:ethics@jcu.edu.au).

## 11.3 Notifications you will receive.

### Application and amendment status changes

- When an application or amendment is submitted to the workflow.
- When the application or amendment is returned to you by a reviewer for additional information or changes.
- When a final decision is made (approved or not approved).

There is no separate "Approved with Conditions" notification — the application is either returned for changes or approved. There are also no notifications as the application moves through intermediate review steps; however, the current workflow stage and the reviewer assigned are always visible in GECO.

### **Progress (annual) report reminders**

- Due on the anniversary of the original approval date each year.
- Reminders issued 60, 30 and 14 days prior to the due date.

### **Final report reminders (also serve as expiry reminders)**

- Due on the expiry date of the ethics approval.
- Reminders issued 60, 30 and 14 days prior to the due date.
- After the expiry date, research activities involving animals or human participants cannot continue under that approval.

### **Annual Animal Use Report reminders (JCU Australia animal ethics only)**

- Animal usage data is reported to state government regulators each year as a condition of JCU's Animal Research Registration.
- Reminders are issued on 1 December, 15 December, 1 January, 15 January, 1 February, and 15 February, with reports due to the JCU Animal Ethics Team by 30 March.
- Nil reports are still required where no animals were used in the previous calendar year.
- JCU Singapore animal ethics report usage at the same time as the progress report.

## **11.4 GECO is an aid, not a safety net.**

GECO notifications are an institutional aid. They are not a substitute for the PI's own pre-expiry control. Notifications can be missed where:

- The PI is on field deployment, leave, or overseas with limited access to JCU systems.
- The PI's inbox is heavily filtered, or auto-routes JCU system mail away from primary view.
- The non-JCU sender address causes messages to be flagged or filtered.
- Multiple administrative platforms send concurrent notifications, reducing the salience of any single message.

## **11.5 Recommended practice — build your own control layer.**

For every approval on which you are listed as PI:

- 1.** Record the expiry date in your own calendar or task system on the day approval is granted.
- 2.** Set personal reminders at 120, 90, 60, 30 and 14 days prior to expiry.
- 3.** Treat each reminder as a defined action point, as set out in §11.6.

## 11.6 The renewal workflow at a glance

Time before expiry	Action
120 days	Start the new application or consolidated replacement in GECO. Notify co-investigators and chase their declarations and training records immediately.
90 days	Application substantially drafted; SOPs and attachments uploaded; statistical justification in place.
60 days	Submit. Submission triggers the Animal Ethics Officer (AEO) review queue and the next AEC meeting.
30 days	If not yet submitted, escalate to the AWCO and the Manager, Research Ethics and Compliance (MREC). Do not let it drift.
Day of expiry	If a new approval is not in force, cease all activities under the approval — including housing and routine husbandry of animals held under it — in accordance with the Code.

## 11.7 What if I think I have missed a notification?

Log in to GECO and check the Reporting and Ethics Review tabs of your application. Both progress/final reports and current application status are visible there at any time, independent of the notification emails.

If you believe a notification was missed and you are now close to or past a due date, contact the Ethics team immediately:

- JCU Australia: [ethics@jcu.edu.au](mailto:ethics@jcu.edu.au)
- JCU Singapore (animal ethics): [researchsupport-singapore@jcu.edu.au](mailto:researchsupport-singapore@jcu.edu.au)

Early contact almost always allows a solution. Silence does not.

### Lessons from real non-compliance findings

JCU non-compliance investigations have identified the same pattern: a senior academic relying on a single GECO automated reminder, against a background of multiple competing administrative platforms, while on field deployment or leave at the critical week.

The remedy is not more notifications — it is a personal control layer that does not depend on noticing a single email. Calendar reminders at 120/90/60/30/14 days are the minimum recommended practice for any approval on which you are PI.

### **What you should be able to do now**

- List** the categories of automated notification GECO sends, and the lead times for each.
- Explain** why GECO notifications are sometimes missed and what mitigations apply.
- Set** up your own pre-expiry control layer for every approval on which you are PI.
- Identify** the action point at each milestone in the renewal workflow (120 / 90 / 60 / 30 days / day of expiry).
- Locate** report and application status information in GECO without relying on the email notification.

## Quick-Reference Checklists

Tear-out checklists for the three situations you are most likely to need in practice. Keep these visible — over your desk, in your project folder, or on the inside cover of your lab notebook.

### Checklist A — Starting a new or replacement application.

#### Before you log in to GECO

- Project title confirmed (working title acceptable).
- ANZCCART ComPass certificates collected for every named investigator.
- Approved SOPs identified, or new SOPs drafted for submission with the application.
- Scientific / educational justification written.
- Statistical justification for animal numbers documented.
- Humane endpoints defined for every procedure.
- Conflicts of interest identified and disclosed.
- Internal and External Collaborators identified; GECO access arranged where required.

#### In GECO

- Application created via Grants/Ethics → Ethics Review → New Ethics Application.
- Application Type set to New; Project Type set to Animal; correct Animal application type selected.
- All tabs reviewed; Errors button shows no outstanding fields.
- All required attachments uploaded (training certificates, external approvals if applicable, SOPs).
- Submit clicked; declaration accepted; second Submit confirmed.
- Confirmation visible in Ethics Review showing the submission has entered the workflow.

## Checklist B — Approaching expiry.

### Personal pre-expiry control

- Expiry date in personal calendar on the day approval is granted.
- Reminders set at 120, 90, 60, 30 and 14 days prior to expiry.
- At 120 days — new or replacement application started in GECO.
- At 90 days — application substantially drafted; SOPs and attachments uploaded.
- At 60 days — application submitted; AEO review queue triggered.
- At 30 days — if not yet submitted, escalation to AWCO and MREC actioned.
- Day of expiry — if no replacement in force, all activities under the approval ceased, including holding and husbandry.

## Checklist C — When something goes wrong.

### UAE or non-compliance identified.

- Immediate welfare action taken (where animals are involved): assess; treat or humanely euthanise per approved methods; record observations.
- Activity ceased where the underlying procedure or approval is in doubt.
- UAE Report Form completed and emailed to [ethics@jcu.edu.au](mailto:ethics@jcu.edu.au) within 48 hours, with timeline, monitoring records, animal identification, and post-mortem report.
- Non-compliance self-report emailed to [ethics@jcu.edu.au](mailto:ethics@jcu.edu.au) with approval number, description of what occurred, personnel involved, animal welfare impact, contributing factors, immediate corrective actions, and proposed preventive actions.
- Both reports lodged if the event engages both pathways — do not choose one.
- Records (monitoring sheets, photos, communications) preserved unaltered for AWCO review.
- All personnel involved briefed on cooperation expectations; no contact with affected animals beyond approved care.

## Glossary of GECO Terms

Terms used in this booklet, in alphabetical order. Where a term has both an institutional and a regulatory meaning, the regulatory meaning takes precedence.

Term	Definition
<b>AEC</b>	Animal Ethics Committee.
<b>AEO</b>	Animal Ethics Officer (Research and Innovation Services).
<b>AWCO</b>	Animal Welfare and Compliance Officer.
<b>ANZCCART ComPass</b>	The mandatory animal ethics training platform recognised by JCU. Core modules must be completed before any investigator can be approved on an AEC application.
<b>CAPA</b>	Corrective and Preventive Actions.
<b>The Code</b>	Australian Code for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes (NHMRC, 2013, 8th ed.).
<b>External Collaborator</b>	A non-JCU collaborator who does NOT need access to the GECO application; added by name only.
<b>External Acknowledgement</b>	JCU's recognition of an ethics approval issued by another institution; not equivalent to JCU approval to conduct.
<b>Facility Manager</b>	JCU role responsible for housing and husbandry of animals at a JCU facility; reviews animal ethics applications in workflow.
<b>GECO</b>	JCU online ethics governance and compliance system — the system of record for AEC and HREC approvals at JCU.
<b>Internal Collaborator</b>	A collaborator (JCU or non-JCU) who needs access to view or contribute to the GECO application; added via the application form.
<b>MREC</b>	Manager, Research Ethics and Compliance.
<b>NC</b>	Non-compliance — a deviation from the approved protocol, the Code, legislation, or institutional policy.

Term	Definition
<b>PAM</b>	Post-Approval Monitoring — systematic monitoring of approved projects.
<b>PI</b>	Principal Investigator. The person with ultimate responsibility for the oversight of the project.
<b>RCA</b>	Root Cause Analysis — structured investigation of the underlying cause(s) of a non-compliance.
<b>SOP</b>	Standard Operating Procedure. JCU has over 200 approved SOPs available in GECO; SOPs must be reviewed every 3 years to remain approved.
<b>SSO</b>	Single Sign-On. The default JCU login route for GECO.
<b>UAE</b>	Unexpected Adverse Event — unintended and unanticipated outcome of an approved procedure that causes greater welfare impact than was anticipated.

## Where to Get Help

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If you are stuck in GECO, or unsure whether an activity is covered by your approval, the JCU Animal Ethics Team is the first point of contact. The AWCO is your first point of contact for welfare-related questions, non-compliance reports, and post-approval monitoring.

### Ethics Office

Email: [ethics@jcu.edu.au](mailto:ethics@jcu.edu.au)

Web: <https://www.jcu.edu.au/research-and-innovation-services/ethics-and-integrity>

### Animal Welfare and Compliance Officer (AWCO)

Contact via the Ethics Office for animal welfare, UAE assessment, non-compliance self-reports, and post-approval monitoring matters.

Email: [steven.monsalvequintero@jcu.edu.au](mailto:steven.monsalvequintero@jcu.edu.au)

### JCU Singapore (animal ethics)

Email: [researchsupport-singapore@jcu.edu.au](mailto:researchsupport-singapore@jcu.edu.au)

### GECO knowledge base

Step-by-step articles for each GECO workflow are also available in ServiceNow under the Research category, indexed by KB number. Search for terms such as "GECO", "ethics", "amendment", or "animal use report" to locate the current article.

#### **If in doubt, ask before you act.**

The Ethics Office and the AWCO would rather receive ten precautionary enquiries than one post-hoc non-compliance report. A short email to [ethics@jcu.edu.au](mailto:ethics@jcu.edu.au) is always the right answer if you are unsure whether your activity is within approval.