



Australian Amphibian and Reptile Genomics Initiative: Dealing with Conflict of Interest

- This document provides guidance on how to deal with conflict of interest from working group members in the assessment of proposals and selection of projects submitted to the AusARG initiative programs.
 - Please contact the Project Manager: Sophie Mazard - smazard@bioplatforms.com
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Context

The Australian Amphibians and Reptiles Genomics initiative (AusARG) is a national collaborative project that will facilitate research using genomics approaches towards a more thorough understanding of evolution and conservation of Australia's unique native Amphibians and Reptiles that are now under threat, through climate, disease or habitat modification.

To ensure proper management of the initiative a structure of executive streams have been established as detailed below.

- Steering Committee
- Working groups
 - Comparative Genomics and Evolution
 - Phylogenomics
 - Conservation and Taxonomy
- Expert panel
 - Bioinformatics (reference genomes)

The working groups are designed to bring together individuals possessing knowledge of the relevant functional areas as well as expertise in disciplines and will act either individually or collectively to undertake assigned tasks and activities alongside an indicated timeframe of completion for deliverables, in order to achieve the project's objectives. Each of the groups will engage in broad consultation of the consortium and provide informed recommendations to the Steering Committee. The roles and responsibilities of members of the working groups is defined in the working group Terms of Reference drawn at the establishment of the group.

Conflict of interest – roles and responsibilities of governance groups members

- The working groups provide expert advice to the Australian Amphibians and Reptiles Genomics Initiative consortium. The working group ensures the achievement of program objectives towards their related activities by providing informed recommendations on priorities, selection processes and workflows. Members of the working group are expected to act in an impartial manner, representing the interest of the consortium above organisational interest.
- Any conflict of interests (CoI) in the discussions and assessments conducted by the group from any of the members must be declared to the other members at the start of the discussion or as soon as identified. These CoIs will be noted in the Minutes of the working group meeting.
- Decisions and voting: a working group meeting must have at least 3 committee members for a decision

to be made. If the decision pertains to a specific collaborator's activities, then the representative member for this activity must be part of this quorum. For major decisions where members are absent, the decision needs to be communicated to the absent members through electronic means following the meeting for their check and agreement for full ratification.

Conflict of interest – guidelines on assessments, recommendation and establishment of collaborations

The working groups consist of expert that are actively involved on the topic of each programs, thus CoIs will potentially arise frequently due to the nature of the initiative. As detailed in the previous section, any existing CoI must be declared as soon as identified. To ensure a transparent and adequate assessment and selection of activities for support, all activities and projects will include and/or adhere to the following points:

- Documentation of activities: proposals, meetings, discussion and decisions must all be recorded and available for review
 - Minutes of working group meetings and recommendation from the expert working group members are provided to the Steering Committee
- Evidence of support and engagement: all proposals and thus selected activities, will have written evidence (such as letter, email) of support and external engagement to be provided with the submission.
- Decision on assessment: proponents of reviewed submission can participate to the discussion related to that proposal, however, they will not vote on the final decision by the working group. In the event a proposal presents CoI from a large proportion of the working group, assessment from available members without CoI must be obtained either in person during the meeting or through electronic means. As stated in the ToR at least 3 members must vote for a decision to be made.
- Inclusivity: every supported activity will ensure the creation of a dataset as a resource that can be broadly used and reused, as per the intent of the initiative, with:
 - Tissues and samples lodged into archiving collection
 - Descriptive metadata recorded and made publicly available
 - Generated genomic data made publicly available within one year of creation
- Inclusivity: request for partnerships and opportunities for support as part of the initiative will be promoted broadly within and outside of the consortium membership, to the best of the consortium's ability, including but not limited to:
 - Websites (Initiative and Bioplatforms Australia)
 - Mailing lists
 - Social media channels (e.g. Twitter, LinkedIn)
- Inclusivity: in the event a researcher or end-user is interested in the topic of any proposal selected for support, inclusion and extension of the initial collaborator team will be actively encouraged. If this new collaboration involves request of additional support, an addendum to the original project will be put forward to the working group for review.