



## **Australian Canine Eye Scheme (ACES)**

### **RULES AND PROCEDURES**

**1 January 2008**

*A national system of examination and reporting of abnormal eye conditions (both inherited and non-inherited) in all dog breeds, carried out Australia-wide by registered veterinary eye specialists to standards set by the Ophthalmology Chapter of the Australian College of Veterinary Scientists.*

*The Australian Canine Eye Scheme is administered by the Australian Veterinary Association to strict certification and quality assurance standards, and is endorsed by the Australian National Kennel Council on behalf of Canine Controls and affiliated breed clubs in each Australian State or Territory.*

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# I Introduction and Mission Statement

The **AVA-ANKC Australian Canine Eye Scheme** (hereinafter referred to as 'ACES') is a service provided throughout Australia by registered veterinary eye specialists who are also members of the Australian Veterinary Association. The aim of the scheme is to provide a means by which purebred dogs in any registered breed may be assessed for defects that affect the normal function of the eye or that may threaten vision. Many of these defects are known to be inherited, others are suspected to be so or at least to demonstrate evidence of breed predisposition.

The **purpose** of a national eye certification system is twofold. Firstly and more importantly, it permits the recording of abnormalities of the canine eye in a standardised manner, allowing the meaningful comparison of lesions and incidence figures breed by breed, with data from overseas countries where eye conditions are similarly monitored. Secondly, the results from annual certification provide an invaluable guide for breeders and breed clubs seeking to reduce the incidence of inherited eye defects. Individual participation in the AVA-ANKC Australian Canine Eye Scheme is entirely voluntary.

The **Australian Veterinary Association** oversees the operation of ACES to ensure that (1) standard procedures are followed in the technical aspects of the eye examination; (2) breed-specific data is handled responsibly with owner confidentiality duly protected; (3) all aspects of the certification and reporting process can be assessed and audited with reference to AVA's Quality Assurance guidelines.

The **Australian National Kennel Council** recognises ACES as the only eye certification system authorised to lodge individual results with the ANKC's inherited diseases database, from which breed-specific data may be shared with similar eye certification schemes overseas. The ANKC requires an assurance that eye testing standards will be applied uniformly and that ACES Panellists can provide a regular assessment service at central locations in each State and Territory, on a continuing basis.

ACES certificates will be issued by registered veterinary eye specialists who have agreed to participate in an AVA-supervised national certification scheme. AVA will publicise the names of participating examining panellists in the current **ACES Information for Owners** document, posted on the AVA website. The examining panellists will elect from among their number annually, a three-member Eye Scheme Standing Committee (ESSC). The composition of the ESSC is subject to confirmation by the AVA Board, together with a separate nomination for the position of ACES Chief Panellist.

The Chief Panellist will be the 'public face' of the Eye Scheme for the duration of his/her appointed term. He or she will be responsible for keeping AVA and ANKC informed on significant issues, reporting annual incidence figures breed by breed, communicating with the Canine Control Councils in each State and the ANKC's National Breed Councils on any changes in policy, and finally working with the AVA Veterinary Director to ensure that the day-to-day operation of ACES complies with AVA's Quality Assurance guidelines and also endeavours to satisfy the ANKC's stated expectations and endorsement conditions.

The principal task of the Eye Scheme Standing Committee (ESSC) will be to carry out regular reviews of the incidence of reported eye defects (co-opting from the examining panel where necessary) before it reports to the ACES Chief Panellist on the certifiable eye defects present in each registered breed, with recommendations for additions, deletions or changes to the current 'affected/unaffected' criteria.

The AVA-ANKC Australian Canine Eye Scheme has set itself the following Mission Statement:

***ACES provides a coordinated assessment and reporting system in purebred dogs of registered breeds, for defects that affect normal eye function or may threaten vision. Available on a voluntary basis Australia wide, regular eye certification offers a useful surveillance mechanism for breeders and breed clubs seeking to reduce the incidence of inherited eye defects.***

## **II Detailed Responsibilities**

### **(a) The Australian Veterinary Association**

As official administrator of the service, AVA will oversee the professional aspects of eye testing carried out under the ACES national framework. While it will have no direct involvement in the day-to-day conduct of eye examinations, AVA will prescribe the standard testing procedure for both adult dogs and litters, also minimum requirements for examination facilities to be provided and diagnostic equipment to be used. These expectations will be in line with recommendations of the International Society of Veterinary Ophthalmology that have been adopted by the ACVSc Ophthalmology Chapter.

AVA will confirm appointments to the ACES Examining Panel, Eye Scheme Standing Committee and the position of ACES Chief Panellist, and will set out the responsibilities of each in a manner designed to ensure that ACES operates within the Quality Assurance framework applied by AVA to each of the animal health – related schemes it administers.

These responsibilities are set out in:

- ACES Information for Panellists
- ACES Diagnostic Criteria Supplement
- this document

No veterinarian will be authorised to issue an ACES certificate unless he or she is a current appointee to the ACES Examining Panel. Appointed ACES Panellists may issue eye certificates only on original serially numbered examination forms and must follow the directions for copy distribution, including the return of voided or defaced certificates to AVA. No eye test result issued by a veterinarian who is not a current appointee to the ACES Examining Panel may be represented as being an 'ACES eye exam' or in any way equivalent to an AVA-ANKC Australian Canine Eye Scheme certificate.

AVA will provide the necessary administrative services, including:

- printing and distribution of ACES certificate books and information leaflets,
- maintaining up-to-date information on the AVA's website,
- communicating with the examining panellists on relevant issues,
- receiving completed certificates for data recording and copying to ANKC, and
- responding to public, breeder and breed club enquiries.

AVA's administration officer will:

- liaise with the ACES Chief Panellist whenever necessary, to ensure that any appeal against the results of an issued certificate is dealt with according to set procedures.
- maintain a basic spreadsheet record of all Schedule 1 conditions in the top twenty breeds.

The AVA Guidelines for Quality Assurance and Accreditation Schemes provide the structure by which the ACES Chief Panellist will be expected to report on the continuing operation of the scheme. AVA will require an ACES Chief Panellist's annual report to be prepared prior to its traditional audit date (together with a summarised breakdown of reported eye conditions) and may publish that report with its annual reports. A copy of the ACES Chief Panellist's annual report will be provided to the Australian National Kennel Council and all State Canine Control Councils.

In the event that the number of Panellists becomes insufficient to service the needs of ACES, the AVA Board will approach the ACVSc Ophthalmology Chapter for assistance in addressing the situation.

## **(b) The Australian National Kennel Council**

The **Australian National Kennel Council** represents all eight affiliated State and Territory Canine Control Councils and addresses matters of national significance to the purebred canine industry.

The ANKC endorses ACES as the only eye certification system authorised to lodge individual results with the ANKC's inherited diseases database. Results from individual dogs will be made available to the ANKC's inherited diseases database, all such records remaining current for one year or until such time as annual re-assessment in that breed is no longer considered necessary. Access to these data will be determined in the context of each breed's decision on 'Open Register' or 'Closed Register' listing. Breed-specific data will be produced in a form able to be shared with similar eye schemes overseas.

ANKC's endorsement of ACES is conditional on an annual review being carried out, as a means of ensuring that key features of the scheme (e.g. permanent identification, set examination procedures, access to breed-specific data and compliance with AVA Quality Assurance guidelines) are maintained.

ANKC supports the National Breed Councils in their efforts to co-ordinate the activities of breed clubs in each State, as well as seeking consensus on matters that are in the breed's national interest. Health surveillance (including the study of inherited disease) has become a priority, with significant genetic threats monitored by the ANKC's Canine Health Committee, which also awards research grants.

ANKC-affiliated National Breed Councils have an opportunity for input into the assessment standards pertaining to their breed. On advice from the ESSC, the Chief Panellist reports annually on all the known conditions in each breed and confirms the 'affected/unaffected' standard currently in force. An NBC may make a case to the ESSC either to remove or to re-schedule a particular defect.

In any review of the assessment standard for an eye condition initiated by a National Breed Council, copied to ANKC and forwarded to the ACES Chief Panellist, the decision of the Chief Panellist is final and under normal circumstances would not become eligible for further reconsideration by the Chief Panellist and ESSC for at least three years.

ANKC is committed to the introduction of data management platforms that can store information on a wide range of canine inherited diseases in ways that will allow the mapping of changing trends within a breed, and also meaningful comparison between international populations of the same breed. This is an important feature, especially among emerging popular breeds or those restricted at the outset by having too narrow a genetic base, and should be seen as one of the principal reasons for carrying out regular health surveillance and certification across the general breeding population.

If at any time the ANKC, its national Canine Health Committee or any of the State Canine Control Councils believes that the numbers of Panellists has become insufficient to service the needs of ACES, a request may be made to the AVA Board to try to remedy the situation.

## **(c) The ACES Examining Panel**

Registered veterinarians in each Australian State or Territory, who are eligible under the Rules, may be appointed to the ACES examining panel with renewals offered at the discretion of the AVA Board.

Eligibility to serve on the ACES Examining Panel will be restricted to veterinarians who are currently registered, who have undertaken at least two years of supervised post-graduate training in a formal teaching program recognised by the Australian Veterinary Boards Council through its standing committee the Advisory Committee on the Registration of Veterinary Specialists (ACRVS), as a pre-condition to registration as a **specialist in Ophthalmology** by the respective State Veterinary Board.

As part of that formal training, each examination candidate will have demonstrated competence with the full range of diagnostic equipment used to assess the canine eye, and will have carried out many hundreds of clinical assessments in all domestic species as well as laboratory and exotic animals under qualified

supervision, for inherited and non-inherited eye disease.

Only veterinarians registered as specialists in Australia may be appointed as ACES Panellists. Any additional regulation covering the terms of appointment, training and review courses or re-assessment of panellists will be determined by AVA in accordance with its own Quality Assurance guidelines.

ACES Panellists will provide appropriate facilities within their own practices and when agreeing to conduct eye examinations for a local breed club or field trial event at an outside venue, will insist on the AVA-prescribed minimum requirement of a **darkened room with a suitable examination table, adequate bench space for completing certificates and power outlets for diagnostic equipment.**

All appointments to the ACES Examining Panel will be subject to re-assessment on a regular basis. Panellists who do not keep themselves informed on changing standards within breeds or who do not carry out sufficient eye assessments annually to be confident of passing a re-assessment test, may exclude themselves voluntarily from re-appointment to the ACES Examining Panel.

**Note:** Full information on the duties of appointed ACES Panellists has been provided in the **ACES Information for Panellists** document, available in the AVA website for 'members only'.

#### **(d) The ACES Chief Panellist**

AVA will appoint a member of the ACES Examining Panel to the position of ACES Chief Panellist, to serve for a prescribed term. The ACES Chief Panellist will oversee the workings of the examining panel and the issuing of ACES Certificates, and will co-ordinate the complex delivery schedules of the Eye Scheme Standing Committee.

The ACES Chief Panellist will provide the sole interface between the eye scheme and its examining panellists on the one hand, and dog owners or breed clubs as users of the service, on the other. In addition to formal reporting responsibilities to both AVA and ANKC, it is expected that a large part of the Chief Panellist's workload will be generated by the various ANKC-affiliated National Breed Councils who will be seeking to clarify matters of policy and procedure in respect of their breed.

**Note:** Panellists will be able to access the current **ACES Information for Panellists** document in the AVA website, containing all relevant information on the conduct of the eye examination together with instructions on how to complete the ACES Certificate (incl. Schedule 1 & 2 conditions). Examining panellists should assist owners by explaining what they are looking for as evidence of a known eye condition (inherited or otherwise) but at all times will be expected to abide by the assessment criteria currently in force. Examining panellists should not be expected to comment on or debate the current assessment criteria; these matters should be directed through the National Breed Council to the ACES Chief Panellist.

The ACES Chief Panellist will ensure that examining panellists are kept fully informed on the operation of the scheme and the certifiable conditions in each breed, based on the ESSC's standing 'unaffected / affected' criteria published each year as the **ACES Diagnostic Criteria Supplement.**

The Chief Panellist will assist AVA administrative staff to ensure orderly handling of the Appeals procedure, as a means to review and adjudicate on any application to appeal an ACES Panellist's issued findings.

The Chief Panellist will report on the continuing operation of the scheme to the AVA Board, consistent with the structure outlined in the AVA Guidelines for Quality Assurance and Accreditation. The ACES Chief Panellist's annual report will be tabled at the first Board meeting thereafter, with a copy forwarded to the Australian National Kennel Council and all State Canine Control Councils. The form, and timing, of publication will be determined by the AVA Board.

The Chief Panellist, in consultation with the ESSC and the AVA, will prepare an annual budget for the operation of the scheme, including AVA administration and accreditation process and Chief Panellist and

ESSC activities. The Budget will provide the basis for annually setting the fee to be charged by AVA for the supply of ACES Certificate books to each of the examining panellists.

### **(e) The Eye Scheme Standing Committee (ESSC)**

The principal task of the ESSC will be to carry out regular reviews of the apparent incidence of reported eye defects and any new scientific studies. The ESSC will report to the ACES Chief Panellist on the certifiable eye defects present in each registered breed, providing the Chief Panellist with recommendations to reconfirm or to revise Schedules 1 & 2 by the review date of 1 January each year.

Any recommendations for changes to the Schedules must be reported by the ACES Chief Panellist to ANKC and each State Canine Control Council, for publication before the review date.

The ESSC will confer by telephone whenever necessary to review changing incidence patterns for recognised eye conditions and will meet in person once yearly, before the end of September.

### **(f) Fees charged for ACES Testing**

No standard national fee scale can be applied to ACES. Panellists are responsible for setting their own fees for ACES testing and should ensure that owners understand the fee structure. The only part of the fee that is uniform is that charged by AVA for production and distribution of certificates to ACES Panellists plus **administration and data processing** related to each ACES Certificate issued.

**Note:** Owners should enquire amongst the ACES Panellists listed in their State for details of the 'per dog' fees charged for both adults and litters of pups, and whether or not minimal consultation fees apply. Additional diagnostic tests (e.g. gonioscopy or electroretinography) that do not form part of the standard ACES eye examination will generally be charged for separately. Since all ACES forms are serially numbered with copies to be returned to AVA (completed or not), a defaced or voided ACES Certificate is likely to incur a minimal processing fee, that cannot be reclaimed from AVA.

## **III MECHANISMS FOR RECORDING INDIVIDUAL BREED RESULTS**

The ACES Eye Examination Certificate will record the examining panellist's findings from a detailed assessment of both eyes, for any ANKC registered dog or bitch for which identification details have been confirmed by microchip reader or a clearly legible tattoo number.

The following documents must be sighted by the examining panellist at the time of the examination:

- i) The **original registration certificate** issued by a State Canine Control or the registering authority in the country of origin, endorsed with a record of permanent identification (microchip or tattoo).
- ii) Any **change of ownership documentation** or original export certificate from the country of origin.
- iii) The **most recent eye certificate** issued in Australia or overseas.
- iv) A formal transcript of any **genetic test results for a relevant eye condition** issued by a recognised testing laboratory, that the owner wishes to see included in the ANKC Inherited Diseases database.

If any of these documents are held but not presented, then the examination may proceed but the results will not be made available (even verbally) and the certificate will not be issued until the missing documents have been sighted by the ACES Panellist. Unless individual registration certificates are to hand, ACES Panellists carrying out a Litter Assessment will need to see a copy of the **Application to Register the Litter**, including registration details for the sire and dam and a signed service certificate.

Further information on the conduct of the eye examination, completion of the ACES examination form and the required distribution of signed certificate copies can be found in the **ACES Information for Owners**

document, as posted on the AVA website. In addition the **ACES Information for Panellists** (available on AVA website for 'members only') outlines minimum standards for the examination facility and equipment, procedures for conducting the eye examination and some useful reminders on filling in both the ACES Certificates.

ACES Panellists will be supplied with the current **Schedule 1 and 2 lists** and a **Litter Screening Checklist** along with an updated copy of the **ACES Diagnostic Criteria Supplement**, providing an exhaustive summary of current scientific knowledge in all congenital and inherited canine eye disease.

## IV APPEALS PROCEDURE

This is a complex process that needed to be included in the ACES scheme design in the interests of fairness and with due recourse made available to any disgruntled owner, irrespective of distance.

The **ACES Information for Owners** provides a comprehensive outline of the Appeals Procedure.

## V REPORTING OF BREED-SPECIFIC EYE DISEASE DATA

The Australian National Kennel Council is committed to the on-going monitoring of canine health. This includes the recognition of conditions affecting various body systems that have been shown to be inherited; the disease features, incidence pattern and inheritance mode having been well documented in published scientific studies. Many established canine inherited diseases affect more than one breed and while the inheritance mode for most of these is identical, there are a few conditions (notably PRA as a cause of gradual vision loss) in which the disease features are known to follow different patterns.

The ANKC's national registration database will have the ability to append the inherited disease status of a particular animal in any breed, to that dog's ANKC registration record. Any such notation must carry with it a **high standard of test verification**, which is why surveillance schemes such as the Australian Canine Eye Scheme need to operate in a highly specified manner, subject to procedural and technical audits of the scheme's ability to deliver results that are in accord with ANKC's own goals.

Breeders expect to gain every possible benefit from the data on eye abnormalities collected by ACES, so any data recording system needs to be not only objective and fair but also to produce information that breeders can apply to their breeding programs with confidence. Overseas schemes vary in the way they issue eye reports, with some releasing results for publication automatically (Open Register), while others issue certificates that remain confidential to the owner (Closed Register). Most breeds well established in this country are not threatened by major eye disease and should have no reason to operate under anything other than an Open Register, but Australia's large distances and a relatively thinly spread dog population would make it particularly hard for breeds with only a narrow genetic base to become established, unless they are given some freedom to work within the existing gene pool.

For the purposes of recording ACES results in a way that would provide most breed clubs and national breed councils with the means to work towards a reliable selection base over time, ANKC has been encouraged to allow breed clubs and NBC's to nominate either **Open or Closed Register** status, as an indication of how they want to see the results from all eye exams in their breed made available. In theory the same principle should apply for hips, elbows or any other health surveillance scheme, but the decision on how far to take an Open Register nomination must rest with the breeders themselves.

By seeking to be placed on an ANKC-approved **Open Register** for inherited disease surveillance, the National Breed Council for that breed is making a clear statement on behalf of all active breeders and club members. They are saying that optimum health standards are important to them, and that while all disease testing is undertaken voluntarily, adherence to a strict policy of disease surveillance is a prerequisite for any serious breeding program. They realise that by offering all puppy buyers such a transparent commitment to quality assurance, they are expressing a higher

degree of confidence in the general health of *any puppy* purchased from a responsible breeder and breed club member.

The aim of a two-tier system is to allow developing breeds to assemble data in an ANKC-approved **Closed Register** while they gain a foothold in public acceptance, then use the certification provided by ACES or other surveillance schemes (along with genetic testing and carefully selected imports) to work their way up to a situation where they can apply for recognition as an Open Register breed.

## VI REGISTRATION PROVISIONS

As a voluntary national system of eye certification, ACES aims to offer as much flexibility and access as possible, to breeders and owners in all parts of the country. It is the intention of AVA that ACES Panellists should be able to issue ACES Certificates in any State or Territory of Australia.

Providing a qualified certification service is considered **an act of veterinary science** under all State and Territory jurisdictions, which means that a panellist operating outside the State of primary residence must also satisfy the current registration requirements in the State or Territory where ACES Certificates are being offered. Until such time as the Veterinary Boards agree on a standard national registration system, ACES Panellists operating in another State will need to be registered there as well.

## VII PROFESSIONAL LIABILITY PROVISIONS

- 1) Examinations are conducted by specialist registered veterinarians who have been appointed by AVA Board to the ACES examining panel, on the understanding that each member has made adequate provision against his or her professional liability. In no event shall AVA be liable for any incidental or consequential damages arising from any negligent acts or omissions arising out of the examination.
- 2) AVA does not
  - make any warranties or representations regarding the quality, accuracy, completeness or authenticity of the information provided on the ACES Eye Examination Certificate.
  - accept liability for any loss arising out of the use of said information and / or the reliance placed on it, by the owner or any other party.
- 3) The ACES Examining Panel employs the services of qualified veterinary eye specialists who are not only extensively trained in the recognition of normal and abnormal eye conditions, they are also subject to regular reviews of their individual assessment criteria through periodic re-assessment.

Subject to the normal veterinary certification standards required under the various State Acts, ACES Panellists do not accept individual or collective liability for any consequential loss arising out of the use of information provided on an ACES Certificate, or the reliance placed upon it by the owner or any other party.

## VIII QUALITY ASSURANCE AND AUDIT

A Quality Assurance (QA) process has been designed by the Ophthalmology Chapter of the ACVSc and will form part of the audit of the AVA-ANKC Australian Canine Eye Scheme, to be implemented by AVA on an annual basis as a requirement of the AVA Guidelines for Accreditation Schemes.