What do I need to do to get approval for off-campus fieldwork (non-human) under the MQ COVIDSafe Plan for Research?

What is considered off-campus non-human research fieldwork?

- Research that is off-campus at university or non-university facilities or sites that do not involve human subjects but may involve multiple participants (e.g., staff, HDR students). Fieldwork can be environmental, geological, biological, archaeological etc.

What do I need to know before planning?

- Contact your Department Fieldwork Manager to discuss your fieldwork plans well in advance.
- If you are interacting in the field with vulnerable people (e.g. Indigenous or elderly) or non-MQ participants (e.g. industry partners), additional levels of risk assessment may be needed. Your Department Fieldwork Manager will advise.
- All applications are to be submitted at least 2 weeks before within-NSW fieldwork, and up to 4 weeks before interstate fieldwork. Applications without due notice will be delayed.
- Submission of documents does not mean approval.
- You must await notification of approval before making any arrangements to travel or conduct fieldwork.
- If approvals are not in place, you cannot go to the field.
- Field Friendly and the Absence on Duty (AoD) systems act as the record keeping hub. All documents need to be attached in those systems.

What is the process I need to follow?

1) Researcher/HDR student to complete a Field Friendly Trip plan as normal with a completed COVIDSafe Phase 2/3 Fieldwork Request template (available from your Department Fieldwork Manager) added to the ‘Attachments’ section. This template includes a Detailed COVIDSafe travel plan, COVIDSafe emergency response plan and trip-leader signoff.
2) The Department Fieldwork Manager and Head of Department will consider your application. Review and make any amendments as requested by them in Field Friendly and resubmit.
3) Once Department Fieldwork Manager and Head of Department are satisfied with the application, they will send it to the Faculty to obtain relevant approvals (to fse.execdean@mq.edu.au). Note to researchers and HDR students – do not send applications direct to Faculty. Your Department Fieldwork Manager is your contact.
4) Researcher/HDR student to complete an Absence on Duty (AoD) application as normal.
5) Once approval is obtained from the relevant approver (see below), your Department Fieldwork Manager will be notified and will approve within Field Friendly. You will receive an email notification.
6) Absence on Duty (AoD) approval will follow and you will receive email notification of approval.
7) Only with these two approvals in place can fieldwork be considered approved.

What Phase are we in and what approvals are needed?

For fieldwork within NSW
- Use Phase 2 of the fieldwork (non-human) COVIDSafe Plan for Research (copied below).
- Approval required by the Associate Dean Research/Executive Dean, or depending on the trip, approval from the Vice-Chancellor may be needed.
- Researcher/HDR student to await email notification within both Field Friendly and the AoD system.

For interstate fieldwork
- Use Phase 3 of the fieldwork (non-human) COVIDSafe Plan for Research (copied below).
- Approval required by the Vice-Chancellor. Currently, interstate research fieldwork (non-human) is not being approved except in exceptional circumstances.
- Researcher/HDR student to await email notification within both Field Friendly and the AoD system.

For international fieldwork
- International travel is currently prohibited and is not being approved.
Phase 2 - fieldwork is limited to routine, within NSW fieldwork

-Capacity
- This plan covers both Terrestrial and Marine fieldwork.
- Travel is limited to study sites you will visit.
- The number of participants should be minimised with consideration as to how interactions may be completed with physical distancing or staggered over different periods of time. NSW Health guidelines for outdoor and indoor group sizes should be used as the guide.
- As per ‘normal’ WH&S policy two people are required for fieldwork. Travel to occur with a maximum of 2 people in one large vehicle. As a guideline, a large vehicle is at least the size of a Toyota Hilux. Consult with fieldwork managers if in doubt. Use social distancing as much as possible (e.g., 1 passenger in backseat).
- If there are more than two workers in the field party, source additional vehicles.
- Managers may consider the use of large hire cars or personal vehicles for travel in line with existing approval processes. Public transport and air travel are to be avoided.
- Department Fieldwork Managers and fieldwork leaders should manage access to fieldwork by non Macquarie personnel (e.g., contractors, volunteers, industry partners, collaborators) strictly adhering to physical distancing.
- Fieldwork to be abandoned if any member of the field party experiences symptoms of COVID-19. Field party to be tested for COVID-19.
- A detailed COVIDSafe fieldwork travel plan must be provided that outlines stopping locations and how social distancing will be maintained. This includes passengers and journey stops (e.g., fuel stops, meal breaks, toilet breaks). For trips longer than 2 hours one-way, all drivers are to take a break after 2 hours as per ‘normal’ practice. This travel plan is to be submitted as an additional document in Field Friendly.
- An COVIDSafe emergency response plan should be established in case of incident (e.g., a member of the field party develops COVID symptoms, a cluster is identified in the field area, an area goes into lockdown, travel restrictions change). This is to be submitted as an additional document in Field Friendly. This document should include as a minimum: The distance to the nearest medical facility that could support a team member with COVID symptoms. The mode of transportation of the person to the nearest medical facility. How would the team reduce the risk of transmission to other team members? How will the field trip team respond if Government guidelines and restrictions change or an area is placed in lockdown? If there are no nearby medical facilities, what other emergency evacuation plans will be activated?

-Access
- Minimise the number of days in the field to that which is essential and necessary to complete fieldwork.
- Avoid travel to communities and zones deemed high risk due to high numbers / clusters of COVID-19 cases refer to zone maps on NSW Health website. Where practical avoid travel between high and low risk zones. This will be checked against the COVIDSafe fieldwork travel plan prior to approval.
- Reduce interactions with the public. Where contact is required (e.g., to gain access to sites) either pre-arrange via electronic means or practice physical distancing.
- Field teams to be self-sufficient and self-cater. Where possible all meals to be bought from home to reduce contact with the public and public spaces.
- If an overnight trip is approved, limit the use of large turnover accommodation such as motels. Use one accommodation source rather than moving between towns and facilities. Camp on site or book self-catered accommodation. Separate rooms or tents for all trip members (e.g., avoid communal hostels, bunkhouses, bathrooms, kitchens).
- All COVID-19 restrictions guidelines and approvals carried on person at all times. This is in addition to Field Friendly trip pack with complete details of approved COVIDSafe work.
- All researchers should be recommended (but not required) to download and use the Australian Government's COVIDSafe App to assist with contact tracing if required.

-Hygiene
• Activities should comply with physical distancing, wherever possible.
• Do not share work equipment (e.g. tools, electronic equipment).
• All vehicles (e.g., cars and boats), and high-touch areas (inside and outside) must be cleaned and disinfected by the users before and after use, and regularly during fieldwork. Users will be supplied with a protocol for cleaning by the fieldwork manager.
• All field equipment must be cleaned and disinfected by the users before and after use (before leaving University, during fieldwork, upon return).
• Sufficient PPE, disinfectant and cleaning products should be made available before and after fieldwork, and carried and used regularly in the field.
• Rigorous personal hygiene practices must be implemented multiple times a day and particularly before and after any essential journey stops (e.g., meal and rest stops).
• Reduce interactions with the public. Where contact is required, e.g. when refuelling, extra precautions should be taken including: wearing disposable gloves while handling fuel pump and paying (gloves will be disposed of immediately after).
• Procedures for collection and drop-off of field equipment and field samples should be revised to ensure physical distancing and COVIDSafe practices in consultation with Faculty/Department Fieldwork Managers.
• Procedures and signage should be added in every University vehicle and field pack to remind staff to abandon fieldwork if they have any symptoms, to maintain hand and respiratory hygiene and to maintain physical distancing.
• Procedures and signage should be added in every field equipment store and vehicle, and place of collection and drop-off about equipment cleaning protocols, use of PPE and disposal of cleaning waste.

-Training
• Department and/or Faculty Fieldwork Managers should develop and provide COVIDSafe-consistent training to all researchers (staff and postgraduates) on the use of PPE and cleaning of field vehicles and equipment.
• Department and/or Faculty Fieldwork Managers should develop and provide COVIDSafe-consistent training/induction protocols. New researchers should receive this training with particular emphasis on abandoning fieldwork if sick, practising hand and respiratory hygiene, maintaining physical distancing, and extra restrictions and protocols for fieldwork. Previously trained/inducted researchers should receive an update emphasising abandoning fieldwork if sick, practising hand and respiratory hygiene, maintaining physical distancing, and extra restrictions and protocols for fieldwork.
• For fieldwork involving Macquarie University vessels, the Safe Work Instruction ‘Managing COVID-19 on Macquarie Vessels’ must be strictly adhered to. This also covers the towing of vehicles and refuelling.

-Supervision
• Call-back schedules to be upon departure, then daily and upon return and noted in Field Friendly trip plan.
• Department Fieldwork Managers should arrange to undertake post-fieldwork debriefs with researchers about how the COVIDSafe fieldwork plan was conducted and to request feedback to support future developments.
• Departments should ensure adequate, expert supervision of research students in the field (e.g., a supervisor, another experienced postgraduate, an experienced collaborator).
Phase 3 - allows for interstate field work but is dependent upon the re-opening of State borders. Approval will follow Government and Macquarie University policies and restrictions on interstate travel.

**-Capacity**

- This plan covers both Terrestrial and Marine fieldwork.
- Interstate fieldwork is likely to include the following as a priority (in no particular order): high-value projects where not undertaking the work would jeopardise meeting project milestones and impede scientific progress, and/or result in work having to be restarted or abandoned; long-term field studies where the long-term record is jeopardised; experimental field studies that are already underway where data is required to complete datasets; studies that are funded by national (e.g., ARC) or industry grants where postponement has a financial, progress or contractual consequence; fieldwork that is crucial to a postgraduate thesis; projects with animal welfare consequences, fieldwork where timing is dictated by seasonal or other environmental conditions.
- Reconnaissance only trips are unlikely to be approved in the first instance, with exceptions for timing dictated by environmental conditions or where these trips are vital for making the case for more formal fieldwork, industry partnerships or grant applications.
- Travel is limited to study sites you will visit.
- As per 'normal' WH&S policy two people are required for fieldwork. However, the number of participants should be minimised with consideration as to how interactions may be completed with physical distancing or staggered over different periods of time. NSW Health guidelines for outdoor and indoor group sizes should be used as the guide.
- Travel by car is recommended if safe to do so. All long-distance travel must adhere to 'normal' fieldwork practices and approved within the detailed work plan in Field Friendly. If travelling by car, consider a maximum of 2 people in one large vehicle. As a guideline, a large vehicle is at least the size of a Toyota Hilux. Consult with fieldwork managers if in doubt. Use social distancing as much as possible (e.g., 1 passenger in backseat). If there are more than two workers in the field party, source additional vehicles. Managers may consider the use of large hire cars or personal vehicles for travel in line with existing approval processes.
- Travel by air must adhere to Government and airline policies. On-ground travel by large hire car is recommended (see previous guideline regarding number of passengers and size of vehicle). Avoid taxis and public transport unless adequate hygiene and physical distancing measures are in place.
- Department Fieldwork Managers and fieldwork leaders should manage access to fieldwork by non Macquarie personnel (e.g., contractors, volunteers, industry partners, collaborators) strictly adhering to physical distancing.
- Fieldwork to be abandoned if any member of the field party experiences symptoms of COVID-19. Field party to be tested for COVID-19.
- A detailed COVIDSafe fieldwork travel plan must be provided that outlines stopping locations and how social distancing will be maintained. This includes passengers and journey stops (e.g., fuel stops, meal breaks, toilet breaks). For trips longer than 2 hours one-way, all drivers are to take a break after 2 hours as per 'normal' practice. This travel plan is to be submitted as an additional document in Field Friendly.
- A COVIDSafe emergency response plan should be established in case of incident (e.g., a member of the field party develops COVID symptoms, a cluster is identified in the field area, an area goes into lockdown, travel restrictions change). This is to be submitted as an additional document in Field Friendly. This document should include as a minimum: The distance to the nearest medical facility that could support a team member with COVID symptoms. The mode of transportation of the person to the nearest medical facility. How would the team reduce the risk of transmission to other team members? How will the field trip team respond if Government guidelines and restrictions change or an area is placed in lockdown? If there are no nearby medical facilities, what other emergency evacuation plans will be activated?
- **Access**
  - As State borders reopen, access will need to adhere to respective Stage government guidelines (e.g., access paperwork, any quarantine requirements, travel restrictions etc.).
  - Field trip leader will need to demonstrate awareness of and adherence to interstate guidelines and restrictions in the COVIDSafe travel and work plan for fieldwork to be uploaded into Field Friendly.
  - Minimise the number of days in the field to that which is essential and necessary to complete fieldwork.
  - Avoid travel to communities and zones deemed high risk due to high numbers / clusters of COVID-19 cases refer to zone maps on NSW Health website. Where practical avoid travel between high and low risk zones. This will be checked against the COVIDSafe fieldwork travel plan prior to approval.
  - Reduce interactions with the public. Where contact is required (e.g., to gain access to sites) either pre-arrange via electronic means or practice physical distancing.
  - Field teams to be self-sufficient and self-cater. Where possible all meals to be bought from home to reduce contact with the public and public spaces.
  - If an overnight trip is approved. Limit the use of large turnover accommodation such as motels. Use one accommodation source rather than moving between towns and facilities. Camp on site or book self-catered accommodation. Separate rooms or tents for all trip members (e.g., avoid communal hostels, bunkhouses, bathrooms, kitchens).
  - All COVID-19 restrictions guidelines and approvals carried on person at all times. This is in addition to Field Friendly trip pack with complete details of approved COVIDSafe work.
  - All researchers should be recommended (but not required) to download and use the Australian Government’s COVIDSafe App to assist with contact tracing if required.

- **Hygiene**
  - Activities should comply with physical distancing, wherever possible.
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  - All field equipment must be cleaned and disinfected by the users before and after use (before leaving University, during fieldwork, upon return).
  - Sufficient PPE, disinfectant and cleaning products should be made available before and after fieldwork, and carried and used regularly in the field.
  - Rigorous personal hygiene practices must be implemented multiple times a day and particularly before and after any essential journey stops (e.g., meal and rest stops).
  - Reduce interactions with the public. Where contact is required, e.g. when refuelling, extra precautions should be taken including: wearing disposable gloves while handling fuel pump and paying (gloves will be disposed of immediately after).
  - If travelling by air, personal responsibility and vigilance is required with personal hygiene at airports and before, during and after flights. Consider wearing PPE (e.g., masks) if appropriate.
  - Procedures for collection and drop-off of field equipment and field samples should be revised to ensure physical distancing and COVIDSafe practices in consultation with Faculty/Department Fieldwork Managers.
  - Procedures and signage should be added in every University vehicle and field pack to remind staff to abandon fieldwork if they have any symptoms, to maintain hand and respiratory hygiene and to maintain physical distancing.
  - Procedures and signage should be added in every field equipment store and vehicle, and place of collection and drop-off about equipment cleaning protocols, use of PPE and disposal of cleaning waste.

- **Training**
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