

# Principles for Reporting Forensic Biology Evidence

## Biology Specialist Advisory Group

### PURPOSE

These Principles provide strategic general guidance to Forensic Science Providers in developing and applying policies and procedures in reporting forensic biology evidence. While this document has been prepared for reporting forensic biology DNA evidence, user discretion is advised as to whether it may provide guidance for any other forensic science disciplines. While these Principles promote cross-jurisdictional collaboration for continuous improvement in the communication of forensic biology evidence, there are inherent jurisdictional differences, including settled terminology, that experts should be alerted to and aware of when preparing their expert opinion reports.

### SCOPE

The Principles pertain to the reporting of forensic biology results. Additional concepts relevant to other aspects and steps in the forensic process, including method validation, evidence collection, analysis, and interpretation, are outside the scope of this document. The Principles acknowledge that different jurisdictional environments, including legislation, instrumentation, Information and Communications Technology (ICT) systems and client requirements, may result in variations in the appropriate reporting terminology and language used by Forensic Service Providers.

### DEFINITIONS

Authorised reporting officers with specialist knowledge and training prepare reports resulting from forensic biology processes, arising from the analysis of items collected for criminal investigations to inform decisions by police and Officers of the Court, including Judges, Coroners and Juries.

PRINCIPLES	EXAMPLES OF UNDERPINNING FORENSIC BIOLOGY PRACTICES
<b>QUALITY ASSURANCE</b>	<p>Report results according to the Forensic Service Provider's quality management system, compliant with relevant ISO standards.</p> <p>Apply independent technical and administrative reviews as required by the quality management system before releasing reports to customers.</p> <p>Standardise the reporting of results within the Forensic Service Provider and between jurisdictions, where possible.</p>
<b>SCIENTIFIC VALIDITY</b>	<p>Base reported opinions on sound scientific principles, using validated methods relevant to the case circumstances.</p> <p>Base reported opinions on observations of examinations, tests, empirical studies, assumptions, reported facts, and other information deemed appropriate and relevant by the authorised reporting officer.</p>
<b>WEIGHT OF EVIDENCE</b>	<p>Express in a likelihood ratio (LR) framework where appropriate, evaluating the relative probabilities of the evidence given two alternative propositions, which may include the use of a verbal equivalency scale.</p>

PRINCIPLES	EXAMPLES OF UNDERPINNING FORENSIC BIOLOGY PRACTICES
<b>TRANSPARENCY</b>	<p>Clearly state the assumptions underlying the opinion(s).</p> <p>Ensure the methodology used to derive the reported result is available to promote transparency and accountability.</p> <p>Provide all limitations, sensitivities, and specificities, if available, in reports or upon request.</p> <p>Provide any deviations from methods that have been relied upon that may impact the reliability of the methodology used to form the reported opinion.</p> <p>Disclose any known issues around the reliability of the methodology or technique used.</p> <p>Consider risks and the mitigation of risks associated with cognitive bias and evidence contamination.</p> <p>Provide information on quality issues that may impact the result of the reported sample.</p> <p>Provide information on unresolved differences in scientific views between authorised reporting officers.</p> <p>Record and share information (when required) about all personnel conducting analysis, including the qualifications, training, and experience, demonstrating relevant specialist knowledge.</p>
<b>COMMUNICATION</b>	<p>Endeavour to express opinions and scientific concepts using terminology that can be readily understood by the intended audience.</p> <p>Apply unambiguous language that reduces the risk of overstating, understating, misleading, or misrepresenting the evidence.</p> <p>Ensure that the opinions are not misconstrued as a statement of fact.</p> <p>Use appropriate terminology, taking into consideration the jurisdiction, relevant legislation and intended audience.</p>
<b>OBLIGATION</b>	<p>Comply with the obligations required by the stakeholder for reporting results, including jurisdictional Court practice directions, human rights legislation, and privacy legislation.</p> <p>Where an arrangement with a stakeholder requires an abbreviated or interim report, include an appropriate disclaimer about any inherent limitations of the information.</p> <p>Include information relevant to the result in the report, where possible, such as items examined, findings, and statistical interpretations. The report should indicate relevant information not included.</p> <p>Uphold standards of conduct with respect to impartiality, integrity, and independence to reduce risk of bias of association of the forensic expert.</p>
<b>INNOVATION</b>	<p>Review and revise the Forensic Science Provider's standardised reporting framework, considering new research findings, techniques, or other relevant factors, such as changes in legislation or court requirements.</p> <p>Support personnel to stay abreast of the developments in the discipline to ensure contemporary and high-quality reports.</p> <p>Engagement by representatives in cross-jurisdictional forums to foster a culture of knowledge sharing, identifying, and addressing critical issues and risks, and enhancing capabilities.</p>

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