873—4.2(86) Separate evidentiary hearing or consolidation of proceedings. In addition to applying the provision of Iowa rule of civil procedure 105, a person presiding over a contested case proceeding in a workers' compensation matter may conduct a separate evidentiary hearing for determination of any issue in the contested case proceeding which goes to the whole or any material part of the case. An order determining the issue presented shall be issued before a hearing is held on the remaining issues. The issue determined in the separate evidentiary hearing shall be precluded at the hearing of the remaining issues. If the order on the separate issue does not dispose of the whole case, it shall be deemed interlocutory for purposes of appeal.

When any contested case proceeding shall be filed prior to or subsequent to the filing of an arbitration or review-reopening proceeding and is of such a nature that it is an integral part of the arbitration or review-reopening proceeding, it shall be deemed merged with the arbitration or review-reopening proceeding. No appeal to the commissioner of a deputy commissioner's order in such a merged proceeding shall be had separately from the decision in arbitration or review-reopening unless appeal to the commissioner from the arbitration or review-reopening decision would not provide an adequate remedy.

Entitlement to denial or delay benefits provided in Iowa Code section 86.13 shall be pled, and if pled, discovery shall be limited to matters discoverable in the absence of such pleading unless it is bifurcated. The claimant may bifurcate the denial or delay issue by filing and serving a notice of bifurcation at any time before a case is assigned for hearing, in which case discovery on that issue may proceed only after the final decision of the agency on all other issues.

This rule is intended to implement Iowa Code sections 86.13, 86.18 and 86.24.