

**NHMRC COMMUNICATION
TO
ANIMAL ETHICS COMMITTEES**

FEBRUARY 2008

Dear AEC members

This NHMRC communication is intended to keep you informed about issues related to the care and use of animals for scientific (and teaching) purposes.

NHMRC – NEW GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

The NHMRC became a fully independent statutory agency within the Health and Ageing portfolio on 1 July 2006. This change brought with it an amended *National Health and Medical Research Act 1992* (the NHMRC Act) which defines the NHMRC as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), the Council and the Committees, and the staff of the NHMRC. 1 July also brought with it a new CEO, Professor Warwick Anderson and new members of Principal Committees.

The NHMRC Strategic Plan (2007 – 2009) can be obtained from the NHMRC website at <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/nh80syn.htm>

THE AUSTRALIAN CODE OF PRACTICE FOR THE CARE AND USE OF ANIMALS FOR SCIENTIFIC PURPOSES, 7th Edition, 2004

The *Australian code of practice for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes* (the Code) encompasses all aspects of the care and use of, or interaction with, animals for scientific purposes in medicine, biology, agriculture, veterinary and other animal sciences, industry and teaching. It includes their use in research, teaching, field trials, product testing, diagnosis, the production of biological products and environmental studies.

The Code provides general principles for the care and use of animals, specifies the responsibilities of investigators and institutions and details the terms of reference, membership and operation of AECs. It also provides guidelines for the humane conduct of scientific and teaching activities and for the acquisition of animals and their care, including their environmental needs.

Copies of the Code can be accessed from the NHMRC website at <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/ea16syn.htm>

The NHMRC, through the annual Statements of Compliance provided by AECs, assesses institutions that use animals for scientific purposes for compliance against the Code.

2007 STATEMENTS OF COMPLIANCE

The 2007 Statement of Compliance form is available on the NHMRC internet site. You can access this document at: <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/ethics/animal/issues/index.htm>

The completed form is required to be returned to the NHMRC by 31 March 2008.

AEC MEETINGS

A number of issues arose from the evaluation of the 2006 Statements of Compliance that the NHMRC would like to bring to the attention of AECs.

- Applications and renewals can only be approved at a quorate meeting, that is, where there is representation from each category (A, B, C and D) in the right proportion, at a **face to face** meeting.
- An email meeting of all members is not considered a quorate meeting and is not regarded as an acceptable alternative to a face-to-face meeting under the Code.
- The balance of memberships at meetings is also important. There should be at least one member from each category present and if there are more than four members, C plus D members should represent not less than one third of those present. (Sections 2.2.7, 2.2.10(ii) – (iii) 2.2.20 of the Code refer).
- A meeting with a member from a particular category absent is not a quorate meeting. Subsequent approval from an absent member(s) by correspondence or by phone or by email does not constitute a quorate meeting (Section 2.2.10 of the Code refers).
- In special circumstances, videoconferencing or teleconferencing into the meeting by a member may overcome what otherwise would have been a non-quorate meeting. (Section 2.2.10(iii) of the Code refers).
- Where consensus cannot be reached, section 2.2.22 of the Code allows for a **majority** decision to be made after discussion where consensus cannot be reached after reasonable effort to resolve differences.
- Notification of AEC approvals and quick turnaround are important. When assessing proposals, decisions are to be made as promptly as possible. (Section 2.2.21 of the Code refers).

GUIDELINES TO PROMOTE THE WELLBEING OF ANIMALS USED FOR SCIENTIFIC PURPOSES – PUBLISHING ARRANGEMENTS, 2007

The new *Guidelines to promote the wellbeing of animals used for scientific purposes: the assessment and alleviation of pain and distress in research animals* (the guidelines) have been endorsed and are being prepared for publication. The guidelines will replace the 1994 *Guidelines on minimising pain and distress* and are to be read in conjunction with the *Australian code of practice for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes* (the Code).

The guidelines have been developed to assist investigators and members of AECs to achieve the related goals of the Code. The guidelines advocate consideration of an animal's "whole of life" experiences and explain the potential confounding risk of unintended pain or distress. The guidelines promote the 3 R's (replacement, reduction and refinement) and provide strategies to minimise and manage pain and distress. A series of fact sheets is included to provide specific guidance for researchers.

The guidelines are in the final stages of preparation for publication and will be available early in 2008. They will be produced as a living document in a loose leaf binder format and be available on the NHMRC internet site. Hard copies will be provided to all AECs.

GUIDELINES ON MONOCLONAL ANTIBODY PRODUCTION, 2001

The 2001 *Guidelines for monoclonal antibody production* are currently being revised and will be forwarded to the NHMRC Council to seek support to proceed to public consultation.

AECs should follow the 2001 guidelines until the revised guidelines are finalised.

GUIDELINES FOR THE GENERATION, BREEDING, CARE AND USE OF GENETICALLY MODIFIED AND CLONED ANIMALS, 2006

The *Guidelines for the generation, breeding, care and use of genetically modified and cloned animals* were endorsed in December 2006. This publication was produced by the NHMRC in response to requests for assistance from Animal Ethics Committees and investigators who are involved in the genetic modification and cloning of animals for scientific purposes. The guidelines should be read in conjunction with the *Australian code of practice for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes*.

The guidelines set down standards for the welfare of genetically modified and cloned animals. In particular, they highlight the special ethical and welfare issues related to the creation and use of genetically modified and cloned animals.

Copies of the guidelines and future updates can be accessed from the NHMRC website at: <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/ea17syn.htm>

USE OF CARBON DIOXIDE AS A EUTHANASIA AGENT IN RODENTS

The NHMRC AWC is aware of the continuing controversy and uncertainties surrounding the use of carbon dioxide as an agent for euthanasia in animals and has been monitoring developments. Examples are the consensus meeting at UK's Newcastle University in February 2006, the June 2007 version of the American Veterinary Medicine Association's guidelines for euthanasia (www.avma.org/resources/euthanasia.pdf) and a paper present by Professor Paul Flecknell at the July 2007 conference of ANZCCART.

Professor Flecknell showed that rats euthanased in chambers "slow filled" with carbon dioxide display a quiet passage to unconsciousness and death, quieter than rats euthanased with isoflurane. In situations of "slow fill", where carbon dioxide replaces 10-20% of the atmosphere per minute, the aversiveness of carbon dioxide becomes irrelevant to euthanasia in rats. Professor Flecknell's findings are consistent with established knowledge about the physiology of carbon dioxide in warm-blooded animals. In addition, studies with people have shown that eye irritation from carbon dioxide is provoked at concentrations above that which causes anaesthesia and death. Accordingly, the AWC supports carbon dioxide as an acceptable euthanasia agent for rodents when it is used competently and species-specific variations are taken into account. Up-to-date information on the manner of use of carbon dioxide for euthanasia in laboratory animals is provided by the Office of Animal Care and Use of the US National Institutes of Health (<http://oacu.od.nih.gov/ARAC/EuthCO2.pdf>) and the June 2007 version of the American Veterinary Medicine Association's guidelines for euthanasia (www.avma.org/resources/euthanasia.pdf).

AUSTRALIAN CODE FOR THE RESPONSIBLE CONDUCT OF RESEARCH, 2007

The NHMRC, in partnership with the Australian Research Council and Universities Australia, and through extensive public consultation, has developed the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research* (the Code). The Code replaces the *Joint NHMRC/AVCC Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (1997).

The Code advocates and describes best practice in research for researchers and institutions, as well as setting out a framework for handling breaches of the Code. While the document is aimed at universities and researchers in the public sector, it can be applied by any organisation involved in conducting research.

The Code provides advice on how to manage research data and materials; how to publish and disseminate research findings (including proper attribution of authorship); obligations in peer review; how to collaborate across institutions; and how to manage conflicts of interest. The Code also provides guidance to institutions when establishing independent external inquiries to evaluate allegations of serious misconduct.

The Code is also intended to inform the public about the standards expected of Australian research institutes and individual researchers.

Copies of the Code and future updates can be accessed from the NHMRC website at <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/files/r39.pdf>

THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT OF A COMMON AEC APPLICATION FORM

The NHMRC is examining the feasibility of the development of a common AEC application form for multi centre research. Your cooperation in providing the NHMRC with an electronic copy of your AEC application form in RTF format would be appreciated. Please email this to: louise.hemsley@nhmrc.gov.au by 29 February 2008.

NHMRC CONTACT DETAILS

The NHMRC Australian Business Number (ABN), mailing address and telephone number are:

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If you would like to contact the NHMRC regarding any issue covered in this communication or any other issues related to the care and use of animals for scientific (and teaching) purposes, please contact:

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