

NAEAC POLICY: DEFINITION OF ‘SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY’

The membership requirements of every animal ethics committee (AEC), set up under the Animal Welfare Act 1999, include one member who must be a person appointed by the code holder on the nomination of a territorial authority or regional council. Section 101(9) further states that such person must not be in the employ of, or otherwise associated with, the code holder, or associated with the scientific community or an animal welfare agency.

Readers of *NAEAC News* and participants at NAEAC-sponsored workshops have asked us to clarify what is meant by the words ‘not associated with the scientific community.’

Use common sense approach

It is NAEAC’s view that a common sense approach be used on a case by case basis. The fundamental purpose of section 101 is to limit external members to persons who would be likely to assess research, testing and teaching projects from the perspective of a member of the public, a ‘lay’ person. However, some knowledge of science would not by necessity imply that the person was associated with the scientific community and would also clearly assist the appointee with understanding the complexities of research, testing and teaching project applications. The Act anticipates that the external member will be no more likely to have a scientific or an animal welfare perspective than any other member of the public.

Public perception important

From a public perception point of view it is vital, for the success and credibility of the AEC system under the Animal Welfare Act, that the AECs include persons who are seen to represent the public interest. With this in mind, a conservative interpretation of the meaning of ‘associated with the scientific community’ would reduce the risk of any public perception that the lay member of an AEC could be “biased.”

The overriding principle therefore would be that a lay member has no scientific, financial or philosophical bias, particularly if derived from present or past occupation that would lead to a public perception that he or she represents anything other than the general view of a member of the public on matters classified as research, testing or teaching.

As one NAEAC member put it in colloquial terms:

Lay persons should not receive dosh or regular tucker from the head shirang (and MAF ticket holder) of the outfit or even share a Friday evening grog with them. Neither should they belong to any other outfit that makes them one-eyed when it comes to looking at research and stuff. Preferably they should be gung ho into reading but not have a kip when the big words are tossed around. The MAF ticket holder can, of course, turn any joker down, toot sweet, who only wants a pozzie on the AEC in order to put the kibosh on the whole shooting match. Natch, the applicant doesn’t need to know Arthur from

Martha when it comes to science as long as their mates consider them a dinkum regular joker.

The wording of section 101 of the Animal Welfare Act 1999 is set out below.

101. Membership

- (1) Each Animal Ethics Committee is to consist of at least 4 members.
- (2) If the code holder is an organisation, the members of the Animal Ethics Committee must be appointed by the chief executive of the organisation or his or her nominee.
- (3) One member must be-
 - (a) The code holder; or
 - (b) If the code holder is an organisation, a senior member of the organisation appointed by the chief executive to be a member of the committee.
- (4) Any senior member of an organisation who is appointed under subsection (3)(b) must be a person who is capable of evaluating –
 - (a) Each proposal for a project; and
 - (b) The qualifications and skills of the proposer of a project; and
 - (c) The scientific value or the teaching value, as the case may require, of a project.
- (5) One member must be a veterinarian (not being a veterinarian who is an employee of, or is otherwise associated with, the code holder) appointed by the code holder on the nomination of the New Zealand Veterinary Association or a similar national body of veterinarians.
- (6) One member must be a person appointed by the code holder on the nomination of an approved organisation.
- (7) The person appointed under subsection (6) must not be –
 - (a) A person who is in the employ of, or is otherwise associated with, the code holder; or
 - (b) A person who is involved in the use of animals for research, testing or teaching.
- (8) One member must be a person appointed by the code holder on the nomination of a territorial authority or regional council.
- (9) The person appointed under subsection (8) must not be-
 - (a) A person who is in the employ of, or is otherwise associated with, the code holder; or

(b) A person who is associated with the scientific community or an animal welfare agency.

(10) The appointed members of each Animal Ethics Committee hold office for such terms and on such conditions as are specified in the code of ethical conduct.

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