

NOTES FOR ANZCCART OPENING 29 JUNE 2008
John R Martin, Chair NAEAC

Ladies and gentlemen, AEC members, friends from Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States and Singapore ...

It is an honour to be asked to open this ANZCCART conference. I welcome you all to what promises to be an exciting programme over the couple of days.

This conference in Auckland has special significance for me. Eleven years ago I was introduced into the world of animal welfare at the ANZCCART conference of 1997 held at Auckland University. At David Bayvel's invitation I gave a presentation on 'Societal consensus: how is it reached and changed?'

At the end of the conference I encountered another experience new to me. In company with the other participants I was ushered out the back door of the lecture theatre and the building while those opposed to the use of animals in research made their presence felt in the street outside the front door.

As a political scientist by discipline, the question of how a democratic, pluralist society copes with such conflicts of values has continued to fascinate me. Governance on the national and international stages challenges us with questions of immense ethical conflict.

At the less exalted, but no less important, level of the use of animals in RTT, as chair of first ANZCCART and now NAEAC, I have continued to grapple with this issue.

It is a truism to say that societal attitudes evolve. Over the past decade we have observed the events in the United Kingdom that led to the passage of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005; and the granting of injunction orders by the courts against protest actions. At the same time such august bodies as the Australian Law Reform Commission have identified 'animal welfare and rights' as one of three 'over the horizon' issues that

would occupy societies in the coming decades. As many of you will be aware, the Commission has devoted a complete issue of its journal to the topic.

Similarly in New Zealand we should note the emergence in educational institutions, such as the Centre for Human-Animal Studies at the University of Canterbury, of an interdisciplinary focus on animal welfare issues. And a number of universities are offering courses in animal law.

There is, as you all know, a range of positions taken by those who are opposed to the use of animals in RTT. One of the important judgements to be made from time to time is whether there is value in opening and maintaining a dialogue with some groups and individuals. ANZCCART has taken this route in inviting critics to conferences in the past.

Those who take issue with the use of animals in RTT express their opposition in different ways. Misinformation and some forms of protest do not contribute to good public policy. In a phrase attributed, I think, to Hillary Clinton, I find that most encounters with the media are devoted to 'neutralising negativity'.

Informed debate, on the other hand, can assist the promotion of high standards of animal welfare and the continued efforts to replace, reduce and refine the use of animals in RTT.

In NAEAC, and in collaboration with ANZCCART and other interested organisations, we have given high priority to considering strategies that will enable the case for animal use in RTT to be given a fair hearing, in the face of concerted protest campaigns. This is not to be portrayed as a 'war' against anything — a fair-minded balance is what all parties should be seeking.

But there are times when I detect a measure of criticism in some quarters of the role being played by NAEAC — a wish for us to be, in that rather over-worked word, more 'proactive'.

I take this opportunity to say that I see the role of NAEAC as principally to assure the minister and the New Zealand public of the integrity of the regulatory process enshrined in Part 6 of the Animal Welfare Act. That role is played out, of course, in the context of the science that is being undertaken, And NAEAC in its annual report and dealings with the media does not resile from laying out the gains to society that are the outcomes from that research.

The primary responsibility for making the case for the value of animal use rests, however, with the research community — individually and collectively — with the Royal Society and ANZCCART (and I note the strong support recently reaffirmed by the Royal Society in London). It lies with MORST, the universities and the CRIs. And with those who benefit from the research and testing — the health service, the pharmaceutical companies, the veterinary profession, and the farmers.

There are so many ‘good news’ stories to be told — and we will hear some at this conference. The assignment is to get them into the public domain.

I know very well the understandable reluctance of researchers or their host institutions to draw attention to the work that they are doing. I have talked with people whose families have been exposed to quite unacceptable action by protest groups. But unless the positive side of the equation is exposed the high ground is captured by those whose position, however sincerely held, is at best partial and at worst deliberately misleading.

As steps in this direction, I would personally like to see the research community revisit the topic of lay summaries proposed at the ANZCCART “Lifting the Veil” Christchurch conference. As an example of the kind of publicity that gains ground for the use of animals in RTT, I would instance the attention devoted to the work of recent recipients of the NAEAC Three Rs Award. The publication of Codes of Ethical Conduct would also be a step, in the right direction. NAEAC supports MAF in offering code holders the opportunity to publish their codes on the MAF website.

Like all other organisations in this day and age NAEAC carries out strategic planning. We devoted a day to this in November last year. Two themes came through strongly. The first was the need for not only NAEAC and the Ministry — but all in the RTT community — to keep abreast of the *developments in science and technology* that will pose new challenges to that system in the years ahead. Transgenics are an obvious area; and I look forward to tomorrow's opening session.

NAEAC has been active in reviewing scientific priorities for the promotion of the Three Rs and in reminding funding bodies of the importance of this area of science. While the networks among institutions are strong we believe there is a role for NAEAC to play in acting as a broker for the mutual exchange of ideas and information — and perceived problems in the application of the Three Rs.

The second strategic theme for NAEAC looking ahead is the *international dimension* to our work. Indeed the *several* dimensions. There are the frontiers of the science itself; the tightening welfare standards evolving in other jurisdictions; and the regulatory restrictions applied to our exports. It is on occasions such as this ANZCCART conference and its international counterparts, in the journals, and through the international networking of the scientific community that committees in Wellington rely for ensuring that to the extent possible that there are 'no surprises'. So we encourage you to raise issues with us, either directly or through your AEC.

I also want to say that the concept of international accreditation of laboratories has a particular attraction; and, in that context, we welcome among us from Hawaii, Dr Kathryn Bayne of the Association for the Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care International (AAALAC International)..

NAEAC commends ANZCART and the organisers of this conference in their focus on AECs. Whenever I am called upon to defend the integrity of the New Zealand regulatory system I am very conscious that I am speaking for the 35 AECs who are the 'sharp end'

of that process. As I meet AEC members around the country, I am so impressed by the thoroughness with which committees approach their work, their sense of responsibility and the commitment to a culture of care and the Three Rs.

NAEAC is exploring ways to develop the relationship between members and AECs and I look forward to seeing you (and your colleagues who are not here) at the AEC workshop later in the year.

In particular, I want to underline the importance of the contribution made by external members. Their participation is a crucial element in the integrity of our regulatory framework. We all owe them a special debt of gratitude; this is true public service. Incidentally, I have been surprised to learn that some members serve without monetary compensation. This is something to which the AECs concerned might wish to give consideration.

Finally, I thank the New Zealand committee of ANZCCART and Gill Sutherland for the work that has gone into the organisation of this conference.

We have a rich menu before us. I am sure that we will all leave with an enhanced knowledge and an elevated interest in the topics before us.