



## **Submission to NHMRC**

### ***Public consultation on proposed revision of the Australian Code of Practice for care and use of animals for scientific purposes (7<sup>th</sup> edition 2004)***

The Australian Academy of Science will encourage its Fellows to offer views on the details of the new draft document through our National Committees and through their specialist academic and professional bodies. The Academy wishes to comment on one issue only.

The regulation of research involving experiments on animals is always a delicate balance between the need to conduct experiments to advance knowledge of human and animal disease, and to improve treatment, and the desire of researchers and the community to ensure that experiments do not cause unnecessary or severe pain to animals. It is our belief that the Australian community accepts the need for animal research in the context of medical and veterinary research. The Academy notes that the Australian system was one of the first to offer professional regulation and oversight of animal experiments, and is regarded by many international researchers as a model system to be studied and copied by other countries. The present guidelines have served Australia well over many years, have been administered effectively by the NHMRC, and have allowed Australian scientists and doctors to participate in validating many medical and veterinary advances for safety before offering new treatments in the community.

However, in the context of a document which we generally support and agree with, one new proposal causes us great concern. It is possible to interpret the new draft guidelines as demanding that a veterinary surgeon is present when any surgical procedure, or anaesthetic, is used in any experiment. This would completely cripple medical and veterinary research in Australia. The great majority of animal experiments involve rats or mice. There are several tens of thousands of mouse and rat experiments each year, many in cancer research, that use an anaesthetic prior to a procedure (such as to insert or excise a small number of cells in the animal). The staff who conduct these experiments are highly skilled, and the Academy does not believe that having a veterinary surgeon in attendance would be feasible (in terms of numbers of individuals needed) or useful. We also note that every local animal ethics committee must have a veterinary surgeon as a member, and this person has the right to attend and intervene if they feel that local procedures or expertise

are not up to the requisite high standard. We suggest this proposal be removed from the regulations.

Professor Bob Williamson AO FAA FRS  
Secretary for Science Policy