

## ANZCCART to mark its 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

*Geoff Dandie, CEO, ANZCCART*

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This is the first edition of ANZCCART News for 2012 and so it would be remiss not to acknowledge that this year marks the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of ACCART, which subsequently grew into the trans-Tasman organization we now know as ANZCCART. In the 25 years since we were formed, a lot has changed when it comes to the welfare of animals used in research and teaching and a lot remains the same when it comes to the diversity of opinion and the desire of different groups and individuals to influence public opinion. For these reasons, we firmly believe that the role of ANZCCART is just as relevant and important today as it was 25 years ago.

As we look optimistically towards our future and the next 25 years for ANZCCART, it is important to remember the past and use it to ensure that we continue to pursue changes for the better and not fall behind the standards and expectations of the community at large. While we acknowledge the continuing need to use some animals in pursuit of goals in science, medicine and teaching, we also recognise the vital role the 3Rs have played in ensuring that we

continue to strive to replace the use of animals wherever it is possible and when this is not possible, to ensure that the numbers that are used are reduced, and also the potential impact any study may have on those animals.

In more recent years, ANZCCART has begun to publicly acknowledge the enormous contributions made by some individuals who have championed both ANZCCART and the welfare of animals used in research and teaching and this is something we will continue to do with pride. We have recognized both the contribution of individual members of Animal Ethics Committees with our AEC Member of the Year Award and we have acknowledged some of those who have helped to ensure that ANZCCART has continued to grow and maintain its important role and perspective in this area with Honorary Life Membership.

During the course of this year and in acknowledgement of the work done on behalf of ANZCCART during our 25 years of operation, we hope to bring you some articles that briefly outline the history of ANZCCART, our future priorities, and some areas we consider to be of vital importance during the next few years.

***Of mice and men -***  
**reflections on ANZCCART's role in**  
**the ethics of animal use**

*Mark Fisher, ANZCCART NZ*

John Steinbeck's 1937 novel set during the Depression tells of the friendship and compassion between men, one of whom, Lennie, a gentle giant, both adores and harms animals. To Steinbeck, the basic theme of all writing was to understand each other, and it is this understanding which leads to compassion.

The place of animals, such as mice, in science and teaching can be complex – their welfare is not only determined by what they experience, how they perform or whether they are treated according to their nature, but also by our beliefs, prejudices and expectations of their needs and of the benefits that we may accrue. The range of cultural, economic, spiritual, religious and other dimensions ensure that animal welfare is a 'wicked problem' – difficult to describe, complex, changing and subject to inconsistencies and considerable political debate. Wicked problems are not easily solved but at best managed and progressed with understanding and compassion. Identifying the issues, providing information and knowledge and involving people is the foundation of ethics, the systematic reflection of moral issues in the public sphere.

Acknowledging this social responsibility, ANZCCART provides a forum for different perspectives on the use of animals in research and teaching – its value is as a body external to institutions undertaking the work and one which provides a degree of collegiality. It is a place for bringing together challenging and even opposing views and progressing change. Although the difficulty of managing extremist disruptions is acknowledged, it is important that there is frank and open discussion of the real issues, criticisms and outspoken views. It is also a place to acknowledge the role of people contributing to advancing animal ethics and welfare without their necessary direct involvement in, or even support for, research and teaching.

Part of this forum is in providing balance in publicly articulating the benefits of animal use particularly in an atmosphere of extremist criticism failing to provide any context – public support often, although not always, requires understanding. Who should be responsible for this aspect – researchers and research institutions using animals, end-users such as health and farming groups, and teaching bodies? While there is a risk

that any initiatives will bring further expectations, it is important to commit to further explaining and engaging the issues in a more general and non-threatening way.

Another role for ANZCCART is in questioning the contemporary nature of ethics. How do we define humane? Are we using the right ethical theories? Can animal ethics committees truly engage in ethics or are they more akin to compliance bodies? Does uncritical acceptance of formal ethical theories detract or denigrate from our innate and nurtured or intuitive moral reflection? Philosophy-led ethics has a role in challenging beliefs but moral reflection is more complex and should be acknowledged. For example, the legitimate and necessary role that emotions and sympathy play in moral reflection and choice is frequently not acknowledged.

If this is an important role then should ANZCCART project a sound authoritative, trustworthy and credible public face, one that cares for all sides and facilitates answers to difficult questions? In contrast, for example, animal activist views appear much more engaging, at least on the internet. ANZCCART's efforts, whether through conferences, Fact Sheets, *ANZCCART News* or other initiatives, also have to engage and challenge the full range of people involved in research and teaching. They include researchers (the whole process is driven by science therefore any changes or leadership have to be through science), animal ethics committees (they reflect society's tacit support for research and teaching) and technicians and animal staff (with empathetic husbandry). A culture of care reflects the quality of these extraordinarily skilled individuals caring in different ways for both the animals involved and for the people who benefit from them.

Ethics is fundamentally a process of intelligent inquiry and action that, like other types of inquiry, originates in response to something troubling, determines the causes and consequences, and suggests remedies. Mice are the most commonly reported species of animal used in animal research and teaching, something which troubles some individuals. ANZCCART has an important responsibility to continue providing a forum for encouraging and challenging consideration of the way they are treated by facilitating understanding and compassion if society is not to succumb to the fate befalling Lennie.

*This article is based on discussions with a range of individuals in New Zealand universities, research institutions and organisations whom members of the ANZCCART (NZ) Board periodically visit. The Board is especially grateful to those who freely gave their time and ideas, and who have offered further support and resources.*

## Opinion

### **The Role of an AEC in 2012: An exercise in Compliance or an Ethical Review?**

*Geoff Dandie, CEO, ANZCCART*

Whenever questions come up about the role of the Animal Ethics Committee (AEC) and how it operates, one of the first and almost inevitable question seems to be: "Is the AEC undertaking a truly ethical review of each and every proposal it considers, or is it more focused on ensuring compliance with the rules (in Australia, these rules are largely defined by *The Australian Code of Practice for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes - 7<sup>th</sup> Edition*)?" This is a question that members of AECs may find themselves asking at times (particularly when debating difficult or contentious project applications), that members of the community may ask, that groups or individuals who oppose the scientific use of animals may ask, and most certainly a question that members of AEC Review Panels will ask as they examine the operations of any AEC. Coincidentally, it is also a question that seems to emerge from the previous article by Mark Fisher and I think this really highlights the importance of this as a question we need to think very seriously about.

In my various roles with ANZCCART, as a member of an AEC and also as a member of a number of AEC review panels, this is a question I have given some pretty serious thought to on more than one occasion and I have drawn my own conclusions. While everyone will have their own opinions and beliefs, and therefore judge my own opinions for what they are worth, I thought I might take this opportunity to share some of my thoughts and perhaps even a few conclusions, with a view to stimulating your own thinking about this important issue.

In my own personal opinion, this question of ethical debate or ensuring compliance is a very valid and important issue that every AEC member should have in the back of their mind when they read through the pile of applications, annual reports, and requests for modification of approvals and annual renewal applications they consider each year. It is also a question that Institutions and Animal Ethics Committees collectively should consider when it comes time for the annual review of the AEC and its operation, as well as the Terms of Reference that guide their deliberations.

Of course an equally, if not more valid question when it comes to the operation of an AEC might also be asked: "Are the issues of 'ethical review' and 'compliance' in this context really questions that can or even should be considered in isolation?"

If you want to set out a few definitions to help frame the arguments that might be raised in this discussion, the first to consider might be a definition of 'ethical review'. I suspect most would come up with something like "A formal process of examining proposals seeking to use animals for the purposes of research or teaching to ensure that those proposals conform to ethical standards." This in turn may lead to a need to define 'ethical standards' and this is not as easy as it sounds, because individuals will all have their own perceptions of what is or is not ethical and they may also be influenced by context. Within these boundaries, it may be possible to think along the lines of:- "Principles that when followed, promote values such as trust, good behaviour, fairness, and/or kindness." Interestingly, a quick search of the internet comes up with a definition that includes time – "Ethical standards can be described as the rules of acceptable conduct within a society at a given time. They are never universal and are always changing." ([http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What\\_is\\_the\\_definition\\_on\\_ethical\\_standards](http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What_is_the_definition_on_ethical_standards)). I really like this definition as it takes the idea of an ethical debate (particularly in the context of scientific animal use) and defines it as being dynamic, determined by current public attitudes and subject to geographical differences. All of which are absolutely true in this context as attitudes definitely do vary over time and in different parts of the World.

Perhaps the most commonly used description of the ethical review process as it applies to the use of animals in research or teaching in Australia and New Zealand is via a 'cost versus benefit' analysis, where the potential welfare costs to the animals must be weighed up against the benefits that might reasonably be expected to come from the work. It is important to emphasize here that those potential benefits might or might not be for humans, so this should not be generally included in the definition. I say this because of the substantial volume of research done in Australia that is more aimed at benefiting animal species and by this I refer not just to veterinary research, but also to a substantial proportion of the wildlife studies being conducted and even a significant proportion of aquaculture studies. The fact that this Cost versus Benefit analysis forms an appropriately sliding scale that can be used as the basis for the AEC decision-making process is vital. This standard allows an AEC to consider applications that may require animals to undergo quite invasive processes with a far higher

degree of caution and concern than they might use during their assessment of a simple observation style application, where the potential welfare implications for all animals are minimal. This approach is also entirely consistent with the 3Rs principles that guide both the Code and the AEC system, for refinements that reduce the potential impact of any study on the welfare of animals to make it easier for an AEC to approve an application. Of course, the contrary case is also true with anything that potentially increases the effects any study or procedure may have on the welfare of animals making it more difficult for an AEC to approve an application.

Logically, this takes us to the Code itself and the underlying principle I always apply when faced with a tricky question like this – What does the Code say? Those of you who have actually read the Code would immediately recognize that it does not provide a definitive answer to every question, but it does provide the framework that empowers every AEC to decide what it will or will not approve and how it makes that decision. Of course, there will often need to be some interpretation of what is written in the Code, so it can be applied to each and every question at hand.

The first point to remember here is that the Code does place some very clear qualifying standards that must be met by any application before it can hope to gain approval. For example, in section 1.1, the Code clearly states:

*Scientific and teaching activities using animals may be performed only when they are essential:*

- *to obtain and establish significant information relevant to the understanding of humans and/or animals;*
- *for the maintenance and improvement of human and/or animal health and welfare;*
- *for the improvement of animal management or production;*
- *to obtain and establish significant information relevant to the understanding, maintenance or improvement of the natural environment; or*
- *for the achievement of educational objectives.*

The key word in this section is “only” and it means that the appropriate qualifying standards set by both the Code and the AEC must be met before any application can be approved.

In addition to this, the Code requires that every application must contain enough information to satisfy the AEC that the proposed use of animals is justified by weighing up the predicted scientific or educational value of the proposed work against the potential impact on the welfare of the animals. (See section 1.2).

*1.2 Projects using animals may be performed only after a decision has been made that they are justified, weighing the predicted scientific or educational value of the projects against the potential effects on the welfare of the animals.*

This single paragraph essentially sets the tone for an ethical debate. It makes it absolutely clear that both the applicants and the AEC members must be convinced that the use of animals is essential and that the work is ethically justified before any work can be approved.

The Code goes on to actually state that all ethical and animal welfare aspects of the work must be taken into account:-

*1.3 Investigators and teachers must submit written proposals to an AEC for all animal projects which must take into account the expected value of the knowledge to be gained, the justification for the project, and all ethical and animal welfare aspects taking into consideration the 3Rs.*

The concept of an ethical review of each application being a vital part of the approval process is further enforced subsequently within the Code. For example, section 2.2.18 states:

*Only those scientific and teaching activities that conform to the requirements of all relevant sections of the Code and of legislation may be approved.*

Additional facts such as the absolute requirement for all categories of AEC membership to be present in quorate proportions before any application to use animals can be considered is a further testament to the unwavering commitment the Code makes to a complete and ethical review process. The provisions within the Code that prevent either applicants or their institution ever being able to over-ride a decision made by a quorate meeting of the AEC, is yet another clear indication of the total commitment made to the ethical process.

So, if we go back to our original question, “Is the AEC truly undertaking an ethical review of each and every proposal it considers, or is it more focused on ensuring compliance with the rules?” it would seem that the two aspects of this debate are inextricably linked. Every AEC is required to ensure that the applications they approve are compliant with both the Code and the law. They are also required to ensure that every application they consider meets their

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agreed ethical standards before they can approve it. So effectively, the two cannot be separated, because the review process would not be compliant without that ethical debate.

The important final question to ask in this debate would have to be: "How can we be sure that this is really being done?" This is a really important question and in this regard, both the transparency of the AEC system (based on the requirement for both Category C – animal welfare members and Category D – Lay persons to be independent from the institution) and the process of regular independent review of AEC operations which came in with the 7<sup>th</sup> Edition of the Code are very reassuring. The fact that a panel of suitably experienced, independent people goes into the institution every three years to thoroughly examine the AEC as well as their records and processes is central to the idea of true transparency. The fact that we have seen the draft version of the 8<sup>th</sup> Edition of the Code (released for public comment late last year) indicating that this process of regular external reviews is to be strengthened should be commended and seen as appropriately reassuring at this level because it effectively guarantees that an appropriate level of quality assurance will remain as a part of the system.

So if during the long hours you spend reading through all the applications as an AEC member, or writing them as an applicant, or just wondering about them as an individual, the question comes to mind "Does an AEC really submit every application to a detailed ethical review or is it merely looking to see that it complies with the Code?", you may gain some comfort or even reassurance from the fact that an ethical review of all applications is embedded in the system, so even the simple act of complying with the Code and Legislation, will mean that a detailed ethical review of each application has to be done.

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## **ANZCCART AEC Member of**

### **The Year Award for 2012**

Nominations are now open and welcome, but must be submitted to ANZCCART via email by Friday, 4 May.

The criteria and further information on the award can be viewed [here](#).

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## **2012 ANZCCART Conference**

**24<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> July**

**Perth, Western Australia**

*Thinking outside the cage: a different point of view*

**ANZCCART would like to announce that the Call for Abstracts is now open.**

Closing date is Friday, 4 May.

**Conference Registration: Early Bird closes 4 May**

For further information and registration visit:

[www.adelaide.edu.au/ANZCCART/events/current/](http://www.adelaide.edu.au/ANZCCART/events/current/)

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## **The 2012 Australian**

### **Museum Eureka Prize**

The Voiceless Eureka Prize for Scientific Research that Contributes to Animal Protection is a \$10,000 prize awarded to an individual or team for scientific research that has contributed, or has the potential to contribute, to animal protection.

For more information visit:

<http://eureka.australianmuseum.net.au/eureka-prize/scientific-research-that-contributes-to-animal-protection>

or email: [eureka@austmus.gov.au](mailto:eureka@austmus.gov.au)

**Entries close midnight AEST Friday, 4 May 2012.**

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## Recent Articles of Interest

### **Mice guide human drug trial**

In a recently published article, the use of genetically modified mice to monitor an experimental treatment for cancer in parallel with a human trial was described. This article detailed not only the parallel use of these humanized mice, but also the fact that the condition in which they were kept also closely paralleled those of their human counterparts. Clearly, this study is interesting at a number of different levels. Firstly, the fact that treatments were being concurrently monitored in humans and mice begs the question – why, as standard protocol dictates that animal trials precede and help set parameters for clinical trials. But then this trial will also offer some fascinating insights when it comes to comparing the results and gaining a clear vision of the relevance of murine models to treatments of this kind. Equally of course, the quality of care offered to these mice and in particular, the frequency with which their progress is being monitored might be seen as an interesting, yet challenging model.

[http://www.nature.com/news/mice-guide-human-drug-trial-1.10256?WT.ec\\_id=NEWS-20120320](http://www.nature.com/news/mice-guide-human-drug-trial-1.10256?WT.ec_id=NEWS-20120320)

### **Genome Sequencing and Analysis of the Tasmanian Devil and Its Transmissible Cancer**

A recent publication in the Journal *Cell*, described the genome of the contagious tumour that is currently decimating Tasmanian Devils in their natural environment. This study has shown that the cancer has spread from a single female. One key finding from this work is that a number of the mutations that have given rise to this tumour are associated with immune function, which may help to explain why it has been so successful in its spread from Devil to Devil.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0092867412000815>

### **Mouse 'avatars' could aid pancreatic cancer therapy**

Personalized mouse models containing tissue from a specific patient's tumour could be used to test whether a cancer drug will work on that tumour. An 'avatar' is a term informally used by cancer researchers to describe a mouse or other animal onto which tissue from a human tumour is grafted to create a personalized model of one patient's cancer. Mouse 'avatars' could in future allow physicians to find the most effective cocktail of cancer drugs to combat a particular tumour before giving them to a patient, according to researchers at the annual meeting of the Human Genome Organisation (HUGO) in Australia recently.

<http://www.nature.com/news/mouse-avatars-could-aid-pancreatic-cancer-therapy-1.10259>

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**The opinions expressed in ANZCCART NEWS are not necessarily those held by ANZCCART Ltd.**

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