# Australian Dental Council

Submission on

## MUTUAL RECOGNITION

The Australian Dental Council (ADC) thanks the Productivity Commission for the opportunity to make this brief submission on Mutual Recognition.

The main role of the ADC is the maintenance of standards by accreditation programs leading to registrable qualifications in dentistry and by the assessment and examination of overseas trained dentists.

By these means the registration boards of the Australian States and Territories can be assured that those requesting registration to practise have met all the criteria necessary to assure the public of the standards of care they have the right to expect.

This submission will address the issues of the Mutual Recognition Agreements between states and territories and the Trans Tasman Mutual Recognition Agreement (TTMRA) between Australia and New Zealand separately.

### 1. Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRA) between States and Territories

The ADC is concerned that there is the possibility of reduction of standards in the event that one state or territory registration board were to grant registration to a dental professional who did not meet the criteria of the ADC. This could be in response to a perceived need in one particular area but this decision could then affect all other states and territories by way of mutual recognition.

It must be reported that there have not been any significant problems to date but the possibility of interventions which could ultimately affect the safety of the public exists.

### 2. Trans Tasman Mutual Recognition Agreement

There have been positive aspects of this agreement but also some possible negative effects. There is a compelling argument for the ADC and the Dental Council of New Zealand (DCNZ) to work closely together to eliminate all gross disparities of processes.

There has been a very positive and constructive working relationship maintained between councils. The DCNZ has observer status on the ADC – the councils have a joint Accreditation Committee and there is significant movement towards harmonisation of examination processes. Goodwill and flexibility have benefited both councils as well as the public.

Two problem areas exist – the first is the flow of dentists between countries is disproportionately in favour of Australia. Whilst increases in the Australian dental workforce are very necessary, they should not occur at the expense of New Zealand.

The second problem arises from the legislation which requires the DCNZ to assess all overseas trained dentists' applications for registration as separate cases. This means that the Australian registration boards are bound by decisions taken in New Zealand which may conflict with the assessments made in Australia. A situation can occur whereby a dentist may be registered without further examination in New Zealand but could be required to undergo the whole examination process in Australia to be able to register.

It is hypothetically possible for two countries to come to an agreement on the question of registration on socio/political grounds rather than merit. Such a decision could then be binding on a third country. Again hypothetically, one of the two countries referred to above could be New Zealand and the third country, Australia.

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A Free Trade Agreement was recently signed with Singapore. Newspaper reports stated that recognition of university degrees forms part of this agreement. This would seem to indicate that a mutual recognition agreement would be put in place in due course. The ADC would argue that some of the problems referred to above could be avoided if the agreement were restricted to graduates of educational programs which had been accredited to the satisfaction of the ADC by a reputable agency rather than all registrants of the Dental Council of Singapore

It would defeat the purpose of mutual recognition arrangements if they resulted in the creation of "easier portals of entry", could be seen to be discriminatory or could compromise the standards of care available to the Australian public.

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