25 March 2003

The MRA Review
Productivity Commission
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Dear Sir/Madam

Productivity Commission Review of Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) and Trans Tasman Mutual Recognition Agreement (TTMRA)

The Productivity Commission has instituted a review of the Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) and the Trans Tasman Mutual Recognition Agreement (TTMRA).

The purpose of the review is to:

- assess the effectiveness of the MRA and TTMRA;
- consider any changes to improve the effectiveness of the arrangements; and ,
- broadening the scope and examining options for ensuring that issues relevant to the agreements are rapidly incorporated into domestic policy processes.

The NZVA is an incorporated society representing veterinarians in New Zealand. Over 80% of veterinarians resident in New Zealand belong to the NZVA. The NZVA commends the Productivity Commission in instituting a review of these agreements. In general terms the NZVA believes the TTMRA is working reasonably well for the veterinary profession in New Zealand and Australia. In part this may be because prior to the implementation of TTMRA, there was an existing trans-Tasman body (unincorporated) in the form of the Australian Veterinary Board's Conference. With representation from all the Veterinary Surgeons Boards in Australia and New Zealand along with the Australian and New Zealand Veterinary Associations, this body provided a ready made forum which was able to deal with the issues of mutual recognition required under these agreements.

The Australian Veterinary Board's Conference was incorporated in 2000 as the Australasian Veterinary Board's Council (AVBC). The AVBC picked up the National Veterinary Examination from the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (NOOSR) when the latter body was disestablished.

A number of questions are asked in the review.

1. How successful have the MRA and TTMRA been in addressing obstacles to trade in labour mobility? Is there any information available that enables an assessment of the impact of the MRA and TTMRA on trade in labour mobility?

   From the NZVA's perspective the TTMRA has been successful. Veterinarians registered and holding annual practicing certificates in New Zealand are now automatically accepted for registration in Australian states and vice versa.

2. What have been the major benefits and major costs? What has been the net impact?

   The TTMRA has required the various Veterinary Surgeon's Boards in New Zealand and Australia to harmonise standards for registration of veterinarians and veterinary specialists. This has required to all jurisdictions to agree to one standard for the admissibility of foreign veterinary graduates. Graduates of veterinary schools which have been accredited by internationally recognised accreditation agencies are now automatically accepted for registration in New Zealand and Australia. Three such accreditation agencies are recognised, namely the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons, the American Veterinary Medical Association and the Veterinary Schools Accreditation Advisory Committee (the latter is a standing committee of the AVBC).

3. What have been the major benefits and major costs? What has been the nett impact?

   The major benefit has obviously been the harmonisation of standards within the jurisdictions in Australasia. There has been some cost however, in that, amongst other things, to conform with mutually agreed standards, the Veterinary Council of New Zealand has had to de-recognise previously recognised qualifications from veterinary schools which are not subject to any of the aforementioned accreditation processes i.e. graduates from the Irish Vet School and some of the European Schools.

4. Is it possible to quantify or roughly estimate the magnitude of the costs and benefits?

   The cost of running the AVBC per New Zealand registered veterinarian is about NZ$16.00 pa.

5. What are the impediments to and how significant would be the benefits from greater harmonisation?

   It would be desirable if there was one registering authority for both New Zealand and Australian veterinarians. From the NZVA's point of view, it seems that the impediments to such an outcome lie in part within the Australian jurisdictions.

6. Have there been any unintended effects? If so, how can they be best addressed?

Yes, see (3) above. It could be argued that the requirement to harmonise standards and derecognise some veterinary schools has contributed in part to the current shortage of veterinarians within New Zealand. De-recognition coincided with a shortage of veterinarians in New Zealand.

7. How efficient has the administration of the MRA and the TTMRA been?

   From the point of view of harmonisation of standards for registration for veterinarians, New Zealand and Australia have been lucky in that there was a ready made forum through the AVBC to deal with these matters. The process has been relatively smooth and progress continues to be made in the harmonisation of standards.

8. Have there been any ongoing implementation issues of a general nature which have detracted from the effectiveness of the arrangements?

   Yes. It would be far more efficient to have one registering body for both New Zealand and Australian veterinarians. It is inefficient and costly to require veterinarians who wish to practice in all states within Australia and New Zealand to be required to register in each jurisdiction. We are also aware that the Federal Government in Australia employs veterinarians who practice veterinary science in states and territories without registration in these jurisdictions.

9. Have any particular areas of regulation implementation difficulties arisen? For example, has new regulation to address environmental issues placed any concern from a mutual recognition perspective?
   Not applicable.

10. How significant are administrative and compliance costs?
    See (4) above. It is important to ensure that harmonisation be achieved in a cost efficient manner.

11. Are existing disputes resolution mechanisms effective? What improvements, if any, are warranted? The AVBC provides a good forum to resolve issues. It works well because of the positive attitude towards harmonisation brought to the forum by participants. From a New Zealand perspective intra-Australian jurisdictional issues seem at times to present more of a challenge than those that are trans-national.

Yours sincerely

Murray Gibb
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

cc NZVA Board