OPTICIANS BOARD

27 March 2003

MRA / TTMRA Review
Productivity Commission
PO Box 80
BELCONNEN
ACT 2616
AUSTRALIA

Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Agreement (TTMRA) Review

This submission is written for the Council of Optometry Registration Authorities of Australia and New Zealand (CORA). This organisation includes the optometry registration authorities of all Australian jurisdictions and New Zealand. The New Zealand Opticians Board has secretarial responsibility for CORA for a year from November 2002.

There has been frustration for the Optometry Registration Authorities over New Zealand recognition of the United Kingdom 'qualifications' - MBCO and MCOptom, and its effect on the otherwise successful and beneficial elements of TTMRA. These are not 'qualifications', but memberships of the College of Optometrists. They are not, by themselves, qualifications for registration in the United Kingdom. The New Zealand Opticians Board has been unsuccessful in getting these qualifications removed from the list of acceptable qualifications. Australia does not accept the MBCO and MCOptom as suitable for registration purposes. CORA has agreed that the MBCO and MCOptom do not meet the standards for registration.

The Optometry Council of Australia and New Zealand (OCANZ) assesses overseas qualifications, carries out the optometry competency examination, and oversees the accreditation of optometry courses in both countries. OCANZ has three members who are nominees of CORA. Optometrists trained outside of Australia and New Zealand who apply for registration in both countries need to have their qualifications assessed by OCANZ and, if necessary, pass an optometry competency examination. Currently those with the above United Kingdom qualifications who register in New Zealand do not need to go through this process.

New Zealand is being used as a 'back door' for MBCO and MCOptom holders to obtain registration in Australia without meeting that country's registration requirements. The concern is about the ability of applicants to exploit the registration requirements and use the TTMRA to gain registration where they do not meet the statutory requirements in Australia. Many of those, with MBCO / MCOptom, who register in New Zealand do not set foot in New Zealand but go straight to Australia.

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At the November 2002 meeting of CORA it was suggested that any applicant who is registered with MBCO and MCOptom qualifications in New Zealand should practise for a mandatory period of time in New Zealand, before they apply under TTMRA. This would be in keeping with the intention of the TTMRA. Another suggestion is to require an applicant to have citizenship or permanent residency of either country to be eligible to apply for registration under TTMRA.

Yours sincerely

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Chair of the Council of Optometry Registration Authorities