



National Association of Testing Authorities, Australia

MEETING OF MEMBERS' REPRESENTATIVES ON NATA COUNCIL

26 May 2011

SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

- Consistent application and interpretation of accreditation requirements

This continues to be a 'work in progress'. There are a number of projects underway including a major revision of the Field Application Documents (FADs) which, in addition to ensuring their currency, is aimed at removing duplication with the relevant standard, aligning interpretations of criteria between the fields and programs and improving the expression of requirements to eliminate ambiguity. Phase 1 of this review is close to completion. All FADS are now placed on a two-year review cycle with member feedback sought prior to release. Phase 2 of this major review is currently in progress which involves the restructuring of the FADS to better meet the needs of members. Another major project involves a comprehensive review of the delivery of accreditation services, the "Integrated Accreditation" project. A new industry/sector focused accreditation structure is in the process of being implemented across NATA.

- Blood refrigerators in hospitals

There was some discussion about the management and maintenance of blood refrigerators in hospitals (ie that are outside the control of pathology laboratories) that are used for the storage of blood for transfusion. It was recognised that this is a long-standing issue that needs resolution. NATA will facilitate a discussion on the matter with relevant parties in an effort to resolve this long-standing issue.

- Technical assessor forums

The concept of technical assessor forums is still under review and a number of options are being considered. NATA recognises the need to have improved engagement with technical assessors but given the number of fields and programs, the geographical spread of technical assessors and that most of them have 'day jobs', it is a complex issue. Web-based forums could be one solution to this issue. It should be noted that technical assessors are welcome to attend the technical forums held in conjunction with members' meetings. An internal technical assessor engagement working group has been established within NATA to identify strategies to better engage technical assessors and technical assessors were recently provided with the opportunity to participate in a survey to gather feedback.

- DIISR funding

Funds are provided by the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research (DIISR) for NATA's involvement in relevant international activities through its Support for Industry Service Organisations (SISO) program. NATA will make a statement regarding DIISR funding at the next Council meeting scheduled for October 2011.

- Comparability of accreditation by MRA partners

NATA has conducted an international benchmarking exercise on accreditation with two overseas accreditation bodies. Information relating to the costs and logistics for an initial

assessment and for each surveillance activity that comprise an accreditation cycle, was requested from each accreditation body and analysed against the information supplied by NATA. A report outlining the findings to members will be published in the near future. As part of this exercise a review of the assessment process is also currently underway in order to minimise the duplication of assessment effort. NATA is also exploring a fee for service charging model. The model will be based on the review of the assessment effort project.

- Electronic document & records management system (EDRMS)

NATA is moving to an electronic document and records management system to support improved customer service as well as reducing administrative costs. A business-to-business (B2B) customer portal is planned to support increased electronic exchange and information sharing within this environment.

- Rules review

The NATA Rules will undergo a complete review in 2011-2012. Inputs to the revision were sought from members; in particular feedback was sought in relation to the Council and Board and their composition, tenures and roles. Also raised was the issue of the NATA membership structure and its existing relevance. Any changes to the Constitution will require acceptance by members.

- Accreditation Advisory Committees

A review of the role and responsibilities of the Accreditation Advisory Committees (AACs) was conducted in 2011. NATA's Board confirmed that the primary role of the AACs is that of a technical consultative nature. All positions on the AAC are defined by criteria and expressions of interest for the role are sought via NATA's website and other channels. As part of NATA's private sector and industry stakeholder engagement plan and NATA's commitment to providing an effective and customer focused accreditation service, agendas of every AAC meeting are now circulated to all relevant members and other stakeholders prior to the meeting. Members and stakeholders are invited to submit issues or inputs for consideration by the AAC. Summaries of all AAC meeting outcomes are available to all interested parties and are placed on the NATA website.

- Auditing of information systems

A concern was raised by a member that NATA does not direct enough attention to the auditing of Information Systems in pathology. NATA does assess facility Information Systems (and other software) to determine how they function, how they are maintained e.g. with regards to upgrades, and how they were validated or verified upon installation. It is acknowledged that the pathology sector is seeing an increased use and dependence on IT systems, notably for the delivery of reports. NATA is considering how best to assess these aspects as part of its overall review of the surveillance and assessment model for pathology.

- Assessment feedback mechanisms

A project to develop a client feedback strategy has now been completed. A number of feedback mechanisms have been implemented including web-based feedback forms that can be used to provide feedback on accreditation issues such as service delivery matters, interpretation of accreditation requirements etc. All feedback is monitored and data will be reported periodically.

- Signatories and opinions on test reports

Signatory approval now only applies to Chemical Testing, Mechanical Testing, Inspection and Reference Materials Producers (RMP). Their AACs are currently reviewing the signatory policies.

Opinions are currently only allowed on reports in Medical, Medical Imaging, Veterinary Testing, Forensic Science, Biological (plant health only) and Chemical (investigative testing only). AACs are progressively reviewing policies. Any facility accredited in a field of testing which does not allow opinions or interpretations to be included in reports can formally write to NATA and request that its specific circumstances be considered for review (as detailed in the FADs).