

Having confidence in your laboratory results



When sending samples to the laboratory for testing, how can you be confident in the results you receive? Do you know that the staff are well trained? How is the identification of your samples being maintained during testing? Has the equipment been appropriately maintained and test methods checked for accuracy prior to use?

These are all questions you should be asking whenever you send your samples for testing and act upon the results. The costs involved in making a wrong decision can include incorrect diagnosis, incorrect treatment, loss of animal life and litigation. The results obtained from pathology are often critical to the decision making process.

There are many veterinary laboratories that undergo regular peer reviewed assessments against international standards to provide assurance that the testing being performed can be relied upon and that the staff are technically competent to perform tests and report the results. This process involves accreditation to ISO/IEC 17025 *General requirements for the competence of testing and calibration laboratories*. These laboratories are assessed regularly by the National Association of Testing Authorities, Australia (NATA) to ensure technical competence of the work being produced. This includes assessment of: staff training; method validation and selection; quality control procedures; equipment maintenance and calibration and reporting practices.

Assessments are performed under an established quality management system including auditing of the work undertaken, investigation of non conformances, complaints procedures and maintenance and storage of records and results. This rigorous system of assessment is internationally recognised and enables the end client to have assurance in the quality of results issued, and where errors in testing might occur, that systems are available to identify and fully investigate them.

The next time you send you samples to the laboratory, you should ask yourself if the testing has been performed to such rigour and if you can confidently act upon the results. If the laboratory is accredited to ISO/IEC 17025 and displays the NATA accreditation logo on test reports the answer should be yes.

Further information regarding NATA accreditation can be obtained from the NATA website www.nata.com.au. A list of all accredited laboratories and the work they perform can also be found on the website, or by contacting 1800 621 666.

