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Dear Researchers,

I am writing to you as someone named on an Animal Research Authority at Macquarie University. I have recently taken over as Chair from the esteemed Michael Gillings. I am a Pharmacologist at ASAM, and use animals in my research on trigeminal pain and drug treatments. I am familiar with the potential (and actual) frustrations of dealing with AEC's, but have also Chaired the AEC at Royal North Shore Hospital, and I will try and apply both perspectives to the role.

Research involving animals is a privilege, but it is work supported by most of the community, and to a large degree we are given freedom to do what we need to do to answer our scientific questions and achieve our educational outcomes – provided we stick to the rules the community have set for us through the Animal Research Act and the NHMRC Code of Practice. To me these boil down to adequate justification for what we want to do, and making sure we stick to what we say we will do when our work is approved. To that end, I would like to canvass areas where I think some clarification will help in smoother approvals, or areas where there have been a few less than happy experiences at Macquarie recently.

Disease Models: There are many animal models of disease described, and often researchers wish to introduce new models to their work. In order to help the AEC make an informed decision about the new model, we would appreciate the inclusion of literature references describing in detail the technique that the investigator is proposing to use. Ideally, the experimental protocol will be outlined in some depth in the reference. If the reference is readily available then please just include the citation, if it is old or more obscure, we would appreciate inclusion of the actual paper with the submission.

Drugs: The administration of drugs to an animal is a procedure. Details of dose and route of administration should be provided, where possible references to studies that have used the drugs in similar types of experiments should be included to provide support for the dose and choice of agent. If a drug is new or being used for a previously undescribed purpose, then a solid justification for the experiment must be provided, based on what is known about the agent. This could include in vitro data, or studies with compounds of similar activity or structure.

Workload: It is important that investigators consider the workload associated with performing experiments, particularly the number of procedures to be performed in one session, the duration of the experiment involving repeated testing of animals and the timing of the experiments with respect to weekends and holidays. Working under stress of lack of sleep or too many complex procedures can lead to unacceptable animal welfare outcomes; this should be avoided by careful planning.

Monitoring: Where daily or more frequent monitoring of animals is required after a procedure such as surgery or drug administration, 2 or more investigators who are available to undertake the monitoring must be included on the protocol. This is in part to minimize potential workload problems, but also serves to ensure that monitoring can still occur if there is an unforeseen situation involving one of the investigators.

Vet standards: The NHMRC Code of Practice is clear that surgery and subsequent pain relief must conform to or parallel current medical or veterinary practice (3.3.30 and elsewhere). This means adequate and appropriate anaesthesia and analgesia, the use of aseptic technique and adequate monitoring during and after surgery. The AEC can call on significant expertise to assist investigators in meeting these requirements; in particular we hope that you will talk to the Animal Welfare Officer if you have any questions or needs for training.

The AEC is here to oversee and support your work. Please do not hesitate to contact the Secretariat, the Animal Welfare Officer or me if you have any questions, requests or comments.

Sincerely

Mark