



# **AINDT**

*Federal Council*

## **AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE FOR NON-DESTRUCTIVE TESTING**

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Attention Maggie Eibisch

### ***Productivity Commission Draft Research Report - Standard Setting and Laboratory Accreditation***

The Australian Institute for Non-Destructive Testing would like to make a submission to the Productivity Commission following the circulation of the Draft Research Report for further public consultation and input.

Firstly, on behalf of the Institute, I would like to congratulate the Productivity Commission on producing an excellent commentary on the effectiveness of both Standards Australia and the National Association Testing Authorities in playing such an important part in Australia's role as a world leader in the setting of standards and in laboratory accreditation. This is a fact that is not recognised by many government organisations and the general community at large.

AINDT has many members who work on Standards Committees on a voluntary basis. It has been of increasing concern to AINDT that economic rationalization of the late 1980's and 1990's has had a significant effect on attendance at standards meetings and this, subsequently, has resulted in a corresponding loss of available expertise with respect to input into standards. The recommendation of the draft report to provide additional funding to assist members of committees to attend meetings is to be commended and will largely overcome some of the financial considerations that industry has in allowing staff to participate in standards development.

In reviewing the contributions of committee members to Standards Australia it should also be recognised that industry support is also provided to NATA on a voluntary basis in a wide number of fields by expert assessors. Members of the public also contribute through membership of various NATA advisory committees. NATA, it should be noted, also plays a prominent role on standards committees and is represented on several other committees which are vital to Australian industry, particularly in activities that concern AINDT.

For instance, NATA plays an important role on AINDT's National Certification Board and also on a number of its sub-committees. This work is invaluable in maintaining high standards of inspection across a wide range of Australian industries.

AINDT, therefore, would like to submit that financial support on the same basis as that considered for Standards Australia should also be given to enable industry members to attend committee meetings held by NATA.

As an organisation, AINDT is well aware of the proficiency testing program and its benefits to industry. NATA, in adopting a practice that has a high standing overseas first formed a Proficiency Testing Advisory Committee in 1981 and introduced a proficiency testing program for NDT from 1984 on. This, and the confidence that proficiency testing has given in laboratories accredited by NATA, has been responsible for many Australian companies being able to successfully compete with overseas companies on contracts for major infrastructure projects such as the N.W Shelf, Bass Strait and major pipeline projects in Australia and overseas.

The proficiency testing program, therefore, is an essential part of the laboratory accreditation process in maintaining the high standard that has been achieved to date, and in ensuring that any generic differences can be identified and measures put in place to address any deficiencies found.

The examples provided of only slight improvements achieved by proficiency testing in P205 of the report should not be taken out of context. These may not necessarily represent a reflection of what represents the true difference between a poorly performing laboratory and highly performing laboratory. It is possible that the laboratories tested in these references were of a high standard already and had developed a high degree of conformity in laboratory practice and procedures. In such circumstances major differences in performance would not be expected to emerge.

In practice, new laboratories are entering the market place and proficiency testing, if designed correctly, is meant to identify issues of non-conformance with these laboratories as well as to benchmark them and other laboratories against one another.

Australian experience supports the continuation of proficiency testing. Proficiency testing programs for radiography (1990/91) and ultrasonic testing (1992/93) carried out by NATA revealed that improvements in proficiency had been achieved over similar surveys carried out in 1982/84 and 1988/90 respectively, but basic problems with the level of non-compliance was higher than desired. In a paper given to the Fabcon/Fabfair Conference in Wollongong from 27 September to 1 October 1994, Jan Chamberlain (Manager NDT and Engineering Materials, NATA) said:

*"18-44% of participants had less than satisfactory results. Consequently NATA is committed to running NDT proficiency testing programs in conjunction with its laboratory accreditation process. "*

A further proficiency program in 1996 for testing individual signatories for magnetic particle inspection revealed a level of compliance of 82%. Measures were put in place by the laboratories concerned on issues of non-compliance and subsequently most of the unsatisfactory results were addressed on retest.

In respect to these issues of non-compliance, a recent book published by AINDT - "History of Non-destructive Testing in Australia" commented that:

*"The overall results from the programs meant that proficiency testing was here to stay as an essential part of the accreditation process. "*

From this, it is evident that funding for proficiency testing should not be reduced since it is one of the most appropriate means of achieving high levels of conformance in laboratories throughout Australia. It should also be noted that industry bears some considerable cost in their participation in proficiency testing programs. The benefits of doing so are well recognised and overseas there is considerable recognition at an international level of NATA's excellent work in laboratory accreditation. Indeed, many countries have followed NATA's example in being the first organisation in the world to establish a laboratory accreditation program in 1947.

The Australian Institute for Non-Destructive Testing would like to stress the importance of NATA to Australian industry through its accreditation program in ensuring the integrity of critical structures in public transportation, pressure equipment, mining, aviation, oil refining and gas; in fact NATA plays a strategic role in many areas which affect the safety and well being of the general public.

In conclusion, in addition to recommending support for attendance at meetings of committee members, AINDT recommends that the rather insignificant amount of \$240,000 presently provided in funding for the proficiency testing program by the Government should not be reduced in any way whatsoever. There is sufficient reason to increase this sum significantly to continue the ongoing success of the present program.

Yours faithfully,

David Barnett

Executive Officer