

3 October 2008

Dr Conall O'Connell  
Secretary  
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry  
GPO Box 858  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Dr O'Connell

**Re: The Neumann Report – *Transition of Veterinary Students to Rural Practice, Continuing Professional Development and Sustainable Rural Veterinary Practices***

**The Craven *Review of Veterinary Science Education and Registration Requirements***

The Australian Veterinary Association (AVA) has received and had the opportunity to review the recommendations of the reports prepared by Dr Craven in 2005 and Dr Neumann in 2007. We would like to thank you again for making these reviews possible, and have attached a briefing paper that summarises our responses to the two reports.

The AVA is the national professional organisation for veterinarians in Australia. We represent some 5000 members, and support 22 special interest groups including public health, industry, sheep and cattle, small animals, equine practice, and animal welfare. We advise industry groups and governments on a range of policy issues relating to animal health and welfare and all aspects of veterinary science.

The AVA does not receive recurrent funding from government or industry. We have limited funds that are provided primarily by our members. While we do invest in key projects to benefit the profession, Dr Neumann recommends that the AVA should fund several initiatives that we consider to be clearly in the public interest, and therefore the responsibility of government rather than a professional association. There is clearly a role for government to provide funds and the extensive veterinary expertise from within your department to progress these recommendations.

We are currently working on concrete proposals to help achieve some of the objectives raised by Dr Neumann's and Dr Craven's recommendations. With the support of government and the cooperation of the veterinary profession, these will be able to deliver tangible outcomes, and we look forward to providing you with more details of these projects.

Drs Neumann and Craven also recommend several initiatives that the AVA has in fact already undertaken, or is currently progressing. We have described these initiatives in more detail in the attached paper.

The Australian Veterinary Boards Council, to which Drs Neumann and Craven have also directed several recommendations, has suggested that a joint working party of stakeholders work cooperatively to address the recommendations of the Neumann and Craven reports. This group could supervise the various surveys and evaluate the costs and benefits of the recommendations. The AVA is willing to take a leading role in convening and participating in that working party.

The AVA President and I would be delighted to meet and discuss these matters with you and your Department. I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely

Graham Catt  
Chief Executive Officer

# Response of the Australian Veterinary Association to the Neumann and Craven Reports: October 2008

## Background

Major issues examined in the Neumann and Craven reports are associated with the transition of new graduates to rural veterinary practice and the development of rewarding and sustainable careers. These issues are neither new nor unique to Australia.

The reports focus on rural veterinary activities that service the sheep and cattle industries including mixed rural practice and the various consultancy services to these industries.

## The recommendations

The recommendations fall into four broad categories. These are:

- 1) Recommendations that more properly belong in the realm of the public sector
- 2) Recommendations that are being addressed and funded by the AVA
- 3) Recommendations that are being addressed by the AVA but realistically require additional resources
- 4) Recommendations being actioned already by other organisations.

The recommendations cited below are numbered according to which report they appear in (C=Craven, N=Neumann) and then the order in which they appear in that report.

### 1) Public funding

A number of the recommendations would have a major public benefit in production, food security, food safety and biosecurity, but are beyond the resources of the AVA to deliver at this time. The working group proposed above would be able to implement the initiatives, but funding for this work is more properly a matter for government than the AVA. The recommendations in this category are listed below.

- N1. Foresight project to clarify the future of the livestock industries and the role of veterinarians servicing all aspects of those industries.*
- N2. Survey the attitudes and needs of cattle and sheep producers for veterinary services in rural areas of Australia.*
- N4. Develop a series of maps similar to the AVMA (American Veterinary Medical Association) "Food Supply Veterinary Medicine Data Maps".*
- N19. Promotion of rural veterinary services to livestock producers by a formal marketing program as part of the development of a comprehensive strategic vision for the profession in rural Australia.*

### 2) In progress by the AVA

The second category of recommendations deal with development work within the veterinary profession to address the shortcomings revealed in the report. These are already being addressed by the AVA in the following ways.

- N12. The AVA reviews its New Graduate Support Program and if it is agreed it continue, funding be provided to ensure it achieves its objective across Australia.*

The AVA will review its New Graduate Support Program as it does with all accreditation programs, and seek government funding if it is to continue because the beneficiaries of this program are beyond the association.

N13. *The AVA reviews its New Graduate Friendly Practice Accreditation Program, survey its members to identify reasons for the low uptake and consider implementing actions to make the program more attractive.*

AVA will undertake this survey and review.

N14. *The AVA reviews its website with a view to including a "New Graduates Site" that provides information and a level of assistance to all new veterinary graduates.*

A research project into the uses of the AVA website will shortly take place, and this aspect will be included for review.

N15. *The AVA takes a lead role in promoting the concept of developing national information resources to assist new veterinary graduates.*

The AVA's continuing education program plays its part in this, but other continuing education providers need to assist. During recent meetings between the AVA, the Australian College of Veterinary Scientists (ACVSc), the Centre for Veterinary Education (formerly PGF in Veterinary Science at The University of Sydney), Murdoch University Centre for Continuing Education and the New Zealand Veterinary Association, it was agreed that a career pathways document would be useful for new graduates. Dr Maureen Revington, AVA Manager Continuing Education, undertook to work on this document with the help of key AVA special interest groups (SIGs).

N17. *The AVA review its business advisory services to members with a view to enhancing the availability of advice to ensure optimum business practice advice is readily accessible to rural practitioners.*

The AVA provides services and was involved with establishment of the Diploma in Veterinary Practice Management which has already been put in place.

The AVA SIG, the Australian Veterinary Practice Managers' Association (AVPMA), provides telephone advice on practice management issues, and is exploring the feasibility of regional learning groups for members. There is also a range of practice manuals available to AVPMA members for a small fee.

The AVA also offers a number of free telephone advice services available to all members about business topics. These cover human resources, financial, accounting, legal and superannuation issues, and are particularly relevant to practice managers. Special interest group Equine Veterinarians Australia runs continuing education opportunities in equine practice management in regional locations.

N18. *The AVA review the level of financial support provided to its rural Branches especially that which assists speakers to attend who can discuss issues associated with the success of rural veterinary practice.*

The AVA has allocated up to \$70,000 to help branches and special interest groups to attract innovative speakers for regional continuing education events. A pilot program of regional continuing education opportunities has been launched for NSW in 2008, and extra support for branches to run continuing education activities will be provided through AVA divisions in all states in 2009.

- C7. *The AVA encourage debate about veterinary education by, for example, featuring educational topics at annual conferences and other events.*

This is done through a dedicated stream on education at the AVA annual conference and other events.

### **3) Initiatives in progress, but require additional resources**

The third category of recommendations is those collaborative or large-scale projects that are the responsibility of the AVA, but where additional resources would mean much faster progress. These are listed below, along with information about progress to date.

- N3. *Survey of veterinary graduates in rural areas.*

The Australian Veterinary Boards Council (AVBC) and AVA are discussing how to collect data on an annual basis from registered veterinarians for statistical purposes and analysis. Supportive funding would help speed progress.

- N9. *Workshop to investigate the continuing needs of rural veterinarians.*  
N10. *Support discussions between continuing education providers and industry service organisations to produce continuing education relevant to rural veterinarians.*

The AVA works with its own rural practitioner members on these issues, and has this year initiated a series of regional continuing education conferences specifically for rural veterinarians. The AVA is only able to allocate limited resources however, and government funding would enable them to be progressed within reasonable timeframes.

In April 2008 the AVA hosted a two-day continuing education meeting in Sydney involving AVA, NZVA/VetLearn, the Centre for Veterinary Education (formerly PGF in Veterinary Science at The University of Sydney), Murdoch University Centre for Continuing Veterinary Education and ACVSc, at which areas for working cooperatively for the benefit of all veterinarians were identified.

Information on the AVA website refers members to online continuing education courses available from other groups such as Animal Health Australia, and expansion of this information is currently underway.

- N11. *The production animal SIGs work with the ACVSc to provide training programs that will facilitate more rural practitioners attempting Membership and/or Fellowship of the College*

The AVA is committed to providing continuing education for all of its members, and over 130 continuing education events are held annually around Australia by the AVA, including training courses and events for rural practitioners.

Bridging courses between graduation and examination at Membership or Fellowship level with the ACVSc were mentioned at the cooperative meetings referred to under Recommendation 15 above, and are worthy of further investigation. These would be a considerable undertaking for both organisations however, and would benefit from government support.

- C5. *Structured CPD modules to be counted towards specialist and/or academic qualifications.*

The AVA has initiated some preliminary discussions about the feasibility of a program like this with the New Zealand Veterinary Association and ACVSc. However, we need to evaluate whether this is really applicable to most rural practitioners. There is more of a demand to improve practical and management skills that can extend the range of services delivered to clients eg. drought feeding skills, feedlot management and animal finishing skills.

#### **4) In progress, led by other organisations**

- N7. *Examination of the APAV, its effectiveness and impact on practitioners*
- N8. *Farm biosecurity program to support veterinary practitioners providing advice on farm biosecurity.*

These recommendations are currently being addressed by Animal Health Australia, and so no action is required by the AVA.

#### **Conclusion**

Not all of the recommendations have been included here, but those detailed above are the most important ones that require AVA action. The AVA is willing to continue investing in many of the matters raised in the recommendations, and looks forward to continue working cooperatively with government and other professional organisations to make progress in these recommendations.