

## ANZCCART and our strategies for sharing information

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### Abstract:

The Australian and New Zealand Council for the care of Animals in Research and Teaching (ANZCCART), like most 3Rs organizations operates on a very limited budget. We are based in Adelaide, Australia where we have 1.7 full time members of staff (Chief Executive Officer and Administrative Officer) and also have an office in Wellington, New Zealand where the Executive Officer nominally works one day per week for ANZCCART.

As a regionally isolated organization comprising less than two full time equivalent employees, we have to rely on modern electronic communications techniques to effectively and economically disseminate new and relevant information in a highly targeted manner. To this end, we use our web site ([www.adelaide.edu.au/ANZCCART/](http://www.adelaide.edu.au/ANZCCART/)) as the primary portal for communications between ANZCCART, its members, those with a specific interest in the welfare of animals used for scientific purposes and the general public. This web site is constantly updated and provides visitors with opportunities to submit specific questions via email, to join our world-wide mailing list, to purchase books and monographs published by ANZCCART, as well as free access to ANZCCART News and a variety of other relevant resources and web sites.

Web traffic statistics indicate that this strategy has been successful.

**Keywords:** electronic communication, information sharing, networks, web site

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### Introduction:

ANZCCART is the acronym by which the Australian and New Zealand Council for the Care of Animals in Research and Teaching Ltd is better known. ANZCCART is a not – for – profit Public Company that was initially set up just over 20 years ago with the aim of providing leadership in response to increasing concerns and to help develop community consensus on ethical, social and scientific issues relating to the use of animals in research and teaching.

The Corporate mission of ANZCCART is best described in the following four simple statements as we aim to:

- To ensure that the outcomes of the scientific users of animals are worthwhile;
- To encourage the implementation of The 3 R's throughout the research and teaching sector; and
- To promote excellence in the care of animals used in research and teaching;
- To foster informed and responsible discussion and debate within the scientific and wider community regarding the scientific use of animals.

While ANZCCART clearly needs to, and certainly strives to operate in a global sense, our main sphere of operations, as the name suggests, is based around the Australian and New Zealand region. Aside from the variations in animal welfare legislation that exist between these two countries, Australia is made up of eight States & Territories – each of which has a system of regional government and a State or Territory Parliament. Under the Australian constitution, animal welfare legislation falls to the control of individual State / Territory governments so, while there is a very high degree of commonality in these laws across the country, there are also a number of subtle differences that exist and help to confuse the issues that are part of the debate that will always be associated with the scientific use of animals. For example, South Australian law (unlike that of every other State or Territory) is rather backward and specifically excludes fish from the definition of vertebrate animal species, while other States such as Queensland for example have more closely aligned their legislation with the *Australian Code of Practice for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes 7<sup>th</sup> Edition* (The Code), which is formally recognised and incorporated into the relevant legislation of each State or Territory.

This means that in States like Queensland, higher invertebrate species such as cephalopods for example fall under the protection of their law and therefore any such higher invertebrates used for research or teaching purposes must be approved by a properly constituted animal ethics committee (AEC) and that use is included in the animal use statistics kept by each State. New Zealand however, has a single system of government and therefore consistent animal welfare legislation across the country, but it too varies from the laws that exist in Australia.

All this means that we are both geographically isolated from the rest of the world to some extent and confronted by a number of geopolitical boundaries that force us to operate under a variety of legal circumstances in different regions. Another aspect of our local geography is that we have to operate across a number of different time zones. There are for example, two – three hours difference between the East Coast and West Coast of Australia (subject to daylight savings variations) and New Zealand is a further two hours ahead of the East Coast of Australia. We are also operating in a very different time zone to Europe and the USA for example where we can be anything up to 10 hours ahead of the UK, 18 hours ahead of the US West Coast or up to 22 hours ahead of Hawaii for example. These time differences all help to ensure that standard means of communication like the telephone can be problematic at best. Accordingly, we have adopted a communication strategy that is largely based around modern communication techniques such as the internet and email.

## Results:

The utilization of electronic communication as a major aspect of our overall communications strategy has also allowed us to overcome other limiting factors such as the relatively low population densities that exist in our region. New Zealand – a country of roughly the same land area as Japan – has a population of approximately four million people (compared with 128 million people in Japan) and Australia (with a number of regions at least the size of Japan that are totally uninhabited) has a population of just on 20 million people. This puts an added emphasis on the importance of efficiency when we need to disseminate information as the simple, more time honoured techniques such as "word of mouth" sharing of information tend to break down.

Our major mechanism for communicating the work of ANZCCART is via our web pages, which can be accessed at [www.adelaide.edu.au/ANZCCART/](http://www.adelaide.edu.au/ANZCCART/)

The ANZCCART web site is regularly updated and contains both information and links to other sources of verified information relevant to the scientific use of animals.

As can be seen from the example provided below, this page contains a number of hyperlinks to relevant

The screenshot shows the ANZCCART website home page. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for 'About ANZCCART', 'Using Animals in Science', 'Publications', 'ANZCCART News', 'Events Calendar', 'Resources', and 'Helpful Links'. Below this, there is a 'Welcome to ANZCCART' section with a sub-header 'This web site contains information for animal carers, animal ethics committee members and scientists as well as other interested parties.' The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column contains 'Further enquiries' for ANZCCART Australia and ANZCCART New Zealand. The right column contains 'Latest ANZCCART News' with several news items, including 'AEC Member Induction Information Package', 'Euthanasia of Animals Used for Scientific Purposes', 'Useful Information about Experimental Design', and '2008 ANZCCART Conference "Blue sky to deep water: the reality and the promise"'. At the bottom, there is a 'Download the latest ANZCCART News 20.2' link.

Fig. 1. Our Home page at [www.adelaide.edu.au/ANZCCART/](http://www.adelaide.edu.au/ANZCCART/)

internal and external web pages that contain important information. We also have direct links to the ANZCCART New Zealand web page (which contains a lot of information relevant to our New Zealand colleagues in particular) and hyperlinks that facilitate joining the ANZCCART email list, allow people to directly email a question to ANZCCART, or contact ANZCCART at either its Adelaide Head office or its New Zealand Office in Wellington.

Some of the pages within the ANZCCART web site contain information specifically tailored for members of an Animal Ethics Committees (AEC), students, teachers, researchers or other specific target groups, while others provide information about published ANZCCART monographs and our other publications such as ANZCCART News, Fact Sheets, conferences, workshops and other related events.

One of the more important links on the ANZCCART home page assists people to join the ANZCCART email list. This list has a very large membership from around Australia, New Zealand and the rest of the world – in fact we have members from over 24 countries. As the membership of the ANZCCART email list is so diverse (in terms of both the people on it and their geographical location) we are currently exploring options that will hopefully allow us to either send out information to everyone on the list or specific groups within the list – depending on relevance. This will have the added advantage of ensuring that we can send out more emails to target groups without bombarding everyone with a lot of annoying and irrelevant emails. In doing so, it will also help us to fully comply with Australia's strict Anti- SPAM laws.

The hyperlink on our home page that facilitates sending a specific question to ANZCCART goes straight to an email template so anyone can seek specific advice when required.

An important aspect of this template is the section that requests some information about the person submitting the question. While this may superficially appear slightly intrusive, it is clearly important to

The image shows a web form titled "Email a Question to ANZCCART". At the top left, there is a logo for ANZCCART (Australian & New Zealand Council for the Care of Animals in Research and Teaching) and the text "anzccart HUMANE SCIENCE". Below the logo are navigation links: "ANZCCART Home", "ANZCCART NZ", "Join Our Mailing List", "Email a Question", and "Contact Us". The form itself has the following fields and options:

- Your name\*
- Email address\*
- Affiliation\*
- Address
- Country\*
- What best describes you?\*
  - Animal Welfareist
  - Animal Ethics Committee Member
  - Researcher
  - Student
  - Teacher
  - Other
- Question\*

At the bottom left, there is a note: "ANZCCART collects this data so we can tailor the information provided to best suit your needs." At the bottom right, there are "Submit" and "Clear" buttons. A small asterisk indicates that fields with an asterisk are required.

Fig. 2. The email template for submitting questions

structure the answer and specific information in a manner that will be of use to the person submitting the question. For example, a question on appropriate analgesia techniques coming from a researcher would need to be answered in a technically correct fashion and quite specific detail, while the same question submitted by a year 9 school student might focus more on the importance of providing adequate analgesia to ensure compliance with the 'The Code of Practice'. Even in cases where such a question may be submitted by an AEC member, some information regarding that person's background and role on the committee can be important as the use of language may vary between responses sent to a Veterinarian and a Lay member representing the general community.

While our web site and email system does clearly provide for our on-going communication needs fairly well, we still rely heavily on direct contact with the people that tend to rely on ANZCCART as a source of reliable information. To this end, our annual conference, specific workshops and other various meetings that ANZCCART hosts each year also provide important avenues for communication. The Annual ANZCCART conference usually attracts 180 – 200 delegates and is an excellent example of how we can continue to foster an informed public debate of the issues associated with the use of animals. We always endeavour to have a variety of speakers representing different perspectives and enjoy a frank but friendly debate of these issues – both within formal sessions and (in line with Australian customs in particular) over a glass or two of "refreshment" at the end of each day.

### Discussion:

In order to consider how effective our communication strategy really is, it is probably worth looking at some of the major groups with whom we routinely work.

The fact that we are fortunate enough to have all the relevant State Government Departments as

members of ANZCCART is an excellent indicator of the effectiveness of communication that exists between government and ANZCCART. The fact that ANZCCART was also invited by the relevant department within the Federal Government to participate in the implementation of the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS) within the research & teaching sector is also a good indicator of the open lines of communication that exist between government and ANZCCART at all levels.

The relationship between Universities right across Australia and New Zealand and ANZCCART is very strong with both Universities Australia (formerly known as the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee) and the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors Committee both being strong supporters of ANZCCART. We also enjoy a close working relationship with the staff involved with administering all aspects of animal related work within most tertiary educational institutions across the region as well as a number of AEC members associated with these institutions.

Our ability to communicate with the general public is far more difficult to gauge as there are few simple measures that can be applied at this level. While ANZCCART is sometimes consulted by various media outlets for comment on issues that relate to the scientific use of animals, the inherent problems that frequently go along with working with many members of the press, such as being misquoted or quoted out of context do strongly suggest that this is an area where we may need to improve our efficacy.

Another area where it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of our communications is our dealings with protest groups. While we do work fairly closely with some and rely on them to help provide speakers for our annual conference etc., we have in recent years; found that these same groups are supplying both some of our conference delegates and speakers as well as the protesters that try to disrupt the conference. In looking at this aspect, I think it is important to recognise the high levels of reliance these groups have on the mainstream media outlets to raise their public profile and thereby solicit public donations. One might therefore suggest that our lines of communication are effective, but we are providing these groups with a soft target so they can attract media interest.

While I believe it is reasonable to assert that there is no single, ideal method for communicating with a wide and diverse population, we can assume that different techniques will work for different people. So, when these different aspects of our communication strategy are finally considered as a part of the whole, it would seem that a multi- tiered communication strategy that employs modern electronic means, face – to – face meetings and a relatively large network of people within the region provides us with an effective communication strategy.

