

Our own bit of theatre

By Dr Llew Richards, Chief Executive, IANZ

Like all great (and not so great) theatrical productions, a lot depends on what goes on behind the scenes in getting a show “on the road” and keeping it there. This is also true of presenting an accreditation authority that is amongst the best in the world, as I know IANZ is. We are constantly at the forefront of changes in the standards and conformance industry. Not only do we need to be “up with the play” on best practices, we need to be directly involved in any changes to these practices so that New Zealand interests are protected. For instance, it is thanks to the combined efforts of New Zealand (IANZ) and Australia (NATA) that a strong international non-accreditation lobby was prevented from replacing the medical testing standard ISO 15189 with one that would not have maintained the rigour necessary to enable us to provide independent recognition of competence in medical testing laboratories.

We continually strive for acceptance of accredited testing and inspection reports (from New Zealand) on a global basis. There are now 49 countries (including New Zealand) that are signatories to mutual recognition arrangements allowing recognition of each other’s accredited reports. This number is expected to rise to over 60 countries in the next three years. IANZ has senior personnel involved on technical and management committees in the regional (Asia Pacific) and international accreditation cooperation fora which, while time consuming, is essential for accreditation to remain beneficial for New Zealand.

Within New Zealand, we are concerned that continued competition for inspection body accreditation risks compromising the credibility of our accreditation, particularly in regulated areas critical to safety and public health. It is also an issue affecting major export sectors, where overseas regulators seek the assurance given by a single national accreditation authority. We have submitted our view on this issue to the parliamentary Commerce Committee reviewing the Standards and Conformance Bill, and to the Ministry of Economic Development which is currently reviewing all aspects of the standards, accreditation and metrology infrastructure.

In our efforts to keep the show on the road and handle our growing accreditation activity, we have increased the number of assessors to nineteen in recent months. This includes two new programmes involving National Screening Unit (Ministry of Health) assessments and Building Consent Authority (Department of Building and Housing) accreditation. We have worked closely with these two government agencies in setting sound standards and criteria for assessment for their respective programmes. Other new staff have been employed to replace vacancies that have arisen. These new recruits are now well into their training and “on the road” to becoming lead auditors. Having all these new people in the organisation is helping to lift the heavy workload a number of our staff were carrying.

Tribute

I would like to acknowledge the passing of my predecessor, Jack Garside. Words like integrity, vision, and determination come to mind when describing Jack. He was a champion in the accreditation world, both within New Zealand and on the international stage. Through his efforts, accreditation is a highly respected industry today and we are forever grateful for his initiatives, leadership and drive. Our condolences go to his wife Margaret and family.