

**RECORD OF MEETING
OF THE
APLAC
PROFICIENCY
COMMITTEE
IN
SINGAPORE**

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SINGAPORE: 1 FEBRUARY 1996, 9:00 AM START

Attendance (committee members only):

Mr Alan Squirrell, NATA (Australia) - Chairman
Mr Ian Bentley, NATA (Australia) - Secretary
Mr Peter Unger (USA)
Mr Terence Chan (Hong Kong)
Ms Sylvia K Y Lin (Chinese Taipei)

1. INTRODUCTION

The chair introduced the members of the Committee to the observing delegates and advised that the agenda items would also be covered in the open workshop in the afternoon. He then gave a brief overview of the purpose of APLAC proficiency testing and its importance in the development of mutual recognition agreements.

2. REVIEW OF APLAC PROFICIENCY TESTING DOCUMENTATION

APLAC Document 1 (Third Draft, May 1995)

Interlaboratory Comparisons - Calibration and Measurement Proficiency Programs

It was agreed that the experience gained by the program coordinators should be incorporated into a fourth (and final) draft which would then be circulated to all APLAC proficiency contacts for comments by the end of May 1996.

Any comments received would be considered with a view to issuing a final document in July 1996.

APLAC Document 2 (Second Draft, January 1996)

Interlaboratory Comparisons - Testing Programs

The first draft was sent out in August 1995. Comments received from Committee members were incorporated into the second draft along with appropriate comments from other APLAC delegates.

The second draft was tabled at the meeting and will now be distributed to delegates for further comments by the end of May 96. Again, it is intended to issue a final document in July 1996.

The question of whether these documents needed to be approved by the APLAC General Assembly was discussed. It was agreed that this should not be necessary as they were being widely distributed for comment before finalisation.

APLAC Proficiency Testing Directory (Jan 1996)

The directory lists regional testing programs that are available to laboratories in the Asia-Pacific region. The directory will be circulated to delegates and further input sought.

It was suggested that this directory be put on the Internet.

It was pointed out that not all programs may be unconditionally available to laboratories in the whole region. Hence, any limitations on availability should be stated in the directory.

3. PLANS FOR APLAC AP-T001 (METALS IN WATER - CHEMICAL ANALYSIS)

The responses to the questionnaire indicated that a "Metals in Water" program was the first priority.

This program will be coordinated by NATA and Mr Squirrell gave an overview of the program.

APLAC members are to nominate a maximum of 8 of their national laboratories to participate and details of the proposed laboratories must be provided to NATA by the end of February 96. It was agreed that preference should be given to the selection of accredited laboratories (where possible).

It was agreed that broad concentration ranges should be provided for each sample as in practice, laboratories usually know the source of the water sample and select an appropriate method. However, no particular method will be prescribed - laboratories will be requested to use their normal (accredited) method.

Samples are to be sent out on 1 April 1996 and results are to be submitted by 30 April 1996.

It was agreed that samples should be sent to the participating accreditation body for them to distribute to the laboratories in their own country.

The question of whether uncertainty statements should be requested was raised. This was considered to be inappropriate at this stage. A number of further suggestions in relation to the draft documentation supplied were received and will be adopted.

The question of whether it was appropriate for laboratories to fax a copy of their results directly back to the organising body (NATA) was discussed. It was agreed that this was the most efficient way of keeping the program on track and that it should not be a problem as laboratories will send their original results (and any supporting documentation) to their own accreditation body at the same time.

4. REVIEW OF CURRENT CALIBRATION PROGRAMS

APM001 - Dimensional Metrology

Mr Bentley (NATA) gave a status report on the program. The artefacts have completed circulation and are at the reference laboratory for final recalibration. A draft final report will be ready by May 1996.

The question was put to the Committee as to whether all specific measurement points should be specified in the instructions or whether laboratories should be asked to use their normal methods (which would lead to some differences due to the form error in the plug and ring gauge). The Committee agreed that laboratories should use their normal methods as this reflected what really happens in practice and it is essential to highlight differences that may cause problems if we are to accept each other's reports.

Graphs showing the distribution of En ratios and also differences from the reference laboratory and the associated uncertainties were presented.

APM002 - Mass

Mr Ian Bentley (NATA) gave a status report on the program. The artefacts have completed circulation and final recalibration is complete. A draft final report will be ready by April/May 1996 for review by the Committee.

The question was raised as to the how to allocate reference values when there has been a slight change in the artefact when recalibrated at the reference laboratory. It was acknowledged that where the drift could be assumed to be fairly constant, an average of the before and after reference calibrations could be used. However, for artefacts such as masses where it is more likely to be a step-change due to improper handling, the "best case" reference value should be given (i.e. the one that gives the lowest En number). This approach may advantage some laboratories. However, we cannot afford to disadvantage any laboratory by making an assumption about where a step-change may have occurred.

APM003 - Resistance

Ms Sylvia Lin (CNLA) gave a status report on the program (and later provided all delegates with written update). The circulation is running approximately one month behind the original schedule.

Interim reports for the last five participating countries will be issued once the artefacts have been recalibrated at the National Measurement Laboratory, Chinese Taipei.

APM004 - AC / DC Voltage

Mr Terence Chan (HOKLAS) gave a status report on the program. Unfortunately, a major delay has occurred due to the artefact being impounded by Customs in Brasil.

The circulation schedule will be reissued once the artefact is recovered. NATA may supply a duplicate artefact for a second loop in order to cut down the overall timescale of this program.

A graph was presented showing the results chronologically and these indicated that there may be a slight drift in the artefact. This will be confirmed after further results are received and its next recalibration at the reference laboratory (Hong Kong Government Standards and Calibration Laboratory).

APM005 - Thermometer

Ms Barbara Voon (SINGLAS) explained why this program had not commenced. Initially, the program was to use thermocouples. However, due to instability and other technical problems it has been decided to use a Platinum Resistance Thermometer (PRT).

NATA will supply the artefact(s), SISIR will act as the reference laboratory and provide technical advice and SINGLAS will coordinate the program.

Questionnaires will be circulated to APLAC members and a participation schedule drawn up.

5. FUTURE CALIBRATION AND TESTING PROGRAMS

Calibration

From the questionnaires received Capacitance/Inductance, Pressure and Force were the highest priority areas for APLAC members.

CNLA (Chinese Taipei) volunteered to coordinate the force program.

NATA (Australia) volunteered to coordinate the pressure program.

A2LA (United States) agreed to coordinate the capacitance/ inductance program subject to support from NIST.

The current NATA RF Power, Sound Level and EMC programs will also be offered to APLAC members in the near future.

Testing

NATA to coordinate the Metals in Water chemical program in April 1996.

CNLA to coordinate a Nuisance Dust program in November 1996.

NATA to coordinate the Metal Products (mechanical) program later this year.

The possibility of using commercial testing programs that are available in the USA and other countries was raised. It was suggested that there may be problems as the APLAC programs may be seen as unfair competition. The Chairman expressed the view that with the current small number of APLAC programs being offered coupled with the fact that these programs were freely advertised (in the APLAC Directory) there should not be any difficulties. The possibility of APLAC working in conjunction with some external

programs (e.g. as sample suppliers) was also discussed. In the meantime, the participation of accredited labs in listed external programs was encouraged.

6. FINAL REPORT FORMATS AND CORRECTIVE ACTION

It was agreed to circulate draft final reports to the Committee for review and then to all participating accreditation bodies for comment prior to publishing the final report.

Corrective actions for each laboratory (by code number only) are to be included in the final report. The Chairman reiterated the importance of accreditation bodies being able to demonstrate that they had taken appropriate corrective action following poor performance by any of their accredited laboratories. This would be a crucial component during a mutual recognition agreement evaluation.

A sample uncertainty budget using the ISO methods will be included in the final report for the assistance of members.

Guidelines for the calibration of specific equipment and interpretation of standards will be issued as a separate document where necessary.

7. IDENTIFICATION OF COUNTRIES

The question of whether country codes for participating labs should be included in the final proficiency reports (as with EAL) was discussed. It was agreed that at this stage, (where we do not yet have a multi-lateral MRA) it may cause unnecessary sensitivity. It was noted that, when MRA's are being negotiated then the country involved will obviously need to reveal the performance of its laboratories to the evaluation team. Hence, there is no benefit in identifying countries in the widely distributed final reports which would be contrary to the APLAC spirit of constructive development of laboratory accreditation in the region.

Also, in countries where only a small number of calibration laboratories exist for some areas of measurement (sometimes only one) the identity of the actual laboratory could be deduced and hence its confidentiality compromised.

8. PROBLEMS WITH CIRCULATION OF ARTEFACTS / SAMPLES

The Secretary provided an overview of some of the difficulties encountered with customs and couriers and the Chairman advised on action that has already been taken through APEC in an attempt to improve the situation. It was agreed that participating countries should also take a leading role in dealing with their customs in relation to transport into and from their own country

The current customs declaration form was then reviewed. The additional phrases "*for testing/ scientific purposes only*" and "*no commercial value*" were suggested. It was agreed that, where necessary, the Declaration should be translated into different languages.

9. GENERAL POLICY MATTERS

The inclusion of non-member bodies in proficiency programs was raised. It was agreed that these should be treated on a case by case basis and recognised that some may become APLAC members in the future. It was agreed that existing APLAC members should participate first. Then other requests for participation would be at the discretion of the organising accreditation body.

It was agreed that national metrology laboratories should be discouraged from participating in APLAC calibration programs as they have the opportunity to participate in APMP programs which are more appropriate. Accredited laboratories should also be preferred to non-accredited laboratories (unless they are seeking accreditation).

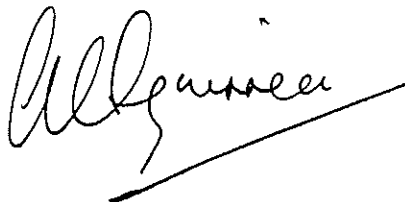
It was suggested that to ensure efficient operation that future APLAC Proficiency Committee meetings be restricted to committee members and a single proficiency representative from each member accreditation body.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

In relation to future MRAs, the Chairman raised the matter of how much proficiency testing should be offered to labs by accreditation bodies. He advised the committee that he had referred this question to the APLAC MRA Committee (refer minutes of the meeting).

The Proficiency Committee agreed that it was important to set some "ground rules" in this matter as it was not clear in ISO Guide 58. Factors like the number of accredited calibration labs and the availability of resources to the accreditation body would need to be considered as well as the nature of programs offered (e.g. nation, regional, external). The importance of one-off practical tests (measurement audits) coordinated by national accreditation bodies was stressed.

The meeting closed at 12:45 pm

 14/2/96

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