



Your ref.: 53575
30 January 2014

Australian Competition & Consumer Commission
GPO Box 520
Melbourne, Vic 3001
By email to adjudication@accc.gov.au

Dear Sir /Madam,

Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists and Managers Australia (APESMA) – Application for Authorisation A91402 – Interested Party Consultation

We refer to your letter dated 8th January 2014 regarding the application for authorisation by The Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists and Managers Australia (APESMA). Whilst the applicant has in the meantime changed its name to Professionals Australia, we will be using their old acronym APESMA throughout this letter to ensure consistency with the application as lodged with the ACCC.

The Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT) is the national association for the translating and interpreting profession. Founded in 1987, it is affiliated with the International Federation of Translators (FIT) and with a membership of 650 has the largest member base of all Australian associations in this sector today. AUSIT seeks to set professional standards, improve public recognition and promote higher levels of competence across the profession. Members are committed to pursuing continuous professional development and training opportunities. AUSIT members adhere to a strict Code of Ethics which is recognised as the benchmark for ethical conduct of interpreters and translators in Australia and New Zealand. It was first launched in 1996 and was revised and updated in 2012.

There are many aspects to the translating and interpreting industry in Australia. In the private sector, where the end-user of the service makes the buying decision, a market place has developed where both sides involved in a transaction have some degree of negotiating power, although there are some problems in that market as well. The big issue is with public sector translating and interpreting, where the government (or government agencies) make the buying decision on behalf of the community and then tenders out the work to agencies who in turn subcontract to individual translators and interpreters. The competitive nature of the tendering process, coupled with an

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erosion of quality standards, drives prices down and the reduction in prices is then passed on to the subcontractor in forms of lower pay and worsening conditions on a “take it or leave it” basis.

AUSIT fully supports the application made by APESMA and also supports the claims made by APESMA therein. In particular we support APESMA’s public benefit claims (item 4). Interpreters have borne the bulk of so-called cost savings, both in monetary terms as well as conditions, in public sector interpreting for the last 15 years. This has led to interpreters being unable to upkeep their professionalism. With cost being the main determinant in contract negotiations between interpreting and government agencies, the end-result is the increased use of inexperienced interpreters and disregard for ethics and quality. This also puts end-users such as patients in hospitals, plaintiffs and defendants in court, refugees in detention centres and others at risk of receiving inferior services with no avenue to redress the issues as they do not select their interpreters and they are not represented by any groups.

The low pay, lack of career prospects and inferior working conditions are driving experienced interpreters away from working for the public sector (e.g. public hospitals and other healthcare institutions, legal settings such as courts, tribunals, offices of the Department of Human Services etc.) They either tend to the private sector or leave the industry altogether, seeking greener pastures elsewhere. We have recently seen a big translation agency advertise to recruit bilingual speakers to become interpreters including in some established languages such as Italian. With appropriate pay and conditions in place, there would be no need to hire inexperienced and untrained bilingual speakers as interpreters – the NAATI website currently lists 20 Italian accredited interpreters in Victoria who pay to be on the NAATI directory, hence the true number of already-accredited and experienced professionals would be a lot higher as many professionals have stopped paying to be displayed on the NAATI directory.

Approving APESMA’s application will, in our opinion, also avoid situations where the inability of interpreters to negotiate terms will lead to ever decreasing remuneration and worsening conditions to the extent that the effective hourly payment for an assignment including expenses and travel born by the interpreters potentially falls below the minimum hourly wage. This is what happened in the recent Victorian government tender cited in the application. Without representation, the next tender will be awarded based on even lower rates and worse conditions.

Approving APESMA’s application will, in our opinion, increase the ability of interpreters to be able to afford (more) continuous professional development. At present, many struggle to complete even the minimal professional development required to renew their NAATI accreditation.

Approving APESMA’s application will, in our opinion, also result in the increase of interpreters being employed as full-time employees. Given the critical function they fulfil especially in health and legal settings, this is a desirable outcome and will lead to an increase in quality and efficiency throughout the industry. The current low pay and adverse conditions do not allow interpreters to make a living out of public-sector interpreting alone.



Approving APESMA's application will, in our opinion, put an end to agencies mis-applying the AUSIT Code of Ethics to elicit particular outcomes from their interpreters. Adherence to the Code of Ethics has become part of the employment / engagement conditions for many interpreters with agencies, however, recent discoveries have shown that some agencies try to impose conditions on interpreters citing the Code of Ethics where said conditions are not part of the actual Code.

In summary, AUSIT is of the expressed opinion that the application made by APESMA ought to be approved as it is the only way to ensure exploitation of interpreters in the public-sector interpreting is reduced and that quality standards in critical settings including health and legal can be maintained.

Should you require any clarifications or seek further information, please do not hesitate to contact our Executive Officer at eo@ausit.org at your convenience.

With Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'A. Arnall', is positioned above the name.

Annamaria Arnall
AUSIT National President

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'D. Muller', is positioned above the name.

Daniel Muller
AUSIT Executive Officer