Fiscal Year 2021
Panel Outcome Report
Animal Health (NP 103)

TODD WARD Digitally signed by TODD WARD
Date: 2022.05.20 11:57:47 -05'00'

Todd Ward, Ph.D., Scientific Quality Review Officer
(January 2020-December 2021)

Date

MARQUEA KING Digitally signed by MARQUEA KING
Date: 2022.05.23 09:36:16 -04'00'

Marquea D. King, Ph.D., Director/Program Coordinator

Date

Panel Outcome Report FY 2021
Animal Health (NP 103)

This Panel Outcome Report is a summary of the Animal Health, National Program (103) Office of Scientific Quality Review (OSQR) Project Plan Peer Review (PPPR) process held from May – September 2021.

The mission of the program is to deliver scientific information and tools to detect, control, and eradicate animal diseases that impact agriculture and public health.

This panel outcome report is intended to inform the Office of National Programs (ONP) and each Area of research (research scientist or SY) progress as it relates to the NP 103. Data tables display outcomes of scoring by Areas, Panels, and overall program.

Selected chairs (Table 1) were in part, recommended by National Program Leaders (NPLs) from NP 103 and/or previous OSQR service; others were sought based on their nationally recognized expertise by the OSQR Director. They were examined for suitability to lead a panel review, screened for conflicts of interest (COI) and finally concurred upon by the current Scientific Quality Review Officer (SQRO), Dr. Todd Ward.

Table 1. Panels reviewed for the Animal Health, National Program (103)

Panel	Panel Chair	Panel Meeting (Re-Review)	Number of Panelists	Number of Projects
1. Biodefense Foreign Animal Diseases	Chad Mire	8/19/21	6	5
2. Biodefense Emerging Diseases	Lark Coffey	9/16/21 3/24/22	5	4
3. Antimicrobial Resistance	Jun Lin	6/22/21 10/13/21	5	4
4. Zoonotic Bacterial Diseases	Angela Arenas	9/20/21 1/18/22	5	4
5. Respiratory Bacterial Diseases	Suresh Tikoo	8/25/21	5	4
6. Production Bacterial Diseases	Adel Talaat	8/18/21	3	3
7. Endemic Viral Diseases	Yehia Saif	8/31/21 1/11/22	5	4
8. Parasitic Diseases	Fiona Tomley	8/24/21 12/2/21	4	3
9. Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy	Ad hoc	Ad hoc	3	1

*Reviews are conducted by no less than two (or greater) expert panel reviewers providing independent written reviews and scores without group panel deliberation. Scores reflect the average of no less than two expert reviewers and written reviews are compiled and screened by OSQR Director.

Review Process

Following panel review for each plan, OSQR Director, with SQRO concurrence, sends each Area Director a panel consensus recommendation document. This may include recommendations for revision of the plan to which researchers are required to respond in writing and, as appropriate, revise their written plans in accordance with guidelines as detailed in the OSQR Handbook (see www.ars.usda.gov/osqr).

In addition, as part of the panel deliberation, a scoring of the overall quality of the plan is judged based on the degree of revision the panel deems is required. This scoring is termed an “Action Class.” Each reviewer is asked to anonymously

provide an Action Class rating for each plan. OSQR assigns a *numerical equivalent* to each Action Class rating and then averages these to arrive at an overall Action Class score for the plan.

Action Class is defined as follows:

No Revision Required. An excellent plan; no revision is required, but minor changes to the project plan may be suggested.[1]

Minor Revision Required. The project plan is feasible as written, requires only minor clarification or revision to increase quality to a higher level.

Moderate Revision Required. The project plan is basically feasible but requires changes or revision to the work on one or more objectives, perhaps involving alterations of the experimental approaches in order to increase quality to a higher level and may need some rewriting for greater clarity.

Passed Review:

For plans receiving one of the above three Action Class scores (No Revision, Minor Revision, or Moderate Revision), scientists are required to respond, in writing, to address all panel comments in the consensus recommendation document; revise their project plan as appropriate; and submit the revised plan and responses to the OSQR through their Area Office. Both the updated plan and the recommendations' form are reviewed by the SQRO and, once they are satisfied that all review concerns have been satisfactorily addressed, the project plan is certified, the Area Office is notified, and the project plan may be implemented.

Certification:

Certification is contingent upon making a good faith effort to satisfactorily address panel comments and recommendations. A plan has not "passed" the OSQR PPPR process until the SQRO's certification is delivered to the Area.

Major Revision Required. There are significant flaws in the experimental design and/or approach or lack of clarity which hampers understanding. Significant revision is needed.

Not Feasible. The project plan, as presented, has major scientific or technical flaws. Deficiencies exist in experimental design, methods, presentation, or expertise which make it unlikely to succeed.

Failed Review:

For plans receiving an Action Class score of Major Revision or Not Feasible, scientists are required to address, in writing, all panel comments in the consensus recommendation document; revise their project plan as appropriate; and submit the revised plan and responses to the OSQR through their Area Office. The plan *MUST* then undergo a Re-Review by the initial deliberating panel, at which time a second set of consensus recommendations and second Action Class score are obtained.

Per the Re-Review, if the plan receives an Action Class score of a No Revision, Minor Revision, or Moderate Revision, the project plan may be implemented after following the **Passed Review** section above. Plans receiving a second Major Revision, or Not Feasible score are considered failed reviews. The Action Class and Consensus Recommendations from the Re-Review are provided to the Area with NO further option for revision or review on that particular project plan as it has been submitted.

Such plans may be terminated, reassigned, or restructured at the discretion of the Area Office and ONP. For plans receiving Major Revision, it may be elected not to further revise them and to end review with the plan not receiving

[1] While a No Revision Action Class would imply that change to the plan is not required, where the panel requests specific additions to the plan, if accepted, should be incorporated into the updated plan.

certification (plan fails review). For those receiving a score of Not Feasible, Area and National Program Leader (NPL) approval are needed for the plan to be revised for re-review. Otherwise, the plan will be considered to have failed review. Subsequent action with regard to the research and researchers is left to Area and ONP-NPL leadership.

At the conclusion of each PPPR deliberation, the chair and panel reviewers are asked to provide general statements or recommendations on the overall process as well as the general quality of the plans which underwent review. The Chair is specifically asked to provide a Panel Chair Statement which they feel focuses on the overall conduct of the review or any broad areas with regard to the research they feel would benefit future researchers or the Agency as a whole. Copies of such statements for (NP 103) can be found following this report.

Review Outcomes

Reviews can vary, but ultimately, depends on a combination of the panelists selected and the scientific writing capabilities of the team who wrote the project plan. The OSQR is responsible for assuring that each panel contains subject matter experts who provide knowledgeable, clear, rigorous, and fair assessments. Therefore, PPPR panels vary in their overall outcomes.

Uniquely, the ability of an ARS research team to respond to panel recommendations/comments in order to *revise and improve project plans is, perhaps, the greatest strength of the ARS PPPR process.*

ARS uses the National Program Panel Outcome Report as a measure of scientific progress and as a demonstration of overall program quality, how well researchers understand and address the needs of the expert panel reviewers. Initial review scores that are moderate or higher are recorded as such and will not be certified as having completed the PPPR until the SQRO has deemed that all reviewer concerns have been satisfactorily addressed. For lower scores/failed reviews, the panel provides a re-review score, which is considered along with the initial review score.

Table 2.
Initial and Re-review Scores for Animal Health, National Program (103)

Panel	No revision	Minor	Moderate	Major	Not Feasible	Re-Review
1. Biodefense Foreign Animal Diseases		4	1			
2. Biodefense Emerging Diseases		1	2	1		No Revision
3. Antimicrobial Resistance		3		1		Moderate
4. Zoonotic Bacterial Diseases			2	2		1 Minor 1 Major
5. Respiratory Bacterial Diseases		1	3			
6. Production Bacterial Diseases		1	2			
7. Endemic Viral Diseases		1	1	2		1 Moderate 1 Minor
8. Parasitic Diseases		2		1		No Revision
9. Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy	1					

*Review conducted by no less than two (or greater) expert panel reviewers providing independent written reviews and scores without group panel deliberation. Scores reflect the average of no less than two expert reviewers and written reviews are compiled and screened by OSQR Director.

Table 3.
Area Scores for Animal Health, National Program (103)

Area	No revision	Minor	Moderate	Major	Not Feasible
MWA	1	2	6	2	
NEA		5	1	1	
PA		2	2		
PWA		2	1	2	
SEA		2	1	2	

Table 4.
Overall Scores for Animal Health, National Program (103)

	No revision	Minor	Moderate	Major	Not Feasible
# Plans with each score	1	13	11	7	

Overall Panel Characteristics:

Panel Characteristics

The OSQR PPPR relies heavily on expert panel member selection by the OSQR Director and SQRO selected Panel Chairs. ARS scientists, research leaders, and ONP are encouraged to recommend panelists they understand to be free of any COIs. While the selected/seated Panel Chair is under no obligation to use Agency recommended panelists, the SQRO must review and approve the Chair's panelist selections and may ask for substitutions or provide additional experts for consideration.

Factors and qualifications considered in PPPR panel selection (chair and panelist) such as being a qualified expert overall in the field being reviewed, research tenure, publication record, award history, geographic location, overall diversity, and availability to participate fully in the process, all play an integral role in who is invited to serve an ARS/OSQR PPPR panel. Many of the reviews are composed with a balance of nationally and internationally recognized experts. Tables 5-6 display various characteristics of the panel composition; all affiliations were accurate at the time of the panel review.

Affiliations

Peer reviewers are affiliated with several types of institutions, primarily those in academia, but also special interest groups and industry. In some cases, peer reviewers have recently retired but are still active as consultants, scientific editorial board members, and members of professional societies.

Table 5.

Panelist Faculty Rank and Affiliations for Animal Health, National Program (103)

Panel	Professor	Associate Professor	Assistant Professor	Government (Agency)	Industry & Industry Organizations
1. Biodefense Foreign Animal Diseases	2	1		1	2
2. Biodefense Emerging Diseases		1	3	1	
3. Antimicrobial Resistance	2	1	2		
4. Zoonotic Bacterial Diseases	2	1	2		
5. Respiratory Bacterial Diseases	2	2	1		
6. Production Bacterial Diseases	3				
7. Endemic Viral Diseases	3		2		
8. Parasitic Diseases	4				
9. Transmissible Spongiform	1			2	

Research Impact and Ethnicity/Gender

The OSQR PPPR process is lauded as a rigorous and objective ARS function striving for the highest possible scientific credibility. In general, panelists shall hold a doctoral degree unless the discipline in question is one which does not subscribe to a doctorate level education to achieve the highest recognition and qualification (e.g., engineers and modeling specialists). Panelists are also judged by their most recent professional accomplishments (e.g. awards and publications completed in the last five years). Finally, the panelists who are currently performing or leading research to address a problem similar to those being researched in the National Program under review are preferred.

Table 6. Panel Additional Information Animal Health, National Program (103)

Panel	H-Index Average	Gender	Geographic Locations
1. Biodefense Foreign Animal Diseases	25	3 Male 3 Female	1 PA, 1 NEA, 1 Sweden, 1 PWA, 1 South Africa, 1 SEA
2. Biodefense Emerging Diseases	23	3 Male 2 Female	2 SEA, 1 PWA, 1 MWA, 1 Canada
3. Antimicrobial Resistance	21	4 Male 1 Female	2 MWA, 1 PA, 2 SEA
4. Zoonotic Bacterial Diseases	20	2 Male 3 Female	2 PA, 1 MWA, 1 NEA, 1 SEA
5. Respiratory Bacterial Diseases	15	2 Male 3 Female	1 SEA, 1 PA, 1 PWA, 1 MWA, 1 Canada
6. Production Bacterial Diseases	29	2 Male 1 Female	1 MWA, 2 PWA
7. Endemic Viral Diseases	27	1 Male 4 Female	3 MWA, 1 PA, 1 PWA
8. Parasitic Diseases	36	2 Male 2 Female	2 United Kingdom, 1 Canada, 1 PWA
9. Transmissible Spongiform Encephalopathy	42	2 Male 1 Female	2 PA, 1 MWA

List of Panel Chairs

1. **Biodefense Foreign Animal Diseases**
   Chad Mire, Associate Professor
   University of Texas Medical Branch
   Education: University of Tennessee Health Science Center

2. **Biodefense Emerging Diseases**
   Lark Coffey, Associate Professor
   UC Davis
   Education: University of Texas Medical Branch

3. **Antimicrobial Resistance**
   Jun Lin, Professor
   University of Tennessee
   Education: Ohio State University

4. **Zoonotic Bacterial Diseases**
   Angela Arenas, Assistant Professor
   Texas A&M University
   Education: Texas A&M University

5. **Respiratory Bacterial Diseases**
   Suresh Tikoo, Professor
   University of Saskatchewan
   Education: University of Saskatchewan

6. **Production Bacterial Diseases**
   Adel Talaat, Professor
   University of Wisconsin-Madison
   Education: University of Maryland School of Medicine

7. **Endemic Viral Diseases**
   Yehia Saif, Professor
   Ohio State University
   Education: Ohio State University

8. **Parasitic Diseases** Fiona
   Tomley, Professor
   University of London
   Education: Manchester University

NP 103 Animal Health, National Program Panel Chair Statements

Panel Chair responsibilities include providing the OSQR with a statement that describes their overall panel experience, how the panel was conducted, and general quality of the plans reviewed. It does not lend itself to discussing details of specific research project plan reviews nor attribution to individual panelists. Panel Chairs are given a format to follow for writing their statements, however, are free to discuss what they believe is important for broader audiences.

utmb Health
Microbiology & Immunology

Dr. Todd Ward, PhD
Scientific Quality Review Officer
Office of Scientific Quality Review
Agricultural Research Service, USDA
5601 Sunnyside Avenue, MS 5142
Beltsville, MD 20705

Dear Dr. Ward,

On 19 August 2021, I had the pleasure of serving as Panel Chair for the program review of USDA-ARS NP 103 Panel 1 on Biodefense Foreign Animal Diseases. This was my first time serving as a panel chair for USDA-ARS national program review and as such was not aware of the process when I was approached to chair this panel. I found the process of learning about and training for the chair responsibilities, identifying reviewers, vetting reviewers for conflicts of interest, inviting reviewers, receiving the proposals for review, scheduling the date of review, and the review itself to be smooth as it was well coordinated by Linda DalyLucas. She set the foundation for this review panel and was a strength of the OSQR.

The panel review of USDA-ARS NP 103 Panel 1 on Biodefense Foreign Animal Diseases benefitted from a strong, diverse, and international committee with experts on each foreign animal disease found in the proposals for this national program. All proposals had quality written reviews that were in-depth but concise enough to offer comments and suggestions that should provide the PIs of the proposals a clear path to address the comments and strengthen the proposals. On the day of the review panel discussions, each primary and secondary reviewer were well prepared for discussing their assigned proposals to the extent that other panel members who were not assigned these programs participated in the discussions based on how each proposal was presented. This review panel covered 5 proposals, where each were deemed to have merit and have a high probability of success. All of the reviewers had a positive view of the proposals and the overall program that were presented and reviewed although, the reviewers did notice and discuss some disparities between the depth of some proposals versus the others but also noted that no one on the panel have an understanding of how the USDA-ARS sets the objectives and timelines.

Overall, the review panel had a favorable opinion and were excited about the NP103 Biodefense Foreign Animal Diseases program proposals and the review process for USDA-ARS OSQR. I would like to thank you for the opportunity to serve as chair of this panel and please feel free to reach out to me for any further comments or clarifications you may need.

Best regards,

Chad Mire, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Member Institute for Human Infections and Immunity
Member Center for Biodefense and Emerging Infectious Diseases
Department of Microbiology and Immunology
University of Texas Medical Branch

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, DAVIS

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RE: Panel chair statement after NP 103 review

Dear Dr. Ward,

I chaired review of applications in the USDA Animal Health Program NP 103 on September 16, 2021. Four subject matter expert reviewers and I served on the panel. Each reviewer provided written reviews in advance of the meeting, and we discussed the 4 applications for 2.5 hours. The reviewers jointly provided the written and verbal feedback in the *Panel recommendations for ARS research project plan* documents.

There was consensus among the panel that all 4 applications were from leaders in their respective fields who possess appropriate expertise, facilities, equipment, and collaborative networks to accomplish the proposed projects. There was also agreement that all proposed projects are appropriate for the USDA-assigned objectives, with strong rigor of prior research supporting many project goals. Most (3) of the applications received passing scores of minor or moderate revision and 1 received a failing score of major revision. Some reviewers felt that the scope of projects was appropriate, while others indicated some were overambitious within the period of performance and with the personnel proposed. Methods sections were frequently felt to be overly detailed, often at the cost of missing detail in other important sections, including expected results and interpretations.

Reviewers also noted that two proposals from the same applicants were highly similar wherein near identical approaches were proposed for two different viruses, with one virus in application A and another virus in application B. Since the applications were presented separately, reviewers expressed concern that the rigor of prior research supporting the virus proposed in application B was not strong since the text supporting the rigor section appeared to have been pasted from application A. Reviewers felt that both studies would be stronger if presented together, either in the same application or by cross-referencing each other, which would enable comparison of outcomes from both viruses.

Future applications might be improved if additional proposal components were requested of applicants, including:

1) Detailed description of plans to ensure rigor and reproducibility

2) Highlighting the need for limiting the amount of methodologic detail to that which is strictly necessary

3) Primary outcome readouts and expected results in support of project hypotheses

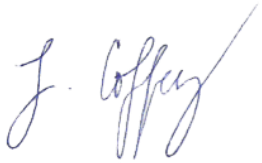
4) Interpretation and application of results the context of overarching project goals

5) Instructions/guidance for preparing applications with similar approaches and goals for use in different systems

The reviewers also found the review process to be appropriate and productive, with no changes suggested.

Please let me know if you have further questions.

Sincerely,



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RE: Panel chair statement after NP103 Panel 3 AMR review (2021)

Dear Dr. Ward,

I was pleased to serve as Panel Chair for the program review of USDA-ARS NP103 Panel 3 Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) on 06/22/2021 and 10/13/2021 for the initial review (4 proposals) and re-review (1 proposal), respectively. I feel this is an extremely well-organized high-quality review when compared to many of my other grant review experiences.

The whole review process, from training, reviewer identification and assignment, scheduling the dates of review, to the review itself, is very well organized with clear instruction and assistance. This is attributed to the efficient and effective management/guidance provided by Dr. Marquea D. King and Ms. Linda DalyLucas.

The four reviewers are highly qualified for the assigned proposals given their extensive experience and expertise in AMR. Prior to panel meeting, all the reviewers have performed serious and careful review for each of assigned proposals, and provided detailed written review with constructive comments for panel members to discuss during the meeting and for PI to further improve the outcome & impact of the proposed studies. Panel discussions were highly active, stimulating, and professional, leading to the consensus of the key questions, concerns, and suggestions provided to the PI of each proposal. I truly believe that all the reviewers have done an excellent job in producing a rigorous and non-biased assessment of each proposal, and in providing valuable and constructive feedback for the PIs.

Together, the overall quality of the review process is very high, which was primarily due to the high-quality reviewers selected for this panel.

Thank you again for inviting me to serve on this important panel as panel manager. Should you have any questions or need additional clarifications, please feel free to contact me at (865)974-5598 or jlin6@utk.edu.

Best regards,

Jun Lin, PhD
Professor of Infectious Disease

COLLEGE OF VETERINARY MEDICINE
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Department of Veterinary Pathobiology

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY

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RE: Panel chair statement NP 103 Panel 4 Zoonotic Bacterial diseases

Dear Dr. Ward,

It was a pleasure to have served as Panel Chair for the program review of NP 103 Panel 4 zoonotic bacterial diseases that initially occurred on Monday, September 20, 2021. For this panel, four proposals were reviewed by subject matter experts. The review process was very organized, efficient and professional. Prior to the meeting, all the reviewers submitted their comments based on the scientific quality of the proposals, which allowed me to review their comments prior to the virtual meeting. The meeting had a clear agenda where reviewers had the opportunity to discuss in detail the proposals, highlighting their strengths and deficiencies. The manner in which the meeting was structured made it easy to achieve the meeting's goals and objectives, and this was mainly due to the superb organization of the documents and materials by the USDA team including, but not limited to, Dr. Marquea D. King and Ms. Linda Daly-Lucas.

Overall, the review panel had a favorable opinion of two of the four proposals, necessitating a new meeting to discuss further clarification of the proposals. After the second meeting, only one of the proposals was deemed acceptable based on the scientific quality.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude for including me in this important process, and please feel free to consider my name for future reviews.

Sincerely,

Angela Arenas, DVM, PhD, Dip ACVP
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College Station, TX 77843

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RE: NP103 Panel 5 Respiratory Bacterial Diseases (2021)

Dear Todd,

I chaired the review of applications for USDA-ARS NP-103, panel 5 on Respiratory Bacterial Diseases (2021) in Animal Production and protection National program. Of the 6- 8 researchers (from the list approved by Scientific and Quality Review Officer) invited to server as grant reviewers, we were fortunate to get four dedicated reviewers based on their National /International recognition, expertise in the field and their willingness to serve as experts.

The review process appears to be appropriate, consistent and productive. The involved staff particularly Linda DalyLucas was very dedicated, helpful and quickly responded in a professional way to any questions/queries during the whole review process. The online presentation about the review process particularly how USDA-ARS finalizes the objectives was very helpful.

A total of 4 applications were reviewed. Each reviewer (acted as 1st reviewer on one grant and second reviewer on another grant) provided written reviews in advance of the meeting. On the day (Aug. 25, 2021) of the review panel discussion, each reviewer took a holistic approach in evaluating the feasibility and scientific merit of the proposed research. The discussions were open, fair and thoughtful. The panel felt that the proposed research proposals will help in filling the gaps in the current research proposals in the specific areas, which ultimately will help to achieve the important objectives of USDA. The panel agreed that each proposal was led by a recognized leader in the field, who has network of collaborators and access to state of art facilities /equipment.

Overall, the panel was happy with the entire review process. Moreover, the reviewers provided a fair assessment and valuable input for researcher to consider in improving the research proposal/outcomes.

Best Regards

Suresh Tikoo
Professor & Director, Vaccinology & Immunotherapeutics Program
School of Public Health,
Research -Fellow, VIDO,
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S7N5E3

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Dear Dr. Ward,

It was an honor and a privilege to serve as the chair of the reviewers for the NP 103, Panel 6 on Production Bacterial Diseases (2021). With the help of the staff at the Office of Scientific Quality Review (OSQR), USDA, I was able to assemble premier researchers in the topic of bacterial diseases of food animals to help in the review of the submitted research plans. As expected from the letter of charge to form and lead this panel, the panel conducted the whole review process with the highest standards of professionalism, integrity and wisdom needed for this critical mission to the success of the submitted plans. I was struck with the reviewers' ingenuity and deep knowledge that they brought to the discussion which allowed them to approach the critiques of the proposals from different aspects and with a holistic approach that involved feasibility and practicality of the research under evaluation. As expected from the USDA investigators, all of the reviewed areas of research were very critical to the safety and productivity of food animals and the selected topics were very focused on knowledge gaps present in their respective topics. The panel was also very keen to make sure that the proposed plans addressed key aspects that can advance our understanding of mechanisms and control of bacterial diseases causing problems in production animals. By the end of the discussion of all projects, I was very proud of the whole process and the quality of reviews and attention that were given to each proposal.

The staff who attended the review panel meeting from the USDA as well as those who helped the panel from the time of charge to the time of the meeting execution, were very helpful and eager to make the review process go smoothly. As a chair of this panel, I'd like to extend my gratitude to their dedication and professionalism. In fact, my positive experience with the team at the OSQR, USDA, will allow me to always consider participation in future panel meetings conducted by this dedicated team.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you need any help.

Sincerely,

Adel M. Talaat
Professor of Microbiology

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

College of Food Agriculture and Environmental Sciences
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PANEL CHAIR STATEMENT
NP 103, Panel 7, Endemic Viral Diseases

The quality of any review is dependent on the expertise of the reviewers and their commitment to the review process. We were fortunate to have expert and dedicated reviewers to serve on this panel. They provided relevant comments and questions prior to the panel meeting and were well prepared for the meeting. We had good discussions that helped in formulate a consensus of thoughts on questions, comments, and suggestions for each proposal. I believe that the reviewers have done an outstanding job in producing a fair assessment of the proposals and in providing valuable input for the researchers.

In conclusion, the review process as conducted is sound, but it is worth repeating that a most important factor in the review process is the choice of reviewers.

Y.M.Saif, DVM, PhD, DACVM, CDACPV
Professor and Head Emeritus

Royal Veterinary College
University of London

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NP103 Panel 8 Parasitic Diseases – Panel Chair Statement

Dear Todd,

It was my pleasure to chair this panel which met earlier in the week to discuss three research plans. It was my second experience of the panel and the first time as chair. Overall, I was happy with the review process and quality of the panellists involved; the plans received were very thorough as were the detailed reviews and discussion; I believe the outcomes were fair and the applicants will find the comments and recommendations very helpful.

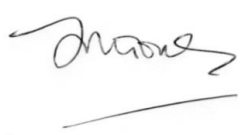
The other panellists and I think the review process is sound and consistent; it is a serious business and the professionalism and experience of your team is obvious. The procedures are very well documented and explained carefully in the briefing sessions. Your quality management team take care to conduct everything in a methodical and unbiased manner.

I believe the meeting this week was well managed and the discussions were thoughtful, fair and appropriate with all panellists contributing positively, resulting in improvement and modification to the draft comments/recommendations; this iterative process is very helpful and should lead to considerable improvements to the final plans.

More generally the panellists believe there are both advantages and disadvantages to the fact that research objectives are set in advance. It certainly avoids circularity in processes, which is a good thing, however we think would be good if there were a formal mechanism for the panel to express views on the relevance/priority of the set objectives. Alternatively a brief statement from USDA about why specific objectives were set would help provide more context for the panel as it conducts its review.

I hope you find this feedback helpful; thank you for inviting me to chair this panel.

Yours sincerely



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