

A CODE OF ETHICS FOR THE AUSTRALIAN ACOUSTICAL SOCIETY

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The Australian Acoustical Society, like most professional institutions, has a code of ethics. While there are considerable limitations on the value of such codes, they do provide a broad vision of an ideal that members of a profession share and aspire to even though there is often a large gap between the ideal and the practice.

Like the Ten Commandments, the Code of Ethics is open to interpretation. Just as the commandment that you shall not kill can be ignored if the right person tells you to kill, the ethic that the welfare of the community should be paramount is also open to various interpretations. For instance when noise is an issue, is the "community" the immediate neighbours of an airport, say, or is it the population of Australia? Over what period should the welfare be considered? How does one define the welfare of the community?

I suggest that we need to discuss and debate and feel passionate about such issues. We need to give examples of what is acceptable and what isn't. We need, on occasions, to be able to communicate heretics and occasionally, in a vibrant organization, we must accept that there will be insurmountable doctrinal differences which end in splits and splinters, and that this is probably for the greater good. Life is full of contradictions and the need for both unity and diversity is just one of them. A conscious consideration of issues may lead to contradictions but it is difficult to argue that consciousness is not fundamental to human existence.

Attitudes and ideologies evolve over time and if a code of ethics is to be relevant it should evolve also. While I don't see a need to alter the six items in the present code I would like to see a seventh item added to it. At present the code of ethics is only concerned with the responsibilities of members to the community, other members and the acoustical profession. I suggest that members of the Acoustical Society should also have responsibilities concerning the acoustical and physical environment.

Under the existing code of ethics welfare, health and safety of the community shall at all times take precedence over sectional, professional and private interests. Animals too are affected by some of the actions we take as professionals. One of the most notable of these is the effect of sonar signals on whales and other marine life but bird and animal behaviour is also influenced by noisy activities.

Another "environmental" issue concerns our cultural heri-

tage. For instance, should we support the construction of roads, with or without noise barriers, where the road will visually, aurally or physically produce a significant degradation of the built environment or the natural environment?

While it may seem unrealistic to consider environmental issues in the daily need to turn a dollar an environmental clause in the code of ethics seems to be as reasonable as other clauses in the code of ethics. It might even focus attention, in the Society, on the six existing Code of Ethics clauses. Also, given the mysticism involved in some aspects of acoustics it would seem appropriate to have a mystical seventh clause in the Code of Ethics.

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