



Guidance Note for Ethical Practice in Undertaking Peer Reviews

The practice of peer review is a fundamental basis for research publication and scientific method generally. It is also widespread in professions where 'professional judgment' is involved.

The *EIANZ Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct* (the Code), to which CEnvPs are also bound, encourages the practice of peer review, specifically under the heading "DEMONSTRATE INTEGRITY":

c. Be objective, seek peer review and other quality assurance of work as appropriate, and accept as well as give honest and fair criticism when required.

At the same time, the Code also requires us to discourage reviewers from unfair criticism or inappropriately denigrating the work of colleagues, under the heading "REPRESENT AND PROMOTE THE PROFESSION":

c. Support others in their development as environmental practitioners;

d. Do not advertise or represent services, or those of another, in a manner that may bring discredit to the profession.

However, situations inevitably arise where 'honest and fair criticism' may be interpreted as unduly harsh and damaging of a colleague's professional reputation, or as an attempt by the reviewer to take over the project. It is essential that practitioners trust the process of peer review, especially where they have not voluntarily sought such review or selected the reviewer. The credibility of peer reviews is underpinned by the codes of ethics – not only that of EIANZ, but also those of allied professions, ensuring a high degree of trust between practitioners, reviewers and agencies.

The following guidelines are based on the *EIANZ Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct*, as well as the NSW DPE Guidance Series and the Code of Ethics of “Consult Australia”, representing most of the large engineering and multi-disciplinary consulting firms in Australia (many of which also have offices in New Zealand):

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- (1) *A peer reviewer should have appropriate and relevant experience to assess the work being reviewed and be independent from the proponent and the project. The peer review should demonstrate independence by acting objectively, disclose interests as appropriate and be free from conflicts of interest that may arise in relation to the engagement (such as being employed by the same firm as the reviewee)*
 - (2) *Peer reviews should give honest and fair professional criticism when commenting on another’s works or making public comment*
 - (3) *Where appropriate (consistent with the review brief), reviewers should consult with the ‘reviewee’ regarding the findings of the review or to seek explanation and corrections*
 - (4) *A peer reviewer should not maliciously nor carelessly do anything to injure, directly or indirectly, the reputation, prospects or business of others*
 - (5) *A peer reviewer should neither attempt to supplant another individual or organisation who has been duly appointed by a client or employer, nor accept engagement from a client or employer in replacement of another without first ascertaining that the appointment has been terminated by due notice*
 - (6) *Peer reviews should not unfairly criticise past work conducted in accordance with the accepted standards and practices and community values of the time.*¹
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04/10/2018

¹ Points (2)-(6): with acknowledgement to Consult Australia’s Code of Ethics