

Ethics head quits in roundup row

By MICHAEL HOLLAND

Official determination to push through the trial capture of the Kaimanawa wild horses has prompted a Department of Conservation animal ethics adviser to quit in protest.

Mr Neil Wells, a legal consultant to the RSPCA in Auckland, resigned from his position as chairman of the department's animal ethics committee, citing a lack of consultation over the horse roundup.

Senior department staff had neglected their own code of conduct in authorising the capture of more than 220 horses from the herds roaming the Kaimanawa Ranges in the central North Island, he said.

Mr Wells said he firmly believed that the operation was a trial conducted for the purposes of research, and it therefore required the approval of the animal ethics committee.

Committee members had discussed the matter at a special meeting last

month, but were not asked for their consent.

The manipulation of animals to determine a result — as in the case of the wild horses — was deemed to be research.

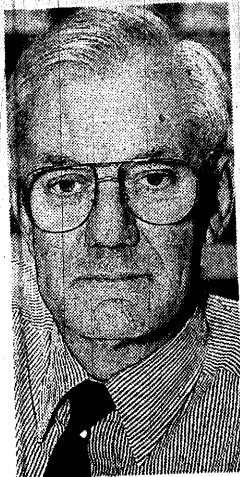
“Such practices can only proceed if carried out in accordance with an ethical code of conduct.”

It was essential to the integrity of the system that research protocols were observed.

“It is unfortunate that the department went ahead with such a rush, and that there was not more public consultation. I do not think that the public was fully informed.”

The department, in pressing itself to carry out the operation, had compromised the workings of the committee it created eight years ago.

“The whole process of the ethics committee approval is to balance the ethical cost [or research] against the gains to be made. That is quite a feat at times.”



Mr Wells