

Submission from Elizabeth Gleeson

I agree with Senator Heffernan et al regarding the amendments proposed in the Patent Amendment (Human Genes and Biological Materials) Bill 2010.

I am opposed to the granting of patents for human genes or biological material. Not only is it ethically reprehensible, it appears to promote monetary gain at the expense of commonsense.

Human genes belong to each of us as individuals and have not been invented or manufactured by anyone, so how then can they be patented? Something in nature cannot be called an invention of humankind, nor has it been manufactured. How then can a patent be ascribed to something biological that occurs naturally?

Over the last twenty or more years our universities and public hospital laboratories have become businesses run along corporate lines, but still funded in large part by public taxes.

Multinational drug companies have the ability to distort the market and exclude everyone else in the pursuit of shareholder profits. Medical discoveries should belong in the public domain for the good of everyone.

Now the Australian citizen is being asked to pay twice. The medical companies don't want to put their money into research until they are certain of a return. Then, at the end of the research, citizens will have to pay again to gain access to the knowledge gathered by scientists in government-funded universities and laboratories.

There was a time when researchers were happy if their work was published and they received peer recognition. Now they work for corporations and are under pressure to perform, toe the line, and show they are earning money for the team.

An important human endeavour has become skewed and it seems there is a distinct lack of common sense, not to mention ethics about applying for patents for the human body or other biological material occurring in nature. Our genes are an integral part of each person's individuality, and should be inviolable.

Passing this amendment will ensure that researchers will be able to share their knowledge and build on previous endeavours for the well-being of all citizens.