

Ms. Sophie Dunstone, Committee Secretary
Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT 2600

Dear Ms. Dunstone,

EcoHealth Alliance welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee's letter of 21 March 2024. Please see below for specific responses to the "adverse reflections" as laid out in your letter.

1. "As part of the inquiry, the committee has received a submission from Senator Gerard Rennick, which contains the following potentially adverse reflection on EcoHealth Alliance:
 - a. National Security impacts
 - b. The role of Gain of Function research in creating the virus. The Covid-19 virus has a Furin Cleavage site that many scientists believe could not have come from nature.
 - c. The funding of Gain of Function research at the Wuhan lab. There is extensive evidence that EcoHealth, a company funded by the US Government was conducting experiments with the Covid-19 virus at the Wuhan virology lab."

Response 1: EcoHealth Alliance did not support "gain-of-function" research at the Wuhan Institute of Virology, nor did EHA conduct experiments with SARS-CoV-2 at the Wuhan laboratory. Any assertions to the contrary are based either on misinterpretation, or willful misrepresentation of the actual research conducted.

The U. S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) defines "gain-of-function" as research that will create new viral strains with "enhanced transmissibility or virulence" for viruses that are already (1) "likely highly transmissible and likely capable of wide and uncontrollable spread in human populations;" and (2) "likely highly virulent and likely to cause significant morbidity and/or mortality in humans." **Because the SARS-related research conducted by EcoHealth Alliance and the Wuhan Institute of Virology dealt with bat coronaviruses that had never been shown to infect people, let alone cause significant morbidity and/or mortality in humans, by definition it was not gain-of-function research.** This was confirmed by NIH on July 7, 2016, in a letter to EcoHealth Alliance made public via Freedom of Information Act requests stating "NIAID is in agreement that the work proposed ... *is not subject to the GoF research funding pause*" (italics added). This was also stated by NIH spokesperson Elizabeth Deatrick in comments to the press (<https://theintercept.com/2021/09/09/covid-origins-gain-of-function-research/>).

The fact is that the bat coronavirus research conducted by EcoHealth Alliance and the Wuhan Institute of Virology could not have started the COVID-19 pandemic. As then-NIH

Director Francis Collins said in a public statement on October 20, 2021: “NIH wants to set the record straight on NIH-supported research to understand naturally occurring bat coronaviruses at the Wuhan Institute of Virology, funded through a subaward from NIH grantee EcoHealth Alliance. Analysis of published genomic data and other documents from the grantee demonstrate that the naturally occurring bat coronaviruses studied under the NIH grant are genetically far distant from SARS-CoV-2 and *could not possibly have caused the COVID-19 pandemic*. Any claims to the contrary are demonstrably false.” (Italics added, <https://www.nih.gov/about-nih/who-we-are/nih-director/statements/statement-misinformation-about-sars-cov-2-origins>).

2. “Both Prof Edward Holmes (of Sydney University) and Prof Dominic Dwyer were involved in producing articles in relation to the origins of the Coronavirus/SARS CoV-2 which attempted to portray a false story that it was of natural origin.”

Response 2: There is a broad scientific consensus that SARS-CoV-2 originated in nature. There is no scientific evidence to support the claim that SARS-CoV-2 originated in a lab. Thus, the claim that the “natural origin” hypothesis is “a false story” is predicated on an absence of scientific evidence. There are now over a dozen peer-reviewed scientific papers analyzing primary data that suggest a wildlife-to-human spillover via the wildlife trade. This body of evidence includes hundreds of coronavirus strains circulating in bats in Southeast Asia (including some very closely related to SARS-CoV-2) spilling over to an estimated 66,000 people annually; a wildlife market where the first cluster of cases occurred, with evidence for multiple spillover from animals to people; and evidence from Chinese scientists in the WHO origins report and from surveys and now genetic sequencing to demonstrate that the wildlife, including raccoon dogs, known to carry coronaviruses were being sold live in that market. This evidence is summarized in the following papers:

- <https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.2214427119>
- <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-022-31860-w>
- <https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/science.abp8715>
- <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/who-convened-global-study-of-origins-of-sars-cov-2-china-part>

3. “Professor Holmes is known to be associated with the Ecohealth Alliance, the suspected developers of the Coronavirus backbone for the creation of SARS-CoV-2, via his publications with Dr Zengli Shi, Hume Field, Danielle Anderson and the CSIRO including Gary Crameri.”

Response 3: As stated above, there is no evidence that SARS-CoV-2 originated in a lab, nor that EHA was engaged in any research that led to the “creation of SARS-CoV-2”. To reiterate: the bat coronavirus research conducted by EcoHealth Alliance and the Wuhan Institute of Virology could not have started the COVID-19 pandemic. As then NIH Director Francis Collins said in a public statement on October 20, 2021: “NIH wants to set the record straight on NIH-supported research to understand naturally occurring bat coronaviruses at the Wuhan Institute

of Virology, funded through a subaward from NIH grantee EcoHealth Alliance. Analysis of published genomic data and other documents from the grantee demonstrate that the naturally occurring bat coronaviruses studied under the NIH grant are genetically far distant from SARS-CoV-2 and *could not possibly have caused the COVID-19 pandemic*. Any claims to the contrary are demonstrably false.” (Italics added, <https://www.nih.gov/about-nih/who-we-are/nih-director/statements/statement-misinformation-about-sars-cov-2-origins>).

4. “However an example of overseas financial interference in Australian universities is the funding of REPLICATS at the University of Melbourne by the US agency DARPA, which also funded EcoHealth Alliance, believed to have been responsible for the release of SARS-CoV-2 (See: answer to Question on Notice R).”

Response 4: EcoHealth Alliance does not receive, and has never received, funding from DARPA. Nor is there any evidence, despite many allegations to the contrary, that EHA was “responsible for the release of SARS-CoV-2.” This may be a reference to an unfunded grant proposal submitted by EcoHealth Alliance in 2018. It is hard to understand these allegations when the project in question never happened.

EcoHealth Alliance wants to remind the Australian Senate Legal & Constitutional Affairs References Committee that DARPA did not select this proposal for funding. Because the work was not selected for funding, any assertions about the details contained within draft proposals are by definition based on review of incomplete information and are extremely misleading.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Best regards, _____

Dr. Peter Daszak
President & CEO, EcoHealth Alliance