

COMMITTEES

Community Affairs Committee Report

Senator MOORE (Queensland) (9.51 a.m.)—I present the report of the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs, *A matter relating to the Positron Emission Tomography (PET) Review 2000*, together with the *Hansard* record of proceedings and documents presented to the committee.

I will speak very briefly to allow some other senators to make comments, and I know there will be some interest in this report. When my friend Kay Denman asked me to ask questions on this issue in Senate estimates in 2003, I did not realise just how much of an interest I would be taking in the issues around PET in Australia. In respect of this report, we have received complaints from a number of people, particularly to Dr Ware and Professor Hicks, who are particularly concerned about the process that went on around the introduction and the assessment of PET during the MSAC process in 2000. You may ask why we are taking note of this issue in 2008. The reason is that there was never a formal completion of the discussion around this process, and it should have happened much earlier.

The committee became immersed in correspondence going backwards and forwards between a range of people. The key element that came out for some of us on the committee was that there was genuine confusion, lack of closure, lack of openness in communication and also deep hurt caused, I do not believe deliberately, to a couple of people who had dedicated their lives to developing PET and making sure that it was valued not just in Australia but also internationally.

People had a range of views, and I think one of the real issues we struggled with was that all this went on in 2000 and we were trying to come to grips with a trail of communication that was clouded, at best, and made worse by the fact that all the officers in the Department of Health and Ageing who were originally dealing with this issue were no longer in the employ of the department. We received information at several hearings from a series of officers who were reliant on documents which were not up to scratch.

One of the issues that has come out of this particular report is that we must do better. There is no doubt about that. I think the department has accepted that. There have already been changes made to the way the MSAC process operates and the way documentation is maintained. I think Dr Ware and Professor Hicks particularly deserve an apology and I am giving that now, even though it is not a formal recommendation from our committee. I am sorry that they have gone through the last seven to eight years of concern, legal expenses, doubt and, I believe, ill health as a result of this process. This may well apply to other people but I particularly wanted to name those two gentlemen.

We believe that the system has been flawed. We believe it can do better. One of the good things to come out of this is that PET, the technology to which so many people are dedicated, particularly Dr Ware and Professor Hicks, has been strongly vindicated through the years of testing and exploration. This is a great technology. It provides services to many people. We should be proud of it. The way this process went ahead was a blot. Our committee became deeply involved. I do not think a single member of the committee was untouched after working

through this process. I want to leave it to other senators to make their contributions.