

From: Malcolm Lyons [mal@waimr.uwa.edu.au]

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To: RRAT, Committee (SEN)

Subject: National Animal Welfare Bill

Having recently become aware of the National Animal Welfare Bill, there are aspects of the proposed legislation that concern me greatly as a medical researcher involved with animal research.

It is important to note in the first instance that no researcher enters into animal research without good cause. The three Rs of Replacement, Reduction, and Refinement have been implemented for all of my scientific career. However, medical research by its very nature, that is, searching for improvements to human health in extremely complex biological systems, often precludes the alternatives to animal models.

I know from experience working in the USA that Australia already employs very stringent ethical codes of conduct and reporting for animal research, comparable to European Union nations such as The Netherlands. However, I suspect that any increased reporting burden may have a negative impact on the productivity of Australian medical research. Given our finite funding and small population on the world scale, any reduction in productivity will have dramatic ramifications for Australian research overall and will likely put us at a competitive disadvantage, especially for health issues of particular relevance to Australia.

Other issues within the bill such as the definition of cruelty to animals that states "kills unwanted animals" could preclude all animal research in one fell swoop. Specific pathogen free (SFP) and genetically defined mice, for example, are one cornerstone of medical research. As such breeding colonies are fundamental and there will always be unused animals produced. Biology dictates that we cannot generate mice specifically to order. Given that animal research continues, the proposal to make names and addresses of animal researchers publicly available creates serious safety threats to all medical researchers and is clearly unacceptable. In this time when we are trying to minimise terrorism and acts of violence, making personal details available can only encourage and facilitate violence towards animal researchers. Such attacks are not without precedence. If this bill is passed as it stands, I will certainly be forced to consider abandoning all of my research that pertains to animals. The risk would be too great.

These are some concerns that arise from the National Animal Welfare Bill that will negatively impact medical and animal research in Australia if the bill is passed in its current form.

Malcolm A. Lyons, PhD
NHMRC Research Fellow
WAIMR & UWA Centre for Medical Research
Level 6 MRF Building
Rear, 50 Murray St
PERTH WA 6000
AUSTRALIA

Tel: +61 8 9224 0388
Fax: +61 8 9224 0322