

Re: Response to Proposed National Animal Welfare Bill 2005

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to express my disappointment at elements of the proposed National Animal Welfare Bill 2005. As an animal researcher for over 15 years, I am entirely in favour of the ethical treatment of all animals and to this end, have witnessed great improvements in the monitoring of animal experiments in my industry. However in recent years, the reporting requirements to ethics committees have shifted towards the ridiculous with more time spent on paperwork than actual experiments. Animal experiments, performed in a humane manner, have significantly contributed to breakthroughs in the treatment of human disease and prevented the risk of testing new treatments directly on humans. It is with this background that I read with interest Part 8 of the proposed National Animal Welfare Bill 2005. Specifically, I can not agree with the inclusion of the following sections:

(1) Section 99 and 100 calls for increased reporting on animal experiments above the extensive documentation already provided to ethics committees and regulatory bodies at present. This is a disincentive to animal research rather than a real attempt to improve the welfare of individual research animals. It also compromises our ability to perform world leading experiments by driving researchers from the lab into additional administrative duties. I would strongly argue that animal welfare reporting needs to be streamlined rather than expanded. A greater focus on education of researchers on animal welfare issues (workshops, lectures, etc) would seem a more appropriate inclusion in this Bill than a smokescreen of extra paperwork.

(2) Section 102 calls for publication of names and addresses of licensees. While a transparent ethics process may seem reasonable, it leaves the individual researcher/research unit open to personal attacks by extremists within our society, often with fatal consequences as witnessed in countries such as England and the US. My colleagues and I will abandon animal research should this become law. At present, members of the public already sit on ethics committees which judge our experimental animal protocols with great rigor. An anonymous report by these ethics committees of experimental categories would surely be sufficient for wider public debate of animal welfare issues. The above comments would also apply to Sections 112-114 referring to public access to an individual's registered details.

In summary, I am opposed to the proposed National Animal Welfare Bill 2005 in its current form, particularly with relation to animals used for experimental purposes. A more moderate approach is required which considers the potential gains provided by research, the necessity to provide a reasonable research environment and the concerns of the general public. Thanks

Dr Graham Leggatt
Research Fellow
Centre for Immunology and Cancer Research

University of Queensland
4th Floor, Research Wing
Princess Alexandra Hospital
Brisbane, QLD 4160
Phone : (07) 3240 5281
Fax: (07) 3240 5946
Email : gleggatt@cicr.uq.edu.au