

FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES

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Committee Secretary
Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee
Department of the Senate
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

We write to indicate our strong opposition to the draft National Animal Welfare Bill. The Bill has the potential to seriously curtail, if not halt, medical research in Australia.

The ethical use of animals in medical research is central to progress our understanding of human health and disease. In view of major existing and emerging disease risks, it is unsafe and unacceptable to limit the progress of medical research. Without adequate provision for use of animals in research, we will remain without new tools to fight cancer, diabetes, heart disease, HIV / AIDS, malaria etc, and will be unable to tackle new infectious diseases such as avian influenza.

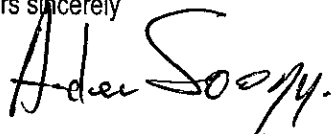
Importantly, we strongly object to the requirement in the proposed Bill for the public disclosure of the names of all persons to be licensed to use animals for research purposes. This creates an opportunity for abuse of this information by extremist groups and individuals that oppose all forms of animal research.

Furthermore there appear to be components of the proposed Bill designed to generate sufficient difficulty for researchers that it becomes unviable to perform studies that require experiments in animal models. A workable public policy for ethical use of animals in research is essential to maintain the impetus of the high-quality research that is required of Australian medical researchers to maintain their international competitiveness and progress in lessening the burden of disease to humans and animals.

We fail to see why such a Bill is required in the face of the existing *Australian code of practice for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes*. The Code is published by the National Health and Medical Research Council and was developed by a widely representative group including State and Territory government representatives, the animal welfare lobby, Australian Research Council, the Commonwealth Scientific Industrial Research Organisation, Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee in conjunction with the NHMRC. It is not clear that the Code is in anyway defective in informing or controlling practice in the use of animals for scientific purposes. The Bill appears to have been put together without reference to the Code or the range of existing structures to deal with animal welfare in Australia that together have resulted in ongoing, significant advances in the practice of animal research.

In summary, we believe this Bill will do harm to Australia's efforts to improve the health of its people and animals.

Yours sincerely



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cc: A/Prof S. Robertson