National Animal Welfare Bill 2005

ASMR submission

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee

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The Australian Society for Medical Research (ASMR) appreciates the opportunity to respond to the National Animal Welfare Bill 2005. The ASMR is the peak body representing health and medical researchers. In addition to direct membership, ASMR represents the sector through 47 affiliated professional societies and Medical Colleges, representing some 15,000 people actively involved in health and medical research in Australia. In addition, corporate and disease related foundation memberships bring a further 100,000 Australians with an interest in health and medical research into association with ASMR. Our mission is to foster excellence in Australian health and medical research, and to promote community understanding and support for health and medical research in Australia. ASMR achieves these goals through public, political and scientific advocacy. As a broad cross-section of our membership is actively involved in animal experimentation, the following comments pertain to the impact of the proposed Bill on animal experimentation in medical research and on the scientists involved in that research.

This submission is therefore concerned only with Part 8 and 9 of the Bill "Animals used for experimental purposes"

Animal experimentation within the medical research community is currently tightly regulated through the *NHMRC Australian Code of Practice for the Care and Use of Animals for Scientific Purposes* (the Code). The Code involves extensive interaction with and monitoring by Animal Ethics Committees (AECs) and is legally binding. The ASMR is committed to the standards outlined in the Code and fully supports the application of the 3Rs to animal experimentation (reduction, refinement and replacement).

General Concerns

Section 99 Matters of responsibility The proposed establishment of a National Animal Welfare Authority that would run in parallel to the current AEC system would result in a duplication of resources and is likely to generate considerable confusion. The additional burden placed on researchers and administrating institutions would not result in better quality animal care and monitoring above that which already exists within the current system.

Specific Concerns

(i) Section 96 The definition of animal as "an invertebrate or vertebrate animal other than a human being" is not appropriate and does not stratify public concern with animal welfare issues. In addition this will introduce a further administrative burden regarding the tracking and monitoring of "animals" such as earthworms and flies.

(ii) Section 99 (l) "ensuring the public is aware that cruel experiments will be scrutinized" is an unnecessary use of emotive language, without definition of either "cruel" or "experiments".

(iii) Section 100 Data bank "the authority must establish a data bank of <u>all</u> experiments using animals, carried out in Australia and <u>overseas</u>" This indicates a completely naïve and unrealistic expectation given the volume of animal experimentation carried out both here and overseas. Currently AEC maintain records of animal experimentation and this works extremely well.

(iv) Sections 101 and 102 Public Notices and Licences We do not support the publication of licence applications in local and national newspapers.

(v) Section 108 Management of pain "Every animal used in a research unit in any experiment that is likely to cause pain to the animal must be anaesthetized" We agree that anaesthetics should be used to minimise pain but in cases of minor discomfort it is not necessarily in the best interests of the animal.

(vi) Section 113 and 114 Registration details Public disclosure of researcher's personal details is an unacceptable breach of privacy and caters to the more extreme elements of the Animal Rights movement.

While we are in general supportive of the concept of uniform animal welfare legislation across all States of Australia, for the reasons outlined above, the ASMR opposes the National Animal Welfare Bill in its current form.