

Chapter 1

Introduction

Referral of the inquiry

1.1 On 12 February 2015, the Senate referred the Regulator of Medicinal Cannabis Bill 2014 (Bill) to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee (committee) for inquiry and report by 21 April 2015.¹ On 26 March 2015, the Senate agreed to extend the reporting date for the inquiry to 21 May 2015.² Several further extensions were subsequently granted by the Senate, with the final reporting date being set for 11 August 2015.³

1.2 The Bill is a private senator's Bill, introduced by Senator Richard Di Natale into the Senate on 27 November 2014 and co-sponsored by Senators Di Natale, Macdonald, Leyonhjelm and Urquhart.⁴ The Bill seeks to establish a new Commonwealth body, the Regulator of Medicinal Cannabis, with responsibility for regulating the production, transport, storage and usage of cannabis products for medicinal purposes in Australia.

Conduct of the inquiry

1.3 In accordance with usual practice, the committee advertised the inquiry on its website and wrote to a number of organisations and individual stakeholders inviting submissions by 13 March 2015. Details of the inquiry were placed on the committee's website at http://www.aph.gov.au/senate_legalcon.

Submissions

1.4 In total, the committee received 261 submissions to this inquiry. The public submissions are published on the committee's website and are listed at Appendix 1.

1.5 A significant number of the submissions received by the committee contained detailed accounts of individuals' experiences using cannabis products in Australia to treat a variety of medical conditions. Given the sensitivities around the usage of medicinal cannabis in Australia, the committee resolved to withhold from publication the names of any individuals whose submissions included details of cannabis use in Australia, unless this information was already on the public record (for example, in newspaper articles or other public media).

1.6 Of the submissions received, 50 were 'form letter' submissions in support of the Bill, with identical or substantially similar wording. For administrative reasons,

1 *Journals of the Senate*, 12 February 2015, p. 2156.

2 *Journals of the Senate*, 26 March 2015, p. 2461.

3 See: *Journals of the Senate*, 12 May 2015, p. 2555; *Journals of the Senate*, 15 June 2015, p. 2644; *Journals of the Senate*, 18 June 2015, p. 2707; *Journals of the Senate*, 25 June 2015, p. 2841.

4 *Journals of the Senate*, 27 November 2014, p. 1897.

the committee resolved not to publish all of these submissions, but rather a single example on its website.

Public hearings

1.7 The committee held three days of public hearings for this inquiry: in Canberra on 30 March 2015, in Sydney on 31 March 2015, and on 1 April 2015 in Brisbane. Details of witnesses who gave evidence at the hearing are listed at Appendix 2.

Acknowledgment

1.8 The committee thanks those individuals and organisations who made submissions to the inquiry and appeared as witnesses at the public hearings.

1.9 The committee particularly thanks those who courageously shared their individual stories in relation to medicinal cannabis, many of which included highly personal accounts of struggles with serious medical conditions and the reality of trying to access appropriate treatment and care. It is these individuals who stand to benefit the most from the increased understanding of both the potential and the limitations of medicinal cannabis that could be developed through the implementation of a stronger regulatory framework in Australia.

Structure of the Report

1.10 This report is divided into 5 chapters.

1.11 Chapter 2 provides an overview of the background issues relevant to this inquiry, including: the nature of the cannabis plant and the science relating to its use in therapeutic contexts; the current regulation of cannabis in Australia; and examples of international approaches to regulating medicinal cannabis.

1.12 Chapter 3 includes an overview of the Bill and outlines its key provisions.

1.13 Chapter 4 discusses the key issues raised by submitters and witnesses in relation to the Bill and the broader issue of regulating medicinal cannabis in Australia.

1.14 Chapter 5 presents the committee's views and recommendations.