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4 June 2021

Senator Slade Brockman
Chair
Senate Economics Legislation Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senator Brockman

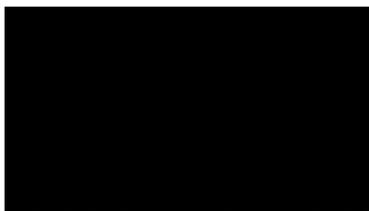
I am writing in regard to questions submitted by Senator Reynolds on 4 June 2021 on behalf of Senator Canavan regarding the testimony given by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) at the Budget Estimates hearing on 3 June 2021.

On 3 June 2021, Senator Canavan asked questions regarding an article in the Australian that discussed research by Chinese researchers on bats in conjunction with CSIRO. It appears from Senator Canavan's questions on 4 June 2021 that my responses to those questions weren't clear and have led to misinterpretation of the answers.

Please find attached the response to Senator Canavan's questions from 4 June 2021 and note that we will also provide responses to questions on notice from the hearing on 3 June 2021 through the usual process.

I apologise for any inconvenience caused and ask that you alert other members of the Committee to this response.

Yours sincerely



Judi Zielke
Chief Operating Officer



Response to questions from Senator Canavan

4 June 2021

This statement is to respond to questions from Senator Canavan in Budget Estimates on 4 June 2021 (included below) and also to clarify CSIRO's evidence on 3 June 2021.

CSIRO is not currently undertaking research on live bats at the Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness (ACDP). We have undertaken research on bats previously, and in responding to questions that were taken on notice on 3 June 2021, we will provide additional details and timing of that research.

Comments regarding the Hendra virus were provided as an example of work undertaken. ACDP did undertake research on bats in collaboration with the Wuhan Institute of Virology in 2016-17. We are not aware of any subsequent collaborative research with the Wuhan Institute of Virology, however, we will review further and confirm the outcome in responding to questions on notice.

Statement / Question 1:

Last night the CSIRO told this committee that "*we does not undertake research on live bats at ADCP*". Yet a paper jointly published by scientists from the CSIRO and some from the Wuhan Institute of Virology stated that:

"Wild caught P. alecto bats were trapped in Southern Queensland, Australia, and transported alive by air to the Australian Animal Health Laboratory in Victoria, where they were euthanized for dissection using methods approved by the Australian Animal Health Laboratory Animal Ethics Committee."

For reference that paper is titled "Type III IFNs in Pteropid Bats: Differential Expression Patterns Provide Evidence for Distinct Roles in Antiviral Immunity". And seems to have been published in the Journal of Immunology in March 2011.

Given the seeming inconsistency between the statement in this paper and the evidence of the CSIRO last night could you ask the CSIRO to urgently clarify their evidence to this committee.

Statement / Question 2:

Last night the CSIRO suggested to this committee that the work it had conducted with scientists from the Wuhan Institute of Virology was limited to work on the Hendra virus. However, I have been alerted to a paper from the CSIRO in 2016. A media release issued by the CSIRO is titled "Bats 'super immunity' could help protect people". The media release states:

"For the first time researchers have uncovered a unique ability in bats which allows them to carry but remain unaffected by lethal diseases ...Bats are a natural host for more than 100 viruses, some of which are lethal to people, including Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome (MERS), Ebola and Hendra virus, however, interestingly bats do not get sick or show signs of disease from these viruses."

The associated paper is co-authored by scientists including Peng Zhou, Lin-fa Wang and Jie Cui, all scientists who have reportedly worked at the Wuhan Institute of Virology.

Could I ask the CSIRO to urgently clarify their evidence to this committee. Was their collaboration with scientists from the Wuhan Institute of Virology limited to the Hendra virus? Or did it include work on other viruses as per this paper. If so, please list details of the research and the Australian Government funding associated with the research conducted with the Wuhan Institute of Virology? Please also list the names of any researchers from the Wuhan Institute of Virology that the CSIRO has conducted research with over the past two decades.