



SELECT COMMITTEE ON ADOPTING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

Adopting AI

FRIDAY, 16 AUGUST 2024

CANBERRA

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE FOR MR SADLER (GOOD ANCESTORS POLICY) AND
MR POUR (HARMONY INTELLIGENCE)

Question: Senator Shoebridge asked Mr Sadler about Good Ancestors Policy's experience of engaging government on cross-cutting issues relating to AI safety policy. Are there any changes or improvements that could be made to structures and coordination?

Answer:

During Good Ancestors Policy's opening statement, further to a discussion of biosecurity risks from frontier AI models and the increased danger of synthetic DNA, Mr Sadler said:

I've raised this issue with several Departments but have not seen any evidence of ownership of this risk in the Australian system; or intent to follow the US in implementing targeted safeguards.

The core challenge is that responsibility for AI risks is currently spread across the public service with no clear coordination. For instance, on biosecurity risks that might be amplified by frontier AI models:

- Department of **Industry** - general responsibility for AI policy
- Department of **Home Affairs** - responsibility for national security threats from technology and separately responsible for counter-terrorism and the risks of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear attacks
- Department of **Foreign Affairs** - responsibility for international engagement, including the Bletchley and Seoul agreements and future AI safety summits of this kind
- Department of **Agriculture** - responsibility for the Australian Biosecurity Import Conditions (BI-CON) which regulates the importation of synthetic DNA, being the critical input to this risk.
- Department of **Health** - responsibility for the health consequences management of an engineered pandemic

Good Ancestors has engaged each of these organisations to brief them on the risks. However, it is easy to understand (and without criticism of any particular public servants) that any singular organisation can think that it does not hold primary responsibility and that it does not have the best policy lever to make an effective intervention.

Hypothetically, officials in the Department of Health might not prioritise preparing for a pandemic caused by an engineered virus because they might think it is primarily the responsibility of Home Affairs to stop the bad actor or Agriculture to cut off the supply chain of dangerous inputs. Officials in Agriculture might not prioritise significantly increasing the restrictions around synthetic DNA because they might think it is primarily the responsibility of Industry to prevent AI models with these dangerous capabilities from



being available in the first place. This exercise could be repeated for any particular perspective within the system.

Good Ancestors believes that the lack of clear responsibility creates a grave risk to public safety.

The solution to the coordination problem is to create specific responsibility – likely in the Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet or the Department of Industry – for AI safety, including underlying risks that advanced AI systems could magnify. This team should have a mandate to coordinate across the service, ring-fenced resources so that it stays focused only on safety issues, and support from highly technical staff (either internally or through connections with an AI Safety Institute).