

QUESTION TAKEN ON NOTICE

Parliamentary Inquiry : 08 June 2018

HOME AFFAIRS PORTFOLIO

(HOT/001) – Importation circumstances of the Real Bodies exhibition in Sydney

Asked:

Senator MOORE: On a separate issue—and Mr Andrews might want to follow up on this—in the course of this morning's evidence an issue came up around an art exhibition in Sydney called—

CHAIR: Real Bodies. This came up in the course of evidence this morning. So I appreciate that you may not be in a position to necessarily answer. It seems that there is a somewhat grotesque exhibition that is for commercial purposes that involves plastinated bodies and organs.

Senator MOORE: And fetuses.

CHAIR: And fetuses, and pregnant women with fetuses, or however you describe it. It has been banned in France, Israel, Hawaii and in some other places. How did this get into Australia? Are there any provisions that might preclude it from happening?

Ms Pearce: I don't have the details on the process for that particular exhibition, so we'd have to take that one on notice. We do have import controls for human remains. If people do want to bring human remains into Australia, they need to have a clearly identified reason. For example, human remains that are, as they describe, commercial in nature require an import declaration 'Commercial' would include remains brought in for display or for scientific or research purposes. There are also, of course, additional biosecurity requirements attached to that, but I'd have to take any further questions around that on notice, just to get a bit more detailed information.

CHAIR: If you could look at it, we would be grateful because, I think it's fair to say, on behalf of those of us on the committee who are here, that it's somewhat disturbing. This is not bringing in body parts for the purposes of anatomical dissection in a medical school or something like that. It's quite clearly on display and, whilst there may be other evidence, what we've had before us so far is that the plastination process, if I could call it that, could only occur at a very early stage after the death of the person or the organ concerned, so there are some aspects to it that I think raise some questions. I think we would be interested to know whether or not there are any potential breaches of the customs regulation and not just the biosecurity aspects of this or whether or not there should, in fact, be some regulations in place that would enable this to be looked at more closely, perhaps, than has happened in the past. It's hard to make the case that this is artistic. It may be easy to make a case that somehow it's educational, but I'm a bit stumped by that as well, to be honest.

Ms Pearce: We'll take that one on notice.

Answer:

Home Affairs implements a number of border controls for specific goods on behalf of other Departments.

These items are not considered to be prohibited or restricted goods upon importation into Australia under the Customs (Prohibited Imports) Regulations 1956.

Individuals who wish to import these items for any purpose need to seek permission from the Department of Health (DoH) who will provide appropriate permissions to importers under the Biosecurity (Managing Human Remains) Instrument 2016.

DoH has not requested we amend our Regulations to class these items as prohibited.