



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MEDIA RELEASE

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Standing Committee on Primary Industries and Regional Services

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Clever, new industries for regional Australia

A report making 22 recommendations for improving Australia's prospects of reaping benefits from the enormous potential of 'bioprospecting' has been presented to Parliament today.

The House of Representatives Primary Industries and Regional Services Committee, chaired by Fran Bailey, MP, has spent 11 months examining Australia's prospects for developing industries based on bioprospecting, and the impediments that stand in the way of that occurring.

What is bioprospecting?: Bioprospecting is the search for valuable chemical compounds and genetic material from plants, animals and microorganisms.

What can it yield?: Sunscreen from corals, painkillers from venomous animals, replacements for petrochemicals. The industries of the future will increasingly rely on processes and materials derived from biological sources. The search for these processes and materials is on all over the world. Bioprospectors are looking for natural products to use as medicines and agricultural chemicals, in mining and for environmental remediation.

Australia's advantage: Australia has immense biological resources. It is one of the 12 mega-diverse countries in the world, and the only one of these 12 which is a developed country. This gives us opportunities that others do not have - opportunities that the House Primary Industries and Regional Services Committee has been investigating.

Committee Chair Fran Bailey says, "Important recommendations in the report highlight that a national strategy and greater efforts by the Federal Government are needed to promote bioprospecting and the bioprocessing industries that can be developed from biodiscoveries. Biotechnology Australia and Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry must play a bigger role here.

"Basic to developing industries from our biological resources is knowing what we have got. The committee recommends more government funding for surveys, collections, databases and study of our biological resources. We must be sure that we have the skilled personnel to carry out this work, and the computing capacity to quickly identify the most promising leads to follow up. Funds are also needed for the equipment to take biodiscoveries through to commercialisation."

The committee addresses two major hindrances to bioprospecting in Australia: uncertainty about who owns what resources and complex administrative procedures in getting permits to access them. It recommends the setting up of single access points for information about these matters, and the speedy establishment of a nationally consistent approach to accessing biological resources and sharing the benefits from them.

"We've set out some principles for access and benefit sharing arrangements," said Ms Bailey. "They will ensure that bioprospecting is encouraged, while still allowing research to proceed and commercial benefits are shared."

Regional Australia stands to benefit from bioprospecting. New industries, based on growing new crops and processing them, will be established. The committee recommends research on and promotion of new industries developed from Australia's biological resources.

"The committee is excited about the possibilities that bioprospecting offers regional Australia and the nation at large," Ms Bailey said.

The report is available on the Committee web site: www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/primind/

For more details, contact the House Primary Industries Secretariat on 02 6277 4500.

To arrange media comment, contact Committee Chair **Fran Bailey**,

on 02 6277 4280 or 0419 583 647 after 12 noon.