

Additional Comments from Labor Senators

1.1 Labor Senators note that the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Amendment (Prohibition of Live Imports of Primates for Research) Bill 2015 does not seek to end primate testing for research purposes in Australia.

1.2 We recognise that while many submissions to the inquiry focussed on this broader issue, the Bill only proposes to deny the importation of non-human primates (NHPs) for research purposes.

1.3 Labor Senators contend that while the Bill would not decrease the incidence of testing, it would have negative impacts on the genetic diversity of the national breeding population and potentially compromise the efficacy of medical research.

1.4 This is supported by the submission from the National Health and Medical Research Council which states:

...in order for the colonies to be sustainable into the future, there may be times when some importation of NHPs is required to:

- (i) maintain genetic diversity and avoid problems of inbreeding within small colonies
- (ii) supply animals, or provide for rapid expansion of the colonies, to meet urgent need, if one arises.¹

1.5 Labor Senators recognise the use of non-human primates continues to be an important avenue for medical research globally.

1.6 While some submissions to the inquiry pointed to the recent decision by the United States National Institutes of Health to cease its existing chimpanzee research program to justify an end to primate importation, we note the advice of Associate Professor James Bourne who stated that:

The research community was very happy to not have chimps used for research anymore. However, the United States is still the largest user in the world of non-human primates for research. They have over seven national breeding facilities.²

1.7 On this matter, Professor Kelso from the National Health and Medical Research Council also testified that she was 'not aware of any chimpanzee research in Australia'.³

1 National Health and Medical Research Council, *Submission 59*, p. 3.

2 Associate Professor James Bourne, *Committee Hansard*, 5 February 2016, p.30.

3 Professor Anne Kelso AO, National Health and Medical Research Council, *Committee Hansard*, 5 February 2016, p. 22.

1.8 Labor is committed to a high standard of animal welfare and will continue to oppose anything that causes unnecessary harm to animals. To this end, Federal Labor recently announced a policy to ban the importation of products tested on animals.

1.9 However, Labor Senators recognise there are significant medical advances that could not have been made without the aid of medical testing on non-human primates.

1.10 Labor Senators acknowledge the importance of a world-class medical research regime which maintains strict animal welfare standards. On this matter, Associate Professor James Bourne testified that:

We are under the most tightly regulated system already. We have what is given to be world-standard facilities for our non-human primates. The main funding body equivalent to the National Health and Medical Research Council in the United States is the NIH—the National Institutes of Health. They have looked at our facilities, because we have collaborative grants, and have put ours as above world standard. Our animals have access to outside runs, which is well above anything that you would see on an international framework.⁴

1.11 Labor Senators are persuaded by the expert evidence provided to the inquiry that, while the Bill would have no impact on the incidence of medical research on non-human primates, it would reduce the genetic diversity of the national breeding population and potentially compromise the health of individual animals in the process.

1.12 Thus, we do not support the Bill in its current form.

1.13 However, Labor Senators may be willing to reconsider the Bill if an amendment were made to provide an exemption for the three government-funded registered breeding facilities.

1.14 Labor Senators contend this amendment would ensure high animal welfare standards are maintained without compromising the health and genetic diversity of national breeding colonies.

Senator Anne Urquhart
Deputy Chair
Senator for Tasmania

Senator the Hon Lisa Singh
Senator for Tasmania

4 Associate Professor James Bourne, *Committee Hansard*, 5 February 2016, p. 30.