

Question on notice no. 3

Portfolio question number: BI-3

2021-22 Budget estimates

Economics Committee, Industry, Science, Energy and Resources Portfolio

Senator the Hon. Matthew Canavan: asked the Department of Industry, Science and Resources on 4 June 2021—

(1. What is the Australian Government's policy on gain of function research? Is there a written prohibition on any work gain of function work being performed? If so, when was that written prohibition made and how has it been distributed to government agencies? 2. Has the Australian Government funded any gain of function research either here or overseas in the past 20 years? If yes, please list details and amounts of funding that have been provided for gain of function research over the past 20 years. 3. Has the Australian Government, including through the CSIRO, conducted any research with the Wuhan Institute of Virology, or its scientists, over the past two decades. If yes, please list details of the research and the Australian Government funding associated with the research conducted with the Wuhan Institute of Virology or its scientists? 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. 4. Does the Australian Government, including through the CSIRO, have any ongoing relationships with researchers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology? If so please detail the nature of these relationships.

Answer —

Please see attachment.

Economics Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources
2021 - 2022 Budget Estimates

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: Department Of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources

OUTCOME: Program 1.1: Investing in science, technology and commercialisation

TOPIC: Government's policy on gain of function research and the Wuhan Institute of Virology

REFERENCE: Written Question – Senator Matthew Canavan

QUESTION DATE: 04 June 2021

QUESTION No.: BI-3

1. What is the Australian Government's policy on gain of function research? Is there a written prohibition on any work gain of function work being performed? If so, when was that written prohibition made and how has it been distributed to government agencies?
2. Has the Australian Government funded any gain of function research either here or overseas in the past 20 years? If yes, please list details and amounts of funding that have been provided for gain of function research over the past 20 years.
3. Has the Australian Government, including through the CSIRO, conducted any research with the Wuhan Institute of Virology, or its scientists, over the past two decades. If yes, please list details of the research and the Australian Government funding associated with the research conducted with the Wuhan Institute of Virology or its scientists? 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.
4. Does the Australian Government, including through the CSIRO, have any ongoing relationships with researchers at the Wuhan Institute of Virology? If so please detail the nature of these relationships.

ANSWER

1. 'Gain of Function' is an umbrella term that could include any research designed to learn how organisms gain new properties through scientific interventions or through natural selection. There are strong regulatory controls in Australia for this type of research. For instance, genetic modification of organisms is regulated by the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator. Questions on the Australian Government's policy on gain of function research should be referred to the Department of Health.
2. The Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources has no role under its Administrative Arrangement Orders or legislation to monitor 'gain of function' research. As a consequence, the department has no line of sight to all the possible entities undertaking research that might meet such a broad definition. Refer also to BI-75 from 2021-22 Budget Estimates.

3. And 4. The Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources does not monitor 'gain of function' research and does not have line of sight to other research or collaboration that may have occurred with the Wuhan Institute of Virology over that time frame. Refer also to BI-75 from 2021-22 Budget Estimates. For details of CSIRO engagement with the Wuhan Institute of Virology refer to BI-74 from 2021-22 Budget Estimates.