

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2015 - 2016, 21 October 2015

Ref No: SQ15-000762

OUTCOME: 9 - Biosecurity and Emergency Response

Topic: Lyme Disease - Research

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Madigan, John

Question:

- a) At the House of Representative Standing Committee on Health Lyme disease roundtable on 18 September 2015 panel experts confirmed that Australian ticks carry multiple pathogens. It's now been over twenty years with only minimal scientific inquiries into what's making certain Australian's sick. What is being done to expedite and remove stigma associated with researching tick-borne diseases in the short-term?
- b) How does the government plan to encourage Australian researchers, by removing stigma and not simply identifying research areas, to engage in tick borne disease research over the long term; perhaps the next five to ten years?
- c) Why has the current position of 'zero Lyme disease in Australia' been based on a 1994 study by Russell and Doggett when it limited its research scope to only 3 strains of Borrelia and subsequently ignored spirochete artefacts that were isolated?

Answer:

The Department of Health is not aware of stigma associated with research into tick borne infections. The Department hosts the National Arbovirus and Malaria Advisory Committee whose members have clinical and scientific interest in tick borne disease. The Department welcomes research in tick borne diseases. As a result of a scoping study it commissioned on research questions about Lyme disease, the Department has made research questions about tick borne diseases available on its Lyme disease webpage. <http://www.health.gov.au/lyme-disease#scoping>

The Department does not have a fixed position on Lyme disease and welcomes new research such as the research of Professor Peter Irwin from Murdoch University which has provided new information on the Australian tick microbiome.