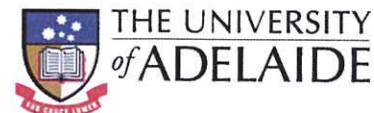


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RESEARCH BRANCH  
Office of Research Ethics, Compliance & Integrity

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29 July 2014

The Honourable Jay Weatherill MP  
Premier of South Australia  
GPO Box 2343  
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Dear Premier

I am writing this letter at the behest of the membership of one of your Ministerially appointed Animal Ethic Committees namely that responsible primarily for overseeing the use of animals in teaching and research conducted at the University of Adelaide. The committee has asked me to respond to your recent correspondence relating to the abolition of government committees.

Whilst the AEC recognises the desirability of a periodic review of committees and processes, especially in times of financial constraint, it has noted with concern that in recent months there has been a decline in the support for animal welfare both at Federal and State levels. This is well exemplified by disbandment of the Australian Animal Welfare Strategy following shut down of the Animal Welfare Unit within the DAFF and the subsequent closure of the Bureau of Animal Welfare in Victoria.

It is a measure of our civilisation that we care for those less able to defend themselves be they animal or human and it would indeed be unfortunate were Australia to establish global leadership in a race to find the lowest common denominator.

You will be aware that opposition to experimentation on animals is subject to intense, well organised and emotively expressed opposition in the public arena. Notwithstanding, the general public accepts the benefits arising from the use of animals in medical and biological research, but it does so with the expectation that animal ethics committees are not subject to commercial or other pressures and in that regard the independence of government oversight provides reassurance to both those who trust these committees and important protection to committees themselves. This "keeping the faith" is of one of the key articles inculcated into animal users in our research organisations.

The AEC system of decision making, with its inclusion of a diverse range of community viewpoints (including a strict committee membership structure), combined with government oversight and accountability, is worth retaining.

It is certainly the view of this Committee that its present status – that of statutory appointment by the State government Minister responsible for animal welfare - gives it a capacity to resist any external interference which would be greatly diminished should it lose that standing.

South Australia and its institutions have always been at the forefront of addressing animal ethics issues and, through the State government DEWNR, have established a greatly valued dialog between the various committees charged with monitoring the ethical use of animals for teaching and research. This, in conjunction with the involvement of the Department in conduct of external reviews of the operation of AECs, is something we can be well proud of and would seek to retain.

The South Australian government has achieved the benefits of a consultative decision-making system with little cost to the public purse. It is a partnership relationship with institutions providing the committee operational support and funding. It is the view of this Committee that AECs represent a very small burden on government and that the return to the public and the committees themselves is sufficient to warrant them retaining their current status.

We would therefore request that they not become a victim of financial stringency.

- AECs perform an essential role and are required under the NHMRCs *Australian Code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes, 8<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2013*.
- The public good is served best by continuation of the current arrangement.

The need for continued Government oversight to ensure public confidence in the system is a strong argument for exemption from the general proposal to abolish committees.

Yours sincerely



RICHARD A RUSSELL AM, PhD, DSc.  
Convenor, Animal Ethics Committee (Science)

Copy:

The Honourable Ian Hunter MLC, Minister for Sustainability, Environment and Conservation