

Gene bill submissions begin

Submissions to the Senate inquiry into the Patent Amendment (Human Genes and Biological Materials) Bill 2010, a private member's bill banning gene patenting, have started rolling in.

The Bill seeks to abolish patenting of biological material and allow doctors, clinicians and medical and scientific researchers to gain free and unfettered access to biological materials, however made, that are identical or substantially identical to such materials as they exist in nature.

Among early submissions, Clinical Associate Professor Judy Kirk Director of Familial Cancer Service at Westmead Hospital expressed support for the Bill, saying gene patents pose a significant potential risk to patient outcomes.

The cancer genetics specialist who directs one of Australia's largest familial cancer services said limitations on the use of the human DNA sequence may hamper clinical services and stifle on-going research. She also fears it could potentially create commercial monopolies of cancer tests and increase costs.

The bill is not supported by either Medicines Australia or AusBiotech who say it will discourage drug development. The closing date for submissions is 25 February. **SDT**