

RU-486 Inquiry About Governance, Not Abortion

Letters to the Editor – Canberra Times
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Angela Shanahan in her column ("Committee on RU-486 apparently ignoring submissions it does not like", CT, January 21) misses the point about the purpose of the current Senate inquiry involving the drug RU-486.

The Senate Community Affairs Committee was not charged with gauging the safety and acceptability of RU-486.

It was charged instead with taking submissions about a governance issue - about who should have responsibility for approval of RU-486.

On December 8, the Senate referred the private Members' Bill Therapeutic Goods Amendment (Repeal of Ministerial responsibility for approval of RU-486) Bill 2005 to the committee of inquiry to report by February 8.

The purpose of the Bill is to remove responsibility for approval of RU-486 from the Minister for Health and Ageing and to place responsibility for approval on the Therapeutic Goods Administration. The deputy chair of the committee, Senator Lyn Allison, was perfectly justified in criticising the bulk of the submissions.

They did not address this governance issue but rather focused on abortion and the safety and acceptability of RU-486 per se.

They ignored the terms of reference that are normally the starting point for any submission to a parliamentary inquiry.

Angela Shanahan quotes figures but they are not set in context and so are meaningless.

Medical experts who are normally wary of any new drug would, of course, take all proper studies and statistics into account.

Thus, it is worth noting that RU-486 has the approval of the World Health Organisation, the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, the Australian Medical Association and the Public Health Association of Australia.

In defending the bulk of submissions from the anti-abortion lobby, Ms Shanahan has done a disservice to the committee system and the parliamentary process.

It is not appropriate to abuse parliamentary inquiries by using them as a vehicle to achieve other ends, in this case, an end to legal abortion in Australia.

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