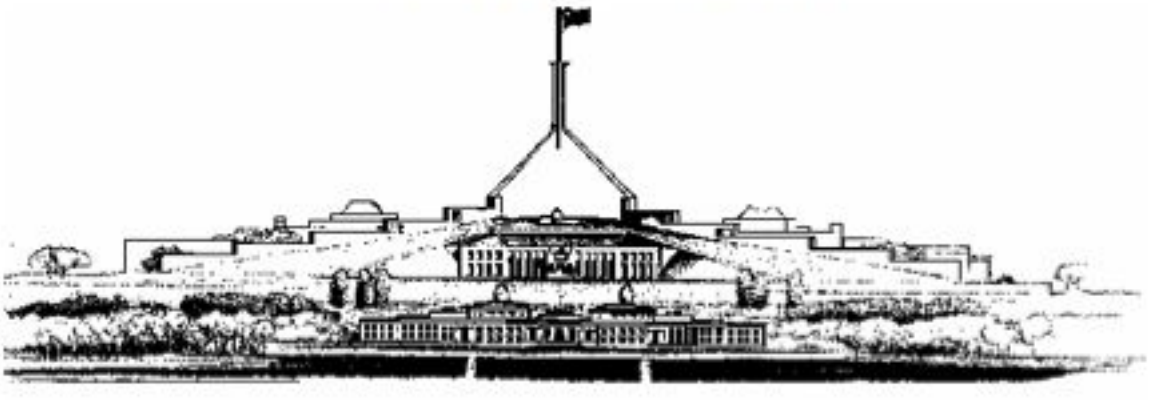
COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

PETITIONS

Medicinal Cannabis

PROCEDURAL TEXT

Monday, 29 November 2021

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROCEDURAL TEXT

Date	Monday, 29 November 2021	**Source**	House
Page	17	**Proof**	Yes
Questioner		**Responder**	
Speaker		**Question No.**	

Medicinal Cannabis

Medicinal Cannabis

Dear Chair

I refer to your correspondence of 18 October 2021 concerning petition EN3044 requesting to legalise and decriminalise tetrahydrocannabinol and cannabidiol by rescheduling cannabis. Petition EN3044 also seeks regulation for cannabis products bought, sold and produced in Australia for medical and/or recreational use.

The Australian Government's concern first and foremost is the health, safety and wellbeing of all Australians and it is committed to preventing and reducing the harms associated with alcohol and other drugs. The approach to achieving this is set out in the overarching framework of the National Drug Strategy 2017-2026 (Strategy), which recognises Australia's long-standing and ongoing commitment to a balanced approach between health and law enforcement.

The Strategy identifies cannabis as a priority substance for action and outlines a range of evidence-based approaches to minimise harm associated with cannabis use. The potential harms from cannabis use depend on the age of the person, pattern of use and other risky behaviours and health concerns. While many Australians may view cannabis as harmless, approximately 20 per cent of Australia's drug and alcohol treatment services are being provided to people identifying cannabis as their principle drug of concern.

The Government does not support any measure that could imply that illicit drugs are safe or may increase their availability or consumption. As such, it does not support the legalisation, decriminalisation and/or use of any quantity of illicit drugs. The use of any illicit drug in any quantity is a high-risk activity and has the potential to cause significant health, social and economic harms. State and territory governments largely have responsibility for matters relating to the legalisation and/or decriminalisation of illicit drugs.

Australia is also committed to upholding its international drug control obligations, which were established by three United Nations (UN) international drug control treaties. Of these treaties, Australia is signatory to the UN Single convention on Narcotic Drugs 1961, which prohibits the cultivation, supply and possession of cannabis.

The scheduling of medicines and chemicals is a national classification system that controls how these substances are made available to the public. These substances are classified into schedules as part of the Poisons Standard according to the risk of harm, and the level of access control required to protect public health and safety. When making a decision in relation to the scheduling of a substance, a senior medical officer at the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA), known as the Delegate, may seek advice from two independent Advisory Committees (with medical and pharmacist experts from across Australia), relevant state and territory regulators, and/or any other expert committees, persons or entities.

The Advisory Committee on Medicines Scheduling and the Delegate have considered the scheduling status of cannabis, cannabidiol and/or tetrahydrocannabinol on multiple occasions. These considerations have balanced the risks of harm and protection of public health against the benefits of access to these substances.

Should a prospective applicant consider that new evidence is available that may warrant a change to the scheduling status of these substances, they may submit an application for consideration through the scheduling process. Anyone can make an application to amend the Poisons Standard and there is no fee charged for lodging an application. When an application to amend the Poisons Standard is received, it is provided to the Delegate as a scheduling proposal which initiates the scheduling process. Further information regarding this process can be found at: www.tga.gov.au/form/application-amend-poisons-standard. If there may be new evidence that may potentially warrant a change to scheduling for cannabis products, the TGA can be contacted to discuss this further.

In regard to using cannabis for medical reasons, the TGA provides safe and legal access to medicinal cannabis products in appropriate circumstances. Most medicinal cannabis products are unapproved therapeutic goods, which means they have not been assessed by the TGA for safety, quality or effectiveness. However, where clinically appropriate, there are pathways for doctors to access medicinal cannabis products for their patients. Further information is available at: www.tga.gov.au/medicinal-cannabis.

Thank you for writing on this matter.

Yours sincerely

from the **Minister for Health and Aged Care, Mr Hunt**