

Lara Giddings MHA  
*Labor Member for Franklin*

**Petition No:** E2/2006

## **RESPONSE TO PETITION**

### **Title of Petition:** Jack Jumper Immunotherapy Programme

To: Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly

The Petition of the undersigned Residents of Tasmania draws attention to the House:

Currently, around 12 000 Tasmanians are known to suffer a serious allergy to Jack Jumper Ant stings. Of these, around 4 000 are highly allergic, having experienced the condition known as anaphylaxis, which puts them at significant risk of death. An internationally renowned clinical trial conducted at the Royal Hobart Hospital, has developed the only known effective vaccine that can prevent life-threatening reactions in these people.

Research funding that has provided this treatment to 60 trial participants for the last 4 years runs out in December 2005. If the programme is discontinued, access to this life-altering treatment will be denied and preventable deaths may occur. The cost to maintain and extend the treatment to other Tasmanians who are at the greatest risk amounts to around \$200 000 per year.

Your petitioners therefore request that:

With the knowledge that there is now an effective vaccine for Jack Jumper Ant Allergy, your petitioners call upon the Tasmanian Government to immediately allocate the funding necessary to provide life saving treatment to those Tasmanians at the greatest risk of death.

In addition, the Tasmanian Government is called on to actively pursue collaborative arrangements with other State and Commonwealth Governments, to make this treatment available throughout Australia.

### **Government's Position**

- The Minister for Health and Human Services, the Hon Lara Giddings, MHA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the petition, signatures for which were collected late last year and early this year, and which was tabled in the House of Assembly on 31 May 2006.

- On 4 November 2005, the former Minister for Health and Human Services, the Hon David Llewellyn, MHA announced a continuation and expansion of Tasmania's desensitisation trial for people with a life-threatening allergy to the Jack Jumper Ant.
- The Government agreed to underwrite the continuation of the successful Jack Jumper desensitisation trial at the Royal Hobart Hospital. Mr Llewellyn indicated at that time that the Government would provide funds to allow desensitisation of approximately 100 new patients each year for the next five years.
- Since that announcement, a steering committee has been established and the researchers are working through the complex arrangements required to undertake this trial. Commonwealth controls under the *Therapeutic Goods Act 1989* and normal ethical approvals must be addressed before any new patient can be treated and work is proceeding to meet these requirements. In addition, further work is being done by researchers at the Royal Hobart Hospital and elsewhere on sourcing Jack Jumper Ant venom and purifying it, to provide safer, more effective and targeted treatment.
- All the patients involved in the previous trial continue to be provided with desensitisation maintenance.
- It is anticipated that the Commonwealth and other regulatory requirements will be addressed and new patients commence treatment by the end of this calendar year.