

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Budget Estimates 2012-2013, 30 & 31 May and 1 June 2012

Question: E12-397

OUTCOME 1: Population Health

Topic: Polybrominated Flame Retardants

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Number of pages: 2

Senator: Senator Di Natale

Questions:

The questions below relate to polybrominated flame retardants (PBDEs): pentabromodiphenyl ether (pentaBDE) and octabromodiphenyl ether (octaBDE). Australia supported the listing of these chemicals as Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) under the Stockholm Convention in 2010. I understand that the Government is currently considering ratification under the domestic treaty making process, but immediate concerns have been raised regarding the impact of these chemicals on the population, particularly children. The Stockholm Convention Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs) Review Committee expressed concern that brominated flame retardants listed in the treaty could be used in recycled goods such as carpet backing. The POPRC technical review says, 'the incorporation of pentaBDE in carpet cushion which generates the highest levels of dust in the zones where children are playing is therefore of particular concern. It is notable that dust releases increases as carpet ages thus exposing the children of poorer families more heavily – an exposure reflected in the published literature'.

- a) What products currently imported or manufactured in Australia potentially contain pentabromodiphenyl ether?
- b) Are there any proposals for labelling products potentially containing pentabromodiphenyl ether or other means of warning customers?
- c) Are imported products made from recycled materials tested for pentabromodiphenyl ether before they are accepted into Australia?

Answers:

The following answers were provided by the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities:

- a) PentaBDE is not manufactured in Australia and available information indicates that no import has occurred since mid-2005. Australia does not have comprehensive national data on imported or manufactured products that potentially contain pentaBDE. While articles containing pentaBDEs may continue to be imported into Australia, the quantity of the chemical in imported articles is expected to decline given international regulatory and voluntary activity.

- b) There are no current proposals for labelling products potentially containing pentaBDE or other means of warning customers.
- c) No imported products made from recycled materials are tested for pentaBDE before they are accepted into Australia.