

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Additional Budget Estimates 2015 - 16, 10 February 2016

Ref No: SQ16-000061

OUTCOME: 1 - Population Health

Topic: Phthalates and Proposal P1034

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Gallagher, Katy

Question:

- a) It appears our food standards may be lower than European jurisdiction, particularly as they relate to phthalates? How do our standards compare internationally?
- b) What actions is FSANZ taking to ensure monitoring of the food supply continues?
- c) What work is FSANZ doing to improve standards of food packing as they relate to phthalates?
- d) Has FSANZ had any dealings with manufacturers of products where the levels have exceeded the acceptable levels? If not, why not?
- e) Has the Australian Government, through the Minister made any enquiries about the safety of the food packaging? When?
- f) Do you anticipate a conclusion of the work you are doing on Proposal P1034, which commenced in 2014?

Answer:

- a) The *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code* (the Code) has a limit for one phthalate in packaged water. The European Union has limits for seven phthalates in food.
- b) Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) monitors the food supply on a regular basis to ensure it is safe and that foods comply with the Code. Its primary monitoring tool is the Australian Total Diet Study (ATDS) which is conducted every 2-3 years. Other surveys are undertaken from time to time to investigate specific issues.

For example, the most recent ATDS indicated that overall, Australian consumers are exposed to low levels of packaging chemicals through food consumption, representing a negligible to low risk to public health and safety. A follow-on analytical survey of two phthalates, commencing in late March 2016, is planned to enable a more comprehensive assessment of any potential health and safety risks.

- c) Through P1034, FSANZ is investigating potential public health and safety risks from chemical contaminants that may migrate from packaging and whether these risks are adequately managed. The outcomes of the follow-on survey on phthalates survey (see part b) will inform whether further risk management measures, such as the development of specific standards, are required.
- d) No. If the follow-on phthalate survey indicates that levels may cause food to be unsafe, FSANZ will inform the responsible enforcement agency or the state or territory. In this event, FSANZ may also liaise with manufacturers.
- e) In November 2015, the Minister was informed of the outcomes of 24th ATDS (phase 2) and was made aware of P1034.
- f) It is anticipated that the work on P1034 will conclude in June 2017. Details of timelines for P1034 are available in the FSANZ Work Plan on the FSANZ website at <http://www.foodstandards.gov.au/code/changes/workplan/Pages/default.aspx>