

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Budget Estimates 2011-2012, 30/31 May 2011

Question: E11-010

OUTCOME 1: Population Health

TOPIC: RECLASSIFICATION OF RADIOFREQUENCY ELECTROMAGNETIC FIELDS

Written Question on Notice

Senator Xenophon asked:

On 1 June, the World Health Organization announced it had reclassified radiofrequency electromagnetic fields as 'possibly carcinogenic to humans', and in one study quoted by WHO, showed a 40 per cent increased risk of gliomas (a malignant form of brain cancer) in heavy mobile phone users.

- a) What action will the agency be taking in response to WHO's announcement?
- b) Does the department have any plans to introduce warning labels for these devices, such as exist overseas? Why not?

Answer:

- a) In response to the announcement by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) The Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANSA) issued a statement on its website welcoming the report and advising that the current ARPANSA advice is in line with the classification by the IARC.

The findings of the IARC did not reflect any change in the body of scientific knowledge regarding possible health effects nor did it provide any assessment of the magnitude of risk associated with particular levels of exposure. However, as advised in its statement, ARPANSA will consider the implications of the IARC decision and the underlying scientific evidence and, if necessary, review the current standard and other means of protecting the public.

- b) ARPANSA is not aware of any country that has introduced such labelling on a national basis. ARPANSA continually monitors the scientific research and will consider the efficacy of any regulatory or other response and make recommendations accordingly.