

**Senate Community Affairs Committee**

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

**Budget Estimates 2014-2015, 2/3 June 2014**

**Ref No:** SQ14-000429

**OUTCOME:** 7 – Health Infrastructure, Regulation, Safety and Quality

**Topic:** Assessment of Existing Chemicals

**Type of Question:** Written Question on Notice

**Senator:** Xenophon, Nick

**Question:**

The European Union, in my view, is a long way ahead of Australia in terms of identifying, regulating and blocking the importation of literally thousands of chemicals hazardous to human health into Europe.

- (a) What was the context of the NICNAS assessment of azo dyes and what further work is being done in relation to azo dyes in Australia?
- (b) What other groups of dangerous chemicals that pose an unreasonable risk to the public health is NICNAS intending to assess as to Australians' exposure, hazard potential and risk to public health?
- (c) Does the scheduling of azo dyes by the TGA bring Australia up to par in comparison with controls in Europe, for instance?

**Answer:**

- (a) The National Industrial Chemical Notification and Assessment Scheme (NICNAS), established under the *Industrial Chemicals (Notification and Assessment) Act 1989*, aids in the protection of the Australian people and the environment by assessing the risks of industrial chemicals and making recommendations to promote their safe use. In July 2012, NICNAS started a process of assessing, over four years, around 3,000 chemicals that had been listed in the Australian Inventory of Chemical Substances (AICS) without previous assessment. The risks of these chemicals are being assessed under the Inventory Multi-Tiered Assessment and Prioritisation (IMAP) framework. NICNAS works closely with Australian Competition and Consumer Commission and the Scheduling Delegate for the Poisons Standard to address public health concerns identified in these assessments.
- (b) NICNAS undertakes human health and environmental risk assessments for both new and existing chemicals. Under the IMAP framework, NICNAS is undertaking the accelerated assessment of 3,000 existing chemicals that were selected for assessment on the basis of potential risk, following an extensive process of stakeholder consultation. The risk to human health is being determined through rigorous

scientific assessment, using transparent criteria for human health hazards and potential exposure. The full list of chemicals subject to assessment under the IMAP framework is published on the NICNAS website at [www.nicnas.gov.au/chemical-information/imap-assessments/implementation-of-imap-stage-one](http://www.nicnas.gov.au/chemical-information/imap-assessments/implementation-of-imap-stage-one).

- (c) Controls on the use of chemicals are framed in accordance with the regulatory framework that applies in each country. In Australia, states and territories have primary responsibility for chemical regulation, with national coordination of risk assessment through NICNAS. The Australian controls for benzidine-based azo dyes are comparable to those that apply in the EU.