Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2010-2011, 20 October 2010

Question: E10-044

OUTCOME 1: Population Health

Topic: CARTAGENA PROTOCOL

Written Question on Notice

Senator Xenophon asked:

a) Does the OGTR support the Cartagena Protocol?

b) Is the OGTR aware of any plans for Australia to support the treaty?

c) What place does the OGTR have in advising the Government on this treaty?

d) What representations has the OGTR made to the Government in relation to the treaty?

e) What future representations will the OGTR make.

Answer:

a) Australia is not a party to the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety (Cartagena Protocol).
    The Cartagena Protocol is a protocol to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity, and
    applies to the biosafety of 'living modified organisms' (LMOs). LMOs are equivalent to
    genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in the Australian regulatory context. Dealings
    with GMOs in Australia are regulated under the *Gene Technology Act 2000*,
    administered by the Gene Technology Regulator. This function operates independently
    of Australia's status as a non-party to the Cartagena Protocol.

b) The Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR) understands that the Australian
    Government does not currently have a timetable for accession to the Cartagena Protocol.

c) As a non-party, Australia has participated in the Meetings of the Parties to the Cartagena
    Protocol as an active observer. Drawing from the experience of administering
    Australia's established domestic regulatory system, the OGTR has provided technical
    advice in support of Australian government delegations at Protocol meetings. OGTR
    also contributed to Australia's voluntary report to the Protocol Secretariat in 2007 on the
    Australian domestic regime.

d) OGTR provides technical advice on the Australian regulatory system for GMOs.

e) OGTR will continue to provide technical advice on the Australian regulatory system for
    GMOs, as required.