Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2015 - 16, 21 October 2015

Ref No: SQ15-000822

OUTCOME: 1 - Population Health

Topic: Safety of Nanoparticles

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Xenophon, Nick

Question:

a) FSANZ has consistently claimed that the best predictor of the safety of nanoparticles is whether they are safe at conventional scale. Does FSANZ still maintain that this is the case?

b) And does FSANZ maintain that this is true of both nano titanium dioxide and nano silica?

c) I also refer to the policy position of the Public Health Association which says there is a growing body of evidence showing nanotechnology may potentially pose significant health, safety and environmental hazards. Does FSANZ consider that nanoparticles could be "potentially unsafe"?

d) What controls exist under the current risk assessment framework to assess the safety of these materials?

e) Is FSANZ planning on now conducting testing or surveying food importers and makers to determine the presence of these materials?

Answer:

a) Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) still considers that the weight of evidence indicates that the parent compound (or "conventionally sized material") is likely to be the best predictor of the toxicity of nanoscale materials which may be present in food, particularly for soluble materials. Most substances which are approved for use in food are soluble in water or oils and fall into this category.

b) FSANZ considers that food-grade titanium dioxide and silicon dioxide are safe for human consumption in food when used according to permissions in Standard 1.3.1 – Food Additives and Standard 1.3.4 – Identity and Purity in the *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code* (the Code).

c) FSANZ, like other food regulatory agencies, does not consider nanoscale materials to be either inherently safe or unsafe.

d) FSANZ amended its *Application Handbook* in 2008 to reflect considerations of the use of nanotechnology and the safety of foods. In cases where particle size is important to achieving the technological function or may relate to a difference in toxicity, the applicant must provide information on the particle size, size distribution and morphology, as well as any size-dependent properties.

Australian food laws prohibit the sale in Australia of food that is unsafe or unsuitable. These laws also prohibit the sale of food which does not comply with a requirement of the Code.

e) No. At this point in time, FSANZ does not propose to undertake testing of food for nanomaterials