

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
Answers to questions on notice
Environment portfolio

Question No: 103
Hearing: Supplementary Budget Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 1.6
Programme: Science
Topic: Chemicals Used in Coal Seam Gas Extraction
Hansard Page: 127
Question Date: 19 October 2015
Question Type: Spoken

Senator Waters asked:

Senator WATERS: Can you answer all the other questions I asked as well, please? They are: what is the time frame; will it end up as guidelines; how will the guidelines fit into the regulatory system; do they cover all fracking, or just CSG; and are they mandatory?

Dr Wright: As part of the chemicals assessment project we have been looking to develop guidelines that could be picked up by jurisdictions when those assessments are released, and we were looking to have some guidelines drafted for consultation processes at about the same time as the report goes out, so it can be seen to have a use and it can encourage consideration and debate. That is currently in progress, but it is at quite an early stage.

Mr Whitfort: It is at quite an early stage, and the US EPA has not had a role in developing those guidelines.

Senator WATERS: Was it just for CSG, or for all fracking?

Dr Wright: The chemical assessment is just for CSG.

Senator WATERS: If you can provide me with any more detail about that on notice, that would be very helpful.

Answer:

The Department of the Environment has commissioned development of a guidance manual that will set out best practice in assessing the risks to the environment and human health from using chemicals in coal seam gas extraction. The manual will draw on the *National Assessment of chemicals associated with coal seam gas extraction in Australia* project. The manual will not cover other forms of unconventional gas. The Department expects to release an exposure draft of the guidance manual and finalise the manual in 2016.

The guidance manual will be a resource available to Commonwealth and state regulators and project proponents. Regulators will be able to ask proponents to use the manual as part of environmental impact studies required under relevant legislation. This includes development proposals for coal seam gas projects referred to the Commonwealth Environment Minister for assessment and approval under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.