

Economics Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Industry and Science Portfolio
Additional Estimates 2014-15
26 February 2015

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY AND SCIENCE

TOPIC: Food Safety

REFERENCE: Written Question – Senator Carr

QUESTION No.: AI-67

In relation to food safety:

1. Please explain NMI's role in Australia's food safety system.
2. In an article on the NMI website dated 17 February 2015, the organisation states "Yes NMI can test for Hepatitis A and Norovirus in foods such as frozen berries". However, on 27 February 2015, the CEO of Patties Food stated on Radio National Breakfast stated that Australia is not very well set up to test for Hepatitis A in food, and that the industry was working with NMI (among others) to resolve this issue but had not yet done so.
 - a. What is the reason for this discrepancy?
 - b. Please describe NMI's role in responding to the frozen berries Hepatitis A incident.
 - c. Has this incident led to changes in NMI's capabilities, contingency planning or forward work plan?
 - d. Was any additional funding required to respond to this incident? If so, where was that funding drawn from?
 - e. Is NMI involved in the current government review of food labelling and related matters? If so, in what way?

ANSWER

1. NMI provides analytical services on a fee for service, user pays basis, and adheres to Department of Finance guidelines for cost recovery and competitive neutrality. Analytical services relevant to food safety are available to government and industry clients.
2.
 - a. The 'discrepancy' may be due to the expectation that hepatitis-A tests from a complex sample such as frozen berries can be rapidly delivered. "Resolving the issue" requires more than simply obtaining a test result, for example it requires tracing the hepatitis-A back through the supply chain.
 - b. NMI provided services on a fee for service and worked with industry and regulators on the issue.
 - c. NMI has expanded its capabilities in this area. NMI monitors international trends, and adapts its forward work plan to respond appropriately to new issues.
 - d. No additional funding was required.
 - e. NMI is not involved in a government review of country of origin food labelling.