

Economics Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Industry, Innovation and Science Portfolio
2016 - 2017 Additional Estimates
2 March 2017

DEPARTMENT: DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND SCIENCE

TOPIC: Nuclear Waste Storage

REFERENCE: Question on Notice (Hansard, 2 March 2017, page 123-124)

QUESTION No.: AI-50

Senator KETTER: Finally, I understand there are about 100 different locations around Australia where we currently store nuclear waste. Is that correct?

Mr Sheldrick: That is correct.

Senator LUDLAM: How many of those 100 sites will close if the dump gets on its feet?

Mr B Wilson: I cannot answer that.

Senator KETTER: Can you tell me: what is the cost to the—

Senator Canavan: The important thing for me in particular is that we have made commitments to the community of Lucas Heights to find a permanent store for the waste that is held there. I am very committed to ensuring that we honour the commitments we make to any community that accepts a waste facility. The Lucas Heights community went through a process when that facility was established; we promised to find it a permanent home, and I think we will live up to this promise as best we can.

Mr B Wilson: Could I also add that it is not about closing the number of the sites; if nuclear waste is generated or held, it needs to be stored somewhere before it is then moved somewhere else. We are about providing a long-term solution for that waste. Most of these sites are not built for long-term storage or disposal, so our aim would be to create a national facility where the waste can transit as quickly as possible to the national facility and then be looked after over the longer term.

Senator KETTER: I will finish by asking: what do you estimate are the costs to the Commonwealth of our current nuclear storage facilities across the 100 or so sites, and what is the expected cost of running the new waste storage facility?

Mr B Wilson: Again, I cannot answer that specifically. Quite a number of those 100 sites are not Commonwealth-owned sites; they are state sites or universities or hospitals, or sites like that. There are a small number of Commonwealth holdings, largely CSIRO and ANSTO but also Defence and a number of other establishments. We have not done a costing for what that holding is—that I am aware of—at this point. We are working through, as part of our process for the new facility, a detailed business case which will be looking at the costs of maintaining the status quo for the Commonwealth versus the costs of alternative arrangements such as this facility. That will all be part of the consideration that goes into cabinet's decision on the waste facility.

Senator KETTER: I am interested in those figures. Are you able to take those on notice?

Mr B Wilson: Yes, I will.

ANSWER

I note that the majority of the 100 or so current sites are not Commonwealth facilities. However, the Department will develop a comprehensive cost analysis of all options, including business as usual (BAU) arrangements as part of a detailed business case for the National Radioactive Waste Management Facility.

The cost analysis work stream of the detailed business case will assess these costs to an 80 per cent

cost confidence, or P80, level of accuracy and is scheduled to be undertaken following the completion of site characterisation activities on one or more nominated sites.