

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Additional Estimates 2010-11, 23 February 2011

Question: E11-001

OUTCOME 1: Population Health

Topic: GM LABELLING LAWS

Written Question on Notice

Senator Siewert asked:

The WA Government has an obligation under Australia's Food Standards to test for compliance with GM labelling laws. In September 2010, Greenpeace sought under the West Australian *Freedom of Information Act 1992* details of all tests conducted by the WA Government on food and food products to determine whether they contained novel DNA or proteins, between 2005 and the present. Greenpeace recently received correspondence from the WA Department of Health advising that '...the Department has not conducted or participated in, and does not hold any documents relating to, received any tests of the nature described in your application.'

- a) Is the Government aware that WA is not meeting its obligations under Australia's food standards?
- b) If so, has it raised the issue with WA?
- c) What actions is the Federal Government taking to address this failure?
- d) Does it mean that the Australian Government cannot guarantee that foods are GM free?
- e) How can Australian consumers have confidence in that their foods are safe if WA is not meeting its obligations?
- f) Are other states meeting their obligations?

Answer:

- a) Decisions relating to monitoring compliance with the *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code* (the Code) and any associated testing are the responsibility of individual state and territory governments in Australia.
- b) See response to a).
- c) See response to a).

- d) GM foods approved in the Code are permitted to be present in foods for retail sale. Subject to limited exemptions, foods derived from GM containing novel protein or DNA, or foods having altered characteristics, must be labelled for consumer information purposes. Australia has a zero tolerance approach for the presence of unapproved GM foods in the food supply.
- e) The regulatory framework for GM foods ensures that Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) conducts a pre-market safety assessment for each GM line, and only those GM foods assessed as safe are approved for sale.
- f) Individual state and territory governments are responsible for enforcing the Code and make their own decisions on the need for compliance monitoring within their jurisdiction.