

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH AND AGEING PORTFOLIO

Budget Estimates 2011-2012, 30/31 May 2011

Question: E11-009

OUTCOME 1: Population Health

TOPIC: DANGERS OF MOBILE PHONE RADIATION

Written Question on Notice

Senator Xenophon asked:

- a) Given the wide body of evidence now available in relation to the dangers of mobile phone radiation, what is the agency's policy on this?
- b) How is the agency making the public aware of this risk?

Answer:

- a) The substantial body of scientific evidence relating to possible health effects, taken as a whole, strongly suggests exposures below the limits of current standards are not harmful. There are some studies that suggest possibly harmful effects, or indicate exposures above current limits make cause effects worthy of further investigation.

The Australian Radiation and Nuclear Safety Agency (ARPANSA), as the Government's primary advisor on radiation protection, maintains a continual review of international and Australian scientific research regarding the health effects of radiofrequency (RF) electromagnetic radiation (EMR) emitted by devices such as mobile phones.

ARPANSA has produced a publication entitled '*Maximum Exposure Levels to Radiofrequency Fields – 3-kHz to 300 GHz (2002)*' (the Standard) that is available on the ARPANSA website. This Standard is based on an assessment of international scientific research, and sets limits for human exposure that are closely aligned with international guidelines. The Standard forms the basis of regulation by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA).

ARPANSA is currently undertaking a comprehensive assessment of the research published since the preparation of the Standard, including consideration of the latest publications from the Interphone Study Group, with the aim of formulating recommendations regarding the need to review or amend the Standard, or take other regulatory or advisory action.

- b) ARPANSA publishes factsheets on its website and a selection of new research results each month.

ARPANSA also answers many hundreds of telephone enquiries each year on issues related to possible health effects of electric and magnetic fields, including those

produced by mobile phone technologies. In relation to the uncertainty about possible health effects, ARPANSA offers advice, including its advice on practical ways in which people can reduce their exposure to the electromagnetic fields produced by wireless telephones. These include: limiting call time, preferring use of land-line phones, using hands-free or speaker options and texting instead of making voice calls. Use of the phone in good signal areas will also usually let the phone communicate with lower power levels and further reduce exposures. ARPANSA has also recommended parents encourage their children to use these methods of reducing exposure.