

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2014 - 2015, 22 October 2014

Ref No: SQ14-001295

OUTCOME: 1 – Population Health

Topic: Food Irradiation

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Xenophon, Nick

Question:

I refer to the FSANZ review of the Labelling Requirements on Irradiated Foods. I have previously written to the Assistant Minister for Health the Hon Fiona Nash on this issue.

- a) I understand there are some concerns that irradiated food can render a protein more allergenic, which could pose a safety risk for consumers. What research has FSANZ undertaken on these concerns?
- b) What is involved in the risk assessments for irradiated foods before they can be sold in Australia and New Zealand?
- c) Are there standards about the levels of irradiation treatment food can be subjected to? What are the standards?
- d) With no discernible signs of irradiation treatment, does this undermine the ability of consumers to make an informed decision at the counter?

Answer:

- a) Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) has considered the research around the effects of irradiation on protein. Studies conducted in animals are poor predictors of allergenicity in humans. FSANZ has also considered the results of *in vitro* studies using human sera from allergic individuals which indicate that protein from irradiated food is of similar or lesser allergenicity than protein from non-irradiated food. These data are more relevant for a risk assessment of irradiated foods. Therefore, FSANZ considers that irradiated foods do not pose a greater allergenicity risk to consumers relative to non-irradiated foods.
- b) FSANZ evaluates whether there is a technological justification for the irradiation process (i.e. whether a request for a food to be approved to be irradiated is for pest disinfestation or for bacterial decontamination).

If so, FSANZ considers data on the composition of the food and assesses whether any changes may have been produced by irradiation which would affect its safety or levels of nutrients.

- c) Standard 1.5.3 – Irradiation of Food in the *Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code* prescribes a minimum and maximum dose of irradiation for foods permitted to be irradiated, depending on the purpose of the irradiation treatment. The Standard is available at <http://www.comlaw.gov.au/Series/F2008B00629>
- d) Standard 1.5.3 requires the label on a package of irradiated food or food containing irradiated ingredients or components to include a statement to the effect that the food, ingredient or component has been treated with ionising radiation. Irradiated food, or food containing an irradiated ingredient or component, which is sold unpackaged, including ready-to-eat foods, is required to display this statement on, or in connection, with the food.