Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2014 - 2015, 22 October 2014

Ref No: SQ14-001329

OUTCOME: 1 – Population Health

Topic: Intervention in Market Place Regarding Nanomaterials

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Siewert, Rachel

Question:

Your answer to SQ14-000584 suggests that the standard for intervening in the market as a result of concerns regarding the safety of food will be when there is 'significant' evidence of 'significant risk'. Would you agree with that characterisation?

If yes: So, in the absence of any evidence, or evidence that is limited but concerning, intervention is unlikely?

If yes again: Would you accept that this is the opposite of a precautionary approach?

If no: Then what is the standard required before FSANZ will intervene? And how do you factor in the almost inevitable unknowns and uncertainties when it comes to nanomaterials in food?

Answer:

In developing or reviewing food regulatory measures and variations, Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) must have regard to the need for standards to be based on risk analysis using the best available scientific evidence. FSANZ undertakes its risk analysis processes to achieve a low overall risk range protective of public health and safety.

FSANZ has not received an application to amend the Code in relation to a new or novel nanotechnology. However, FSANZ amended its Application Handbook in 2008 to require an applicant to provide sufficient information for FSANZ to perform a robust pre-market risk assessment. This conservative risk management approach is considered sufficient to assess the safety of new or novel nanoscale materials.

FSANZ is also proactively evaluating whether there is any justification for establishing specifications based on particle size for certain insoluble materials that already have permissions in Standard 1.3.1 – Food Additives in the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Code, based on the best available scientific evidence.