

Senate Community Affairs Committee

ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

HEALTH PORTFOLIO

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2015 - 16, 21 October 2015

Ref No: SQ15-000828

OUTCOME: 1 - Population Health

Topic: Friends of the Earth Article on Nanotechnology

Type of Question: Written Question on Notice

Senator: Xenophon, Nick

Question:

I refer to the recent *Sydney Morning Herald* news article and information from Friends of the Earth regarding new research showing evidence of widespread use of nano ingredients in popular food products. The articles states:

For many years, FSANZ has claimed there is “little evidence” of nanotechnology in food because no company has applied for approval. It has therefore not tested for nor regulated the use of nanoparticles. Friends of the Earth commissioned tests that found potentially harmful nanoparticles of titanium dioxide and silica in 14 popular products including M&Ms, Woolworths white sauce and Praise salad dressing.

- a) How does FSANZ respond to these findings?
- b) Does FSANZ consider there is conclusive evidence suggesting nano-titanium dioxide and nano-silica are completely safe to eat? I note these chemicals have been shown to interfere with the immune system and cause cell damage?
- c) In the news article FSANZ is quoted as telling Fairfax Media it had not identified any health impacts linked with the consumption of these nanoparticles.
 - (i) What investigations and or monitoring had FSANZ undertaken to come to this conclusion?
 - (ii) Given these new findings, what actions has FSANZ taken? I note in the FSANZ states:

If FSANZ became aware of a potentially unsafe food or ingredient, we would conduct a risk assessment and recommend appropriate control measures.

Answer:

- a) Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) is aware of the Friends of the Earth commissioned study which reported on the size distribution of titanium dioxide and silicon dioxide particles in some food products.

The Friends of the Earth-commissioned report does not contain any information to suggest that food-grade titanium dioxide or silicon dioxide are likely to pose health and safety concerns.

b) FSANZ considers that food grade titanium dioxide and silicon dioxide are safe to eat when used according to existing permissions in Standard 1.3.1 – Food Additives and Standard 1.3.4 – Identity and Purity.

c)

(i) Titanium dioxide and silicon dioxide have been used as food additives for decades without evidence of adverse effects in human populations. Both additives are approved for use in food by the European Union, the United States Food and Drug Administration and the United Nations Codex Alimentarius.

FSANZ has an ongoing program of work continuing to monitor the scientific literature in relation to the potential application of nanotechnologies to foods.

(ii) FSANZ considers any regulatory implications arising from scientific literature.