

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
Answers to questions on notice
Environment portfolio

Question No: 114
Hearing: Additional Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 4
Programme: Science
Topic: Follow on work from CSG Assessment
Hansard Page: N/A
Question Date: 24 February 2016
Question Type: Written

Senator Waters asked:

Background: At a meeting of the IESC on 15 in March 2014 the following was minuted:

“There was also discussion on the feasibility of a follow-on stage to the current National Chemical Assessment Project, and whether this would be a priority to augment the current project to better cover deep groundwater under the chemical research priority theme. It was agreed feasibility work would be undertaken by the OWS” [Office of Water Science]

1. What were the results of this feasibility of a follow on stage to the NICNAS assessment in a later project to better cover deep groundwater?
2. I am aware that the CSIRO are undertaking “preliminary” work in that area – is that the outcome?
3. Will DoE or OWS be doing or commissioning any further work?
4. In October 2015, NICNAS officers told me that they had not been involved in any discussions with DoE about any further follow on work. Does that sound accurate to you?

Answer:

1. In 2014, the Department of the Environment commissioned CSIRO to provide advice on the need for, feasibility and scope of research to assess the potential risks to deeper groundwater systems from chemicals used in coal seam gas extraction in Australia.

Informed by this advice, the Department commissioned CSIRO in November 2015 to do research related to chemicals in deeper groundwater. When complete, this research will improve our ability to predict how these chemicals might move from deeper groundwater to other parts of the environment, covering time, distance and concentrations. This research is not a risk assessment but will develop tools that will be useful for site specific risk assessments. At this stage, delivery of this research is expected in late 2016.

2. See answer to question 1.
3. Any further work is a matter for Government to consider in the context of the completed National assessment of chemicals associated with coal seam gas extraction in Australia, and the research noted in the answer to question 1.
4. The Department concurs with the evidence provided by Dr Brian Richards, Executive Director, National Industrial Chemicals Notification and Assessment Scheme (NICNAS), at the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee’s Estimates hearing of 21 October 2015, specifically about preliminary discussions concerning research into the potential risks to deeper groundwater systems, and the absence of discussions concerning expanding the scope of the current assessment to other related gas industries.