

Economics Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Industry, Innovation and Science Portfolio
2017 - 2018 Budget Estimates
31 May – 1 June 2017

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: CSIRO

TOPIC: Low level radioactive waste at the Woomera site

REFERENCE: Questions on Notice (Hansard, 1 June 2017, page 106-107)

QUESTION No.: BI-58

Senator LUDLAM: That is all right—I have a couple of others I want to run through, and the hour is late. Could you please advise on the cost, the extent of the process and the status of works to recontainerise and secure low-level radioactive waste at the Woomera site? While we are on the subject of how safe this stuff is, how much are we having to spend on recontaining the decaying packaging of the radioactive waste up at Woomera? Is that still kind of your bailiwick, or ... ?

Mr B Wilson: Not technically; it is actually CSIRO's waste, so they own that waste and they are responsible for managing it.

Senator LUDLAM: I will not ask you to speak for CSIRO, but have you got anything at all that you can tell us about what is happening up there? Or is it really not your domain?

Ms Beauchamp: I think we are probably better off taking it on notice and getting that information from CSIRO.

Senator LUDLAM: If you could.

Mr B Wilson: I am just reluctant to say too much about what CSIRO is doing, because I am not across it completely.

Senator LUDLAM: I am used to that. If I am in the wrong portfolio then that is fine, but could you take on notice what is the nature of the impairment of the containers that that material is stored in, and what is it costing to repackage it.

Ms Beauchamp: We will take that.

Mr B Wilson: We can take that on notice.

ANSWER

CSIRO currently has a store located on Defence land at Woomera presently housing 9,725 drums of long-lived low-level radioactive waste. ARPANSA conducted a regulatory inspection of the Woomera facility in April 2016 and identified a number of concerns regarding the future integrity of the drums, with some rust on a number of drums and deterioration of plastic drum liners and stacked drums.

As noted in the CSIRO Annual Report 2015-16, CSIRO has raised a provision for \$29.7 million to cover the estimated costs of assessment, separation and treatment of the waste over several years.