

Senate Standing Committee on Economics
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Innovation, Industry, Science and Research Portfolio
Budget Estimates Hearing 2008-09
2-3 June 2008

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: AUSTRALIAN NUCLEAR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY ORGANISATION

TOPIC: Radioisotopes

REFERENCE: Question on Notice (Hansard, 3 June 2008, Page E17)

QUESTION No. BI-99

Senator EGGLESTON—Are there any nuclear medicine facilities around Australia that are particularly disadvantaged by the fact that you are not producing isotopes?

Dr Cameron—I think in general terms we are doing very well, because we are working very hard to supply all the needs. But there are times when groups get disadvantaged. What the actual numbers and locations are I am not able to say at this stage. I could find out that information.

Senator EGGLESTON—Who do you find make the most complaints about not receiving adequate isotope supplies?

Dr Cameron—Sorry, could you repeat that?

Senator EGGLESTON—Which centres complain most often about not receiving adequate supplies of radioisotopes for medical purposes?

Dr Cameron—That is not information I have with me.

Senator EGGLESTON—Perhaps you could take that on notice. Would you be good enough to do that?

Dr Cameron—Certainly.

ANSWER

The Australian Nuclear and Science Technology Organisation (ANSTO) has not identified any individual customer or group of customers, or any identifiable geographical centres, that have been particularly disadvantaged by the recent unavailability of domestically produced reactor-based isotopes. As Dr Cameron noted, ANSTO has set up an emergency supply group of nuclear medicine practitioners to provide guidance to ANSTO on the execution of radioisotope supply action plans in times of shortage. That group is a valuable means of keeping the relevant medical practitioners informed regarding radioisotope supply and shortages, and allows practitioners to reschedule treatments if required.

Rather than problems of geographical distribution of isotopes, the problems there have been more related to the type of isotope being imported. While there have been delays or interruptions to supply of all imported isotopes, the supply of the isotopes Samarium and Chromium, which are imported from South Africa, has been especially prone to interruption. To put these issues in context, the Samarium shipments of seven per month and Chromium of 47 per month only represent 2 per cent of total deliveries.