

Senate Standing Committee on Economics

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Resources, Energy and Tourism Portfolio

Budget Senate Estimates

31 May 2011

Question: BR5
Topic: Nuclear Policy
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Senator Ludlam asked:

Senator LUDLAM: If you could check that for us; I think that is next week. In recent correspondence to national environment groups and other stakeholders, Minister Martin Ferguson referred to himself as the minister with the portfolio responsibility for nuclear policy. Is this correct and can you confirm—I do not know if I should throw to you, Minister—whether there has been a change of portfolio or a restructure?

Ms Constable: Uranium is the area that the department considers, of course. Uranium is a very important part of the nuclear fuel cycle. Consideration of uranium mining is always in the context of a full nuclear fuel cycle. The department has particular areas of responsibility within that nuclear fuel cycle, starting from the exploration and mining activities of uranium, out to radioactive waste issues. What we do not have responsibility for, because we do not have nuclear energy in Australia, is nuclear power, nuclear energy.

Senator Sherry: Therefore, I think the minister's general description is correct.

Senator LUDLAM: I am wondering whether the minister for the environment, the minister for health or the Minister for Foreign Affairs were notified about the portfolio change or whether Minister Ferguson has just taken this on unilaterally.

Senator Sherry: There was not a portfolio change. Secondly, I would have to take it on notice, if you seriously want me to pursue that. Do you want me to take it on notice?

Senator LUDLAM: Yes, I am very interested to know. I have never heard of a portfolio responsibility for nuclear policy. That is brand new.

Senator Sherry: I think you are, frankly, over-reading into the comments made by the minister.

Senator LUDLAM: No, they are not comments. It is in correspondence.

Senator Sherry: Nevertheless, I will take it on notice.

Senator LUDLAM: If you could, I would appreciate that.

Answer:

The Australian Government policy excludes nuclear power from our domestic energy mix. The portfolio of Resources and Energy has responsibility for energy policy which would include nuclear power if it were introduced.