

Senate Standing Committee on Economics
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Innovation, Industry, Science and Research Portfolio
Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearing 2009-10
21 October 2009

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: INNOVATION, INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND RESEARCH

TOPIC: Regulation of Nanotechnologies

REFERENCE: Question on Notice (Hansard 21 October 2009, E68.)

QUESTION No.: SI-44

Senator ABETZ – Minister and Mr Paterson could you take on notice the question about the regulation of nanotechnologies and registration of them et cetera that I tried to ask under CSIRO. If I could, on notice, be given some indication as to the government's current thinking as to the way forward in relation to that area.

ANSWER

The Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research coordinates the oversight of nanotechnology by the Australian Government through the National Enabling Technologies Strategy and formerly through the National Nanotechnology Strategy.

The Australian Government has put in place a program of work to examine the potential environmental, health and safety impacts of nanotechnologies. This work includes understanding potential health and safety effects of materials in the nano-size range, looking at the adequacy of current regulatory frameworks, and investigating the effectiveness for nanomaterials of current workplace control measures. The Monash report (*'A Review of Possible Impacts of Nanotechnology on Australia's Regulatory Framework'*) was commissioned by the Australian Government to assess the adequacy of nanotechnology regulation. Australia was amongst the first governments in the world to do this. It found that while Australia's regulatory regime is well placed to respond to the impact of nanotechnology, there are certain aspects of the regulatory system that will potentially need amending in the future, which will require a long-term effort across multiple government agencies.

Two aspects that regulatory agencies are addressing is the need to assess the risk level of nanomaterials relative to those materials in bulk form, and the need to have companies register the use of nanomaterials. Through public consultations and independent studies, agencies are modifying processes to effectively manage the uncertainty that accompanies these new materials. Details of this work are provided in the 2007-08 National Nanotechnology Strategy Annual Report published on the website www.nanotechnology.gov.au. The 2008-09 National Nanotechnology Strategy Annual Report will contain more recent information and should be published in early 2010. The Australian Government believes that this approach will ensure the responsible management of nanomaterials.