

Senate Standing Committee on Economics

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Supplementary Budget Estimates

19 – 20 October 2011

Question No: SBT 223
Topic: Statistics on Food Consumption
Hansard Page: Written

Senator Colbeck asked:

223. The Australian Bureau of Statistics used to compile statistics on apparent consumption of selected food in Australia every ten years, but the latest data for vegetable consumption is 1998-99.
- a) Why did this information cease being compiled?
 - b) Who has responsibility for this information now?

Answer:

223.

a) In 2002 the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), in conjunction with the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, undertook a review of the Apparent Consumption of Foodstuff series. This review highlighted a need to revisit a number of the assumptions required to produce the estimates (in particular assumptions relating to the quantity of home production and the components of various foodstuff contained in imported foods) and also a need to recalculate a number of the ratios used in estimating these components. The funds required to update the many assumptions and ratios contained in the publication were not available, and following consultation with users the series was discontinued.

b) The ABS continues to collect, compile and produce details relating to commercial production of agricultural commodities as well as the import and export of foodstuffs. Therefore, for a number of commodities, the data that is currently collected can support good estimates of apparent consumption information. This work is undertaken by users of the data on an ad-hoc basis and relates largely to unprocessed food produce which is largely grown in Australia.

In addition, as part of our international obligations, the ABS provides these details to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations who compile food balance sheets and consumption series see <http://faostat.fao.org/site/368/default.aspx#ancor>.

Information relating to food consumption is also collected through the household survey program. As part of a long running regular health survey program, the ABS collects information relating to usual consumption of key food groups such as fruit and vegetables and other products of health interest such as alcohol and milk.

The ABS is currently consulting with Food Standards Australia New Zealand (FSANZ) in the conduct of the 2011-13 Australian Health Survey (AHS). This collection includes a sophisticated dietary recall measure designed to collect detailed consumption data for use in nutrition and food monitoring research. The AHS will support comparisons against the previous 1995 National Nutrition Survey and is expected to be repeated on an irregular basis.