



Australian Government
**Australian Customs and
Border Protection Service**

Customs House
5 Constitution Avenue
Canberra ACT 2601

27 October 2011

Ms Julie Dennett
Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on
Legal and Constitutional Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Dennett

Corrections to Hansard

I write concerning evidence I provided to the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs at the Additional Estimates hearing of 18 October 2011.

Following the hearing, I have reviewed the proof copy of Hansard, and wish to submit the following clarifications.

In an exchange with Senator Rhiannon regarding the importation of products alleged to contain dog fur, I stated on page 73 of the Hansard:

“...that the residue amounts in the particular products tested were at a low level and it was unlikely to cause anything other than contact dermatitis...”

I wish to correct this statement to read:

“, ...that the residue amounts in the particular products tested were unlikely to cause anything other than contact dermatitis...”

By way of clarification, I can advise that I now understand it is not correct to have stated that the results of the testing (to which Senator Rhiannon was referring) showed ‘a low level’ of hexavalent chromium, as there is no Australian standard relevant to the presence of this chemical in leather garments, against which to make such an assessment.

The evidence I subsequently gave, regarding the expert advice provided to Customs and Border Protection (by other agencies) that the hexavalent chromium detected in the relevant sample was unlikely to cause anything other than contact dermatitis, was correct (page 73 of the Hansard also refers). My statement regarding the ACCC having advised that they have no record of an adverse reaction in relation to the relevant product, was also correct.

On page 74 of the Hansard, the record indicates that I stated the fur was 'rabbit or muskrash'. The correct spelling is 'musquash'.

I would appreciate it if you would consider amending the Hansard to reflect the corrections noted above. If the members of the Committee have any further questions about this matter, please feel free to contact me on

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Major
National Manager
Trade Policy and Regulation Branch

Senator RHIANNON: In one of those tests carried out recently, was it found that there were high levels of hexavalent chromium in those fur pelts?

Ms Major: That is not correct.

Senator RHIANNON: Did you find there was any chemical contamination?

Ms Major: The laboratory results that have been provided to us by HSI indicate that there was hexavalent chromium in a particular sample that was tested. The expert advice that we have from a number of government agencies is that the levels of hexavalent chromium in those garments were unlikely to be a risk for anything other than contact dermatitis.

Senator RHIANNON: Considering hexavalent chromium is classified as a class 1 human carcinogen by the World Health Organisation's International Agency for Research on Cancer and it is reported that it is regularly used in dog fur pelts sourced from China, is this an issue that your office is paying attention to, particularly in the context of occupational health and safety for Customs officers?

Ms Major: It is certainly an issue which we have paid very serious attention to, not so much in terms of our officers, but perhaps I can elaborate. My understanding from the expert advice we have received from both Safe Work Australia and from the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission is that although hexavalent chromium is a carcinogen its cancer-causing properties, if you like, occur when the dust is inhaled or ingested. In this case, the hexavalent chromium is a residue in the garment because of a treatment during the tanning process and the expert advice that we have received from those outside agencies is that the risk is around leaching into the skin through sweat. We have also had advice that the residue amounts in the particular products tested were at a low level and it was unlikely to cause anything other than contact dermatitis. The ACCC has advised us that they have no record of an adverse reaction in relation to this particular product. In addition, there is no prohibition on items coming into Australia with hexavalent chromium in them