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THE HON VERITY FIRTH MP

Minister for Climate Change and the Environment
Minister for Women
Minister for Science and Medical Research
Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer)

Our Ref: M22512

The Hon. Tony Catanzariti
Chair, Standing Committee for State Development
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Mr *Tony,* Catanzariti

Please find attached my responses to the four questions that were taken on notice during my public hearing at the Inquiry into Nanotechnology in NSW on Friday, 6 June 2008.

I would like to extend my appreciation to you and the Committee on your invitation to present at the Inquiry. I look forward to the recommendations that the Committee hands down in October this year.

Yours sincerely

Verity Firth
Minister for Science and Medical Research



Responses to Questions on Notice

Question 1

As well as school children from metropolitan areas, do school children from regional NSW have the opportunity to participate in Science EXPOsed?

In 2007, a total of 1638 school children from NSW participated in the Science EXPOsed event that was held at NSW Parliament House. Almost one third or 570 school children from regional NSW attended the two day event.

Regional schools that attended Science EXPOsed in 2007 included:

- Hunter School of Performing Arts
- Glendale Technology High School
- Nowra High
- Tuggerah Lakes Secondary College
- Kiama High
- Moruya High
- Bomaderry High
- Toronto High School
- Lake Munmorah High
- Bowral High
- Moss Vale High
- Shoalhaven High
- Terrigal High
- Keira High School
- Katoomba High
- Gorokan High
- Kotara High
- Warrawong High
- Francis Greenway High

An additional component of the Science EXPOsed program introduced this year is Science EXPOsé. Science EXPOsé is a fun competition open to students from Years 7 to 10. Students are encouraged to think about the potential for science to impact on their future. To enter they must:

1. Choose a NSW scientist
2. Describe the chosen scientist's work
3. Predict how the scientist's work may contribute to the future

Science EXPOsé will be an annual, state-wide competition that builds on the current science Years 7-10 syllabus and is run in collaboration with the NSW Department of Education and Training.

Question 2

During the Minister's opening address, it was mentioned that there are regulatory barriers facing science and innovation in NSW. What are these barriers?

Companies in any industry and in any jurisdiction can face up to three types of regulatory barriers. They are relevant for science innovation and the challenge for governments is getting the right balance between light regulation and effective regulation. This question of balance is precisely why the Government has established the NSW Better Regulation Office.

Regulatory barriers include firstly, the sheer volume of regulation can prohibit companies from experimenting with new processes or ways of doing things. This is

particularly the case when companies are subject to regulations in multiple jurisdictions - federal, state and local. Second, a regulatory regime that is purely focused on the goals of consumer and investor protection can inadvertently discourage innovation. Third, the absence of regulation or clear regulatory frameworks can be a barrier to developing new technologies or experimenting with new applications of existing technologies.

Question 3

The Office for Science and Medical Research's website includes links relevant to nanotechnology websites, reports and bodies. However, the OSMR website is currently being redesigned and in its new form will provide an information resource for science and medical research related nanotechnology issues. When will the new website be online?

Currently, the OSMR website is in stage one of its redesign. This stage involves designing templates and specifications documents only and is due to be completed by August 2008. Stage two of the project will be the design and build of the website that will ultimately be seen by OSMR stakeholders and the public. It is anticipated that the OSMR will be online in late 2008.

However, the current OSMR website has been updated with Nanotechnology resources and links, these can be found here:

<http://www.osmr.nsw.gov.au/resources/nanotechnology>

Question 4

Has the possibility of using ANSTO and CSIRO facilities in NSW to create a nanotechnology toxicology network been discussed with the Nanotechnology State and Territory Committee (NSTC)?

The NSTC is an officer level committee, comprising representatives from State and Territory Governments. Established by the Australian Office of Nanotechnology, it has been set up to undertake a coordination and communication role between the Commonwealth and States, specifically concerning:

- the promotion of Australian nanotechnology capability to the international community;
- information flow regarding Commonwealth and individual State nanotechnology initiatives; and
- public engagement and education

The NSTC is not the right forum to discuss the nanotoxicology network at this early stage in the development of the proposal. More detailed discussions between CSIRO, ANSTO and DSRD need to occur in the first instance, followed by more in-depth consultations with other NSW Government agencies such as NSW Health, Workcover NSW and NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change. There may be benefit in discussing the role of the network in the national sense with NSTC once the network proposal is further developed.