POISON 1080, USE

1271. Mr Masters to the Minister for Health

In relation to the use of 1080 (monosodium-fluoro-acetate) poison in Western Australia, I ask -

(a) how many cases of fatal or other human poisoning by 1080 have occurred in Western Australia over the past 20 years;

(b) of these cases, under what circumstances did the poisoning occur (was it deliberate, accidental because of poor labelling, secondary poisoning from the consumption of a tainted product, etc);

(c) how many complaints has the Department of Health received in the last five years over the use of 1080 poison; and

(d) what justification can be provided for the maintenance of severe restrictions on the availability and use of 1080 poison, considering its natural presence in many species of native plants, a high tolerance of native wildlife to the poison, and a relative lack of poisoning incidents over recent years?

Mr KUCERA replied:

(a)-(b) The information requested is not available as the system for reporting hospital admissions due to poisoning in Western Australia does not provide the specific identification of 1080 as the causational agent. Reports of 1080 poisonings are included under the general category of poisoning from other chemicals, such as agricultural and horticultural chemicals and rodenticides.

The intrinsic nature of the chemical is also a fact in the accurate recording of 1080 fatalities. 1080 is extremely difficult to detect by analytical methods and accurate detection is often not possible because 1080 persists in the body for a very short period of time – only about 2 hours. There have not been any deaths reported to the Department of Health from the Coroner's Office.

(c) The Department of Health has received 3 formal substantive complaints in the last 5 years. However, the Department is aware that the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Conservation also received complaints about 1080.

(d) The current restrictions are justified on the basis of public health and safety. 1080 is a very toxic compound. Low doses are fatal to children and adults. No antidote is available. 1080 is strictly controlled as a Schedule 7 poison. This classification has been recommended by an expert committee as part of the national system of control over such scheduled poisons.

Schedule 7 poisons are defined as: 'Dangerous Poison – Substances with a high potential for causing harm at low exposure and which require special precautions during manufacture, handling or use. These poisons should be available only to specialised or authorised users who have the skills necessary to handle them safely. Special regulations restricting their availability, possession, storage or use may apply.'