

Environment and Communications
Answers to questions on notice
Environment and Energy portfolio

Inquiry name: INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACT ON THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR OF VEGETATION AND LAND MANAGEMENT POLICIES, REGULATIONS AND RESTRICTIONS

Hearing date: 14 February 2019

Question No: 1

Hansard Page: 7&8

Question Date: 14 February 2019

Question Type: Spoken

Ms SWANSON asked: I just want to go very briefly to the idea of environmental and economic impacts associated with severe fires. I also want to look at, for example, the use of savanna management, which is funded through the Emissions Reduction Fund, and the impact that has on reducing severe fires. I know that's a very general question, but I guess what I'm getting at is: we have savanna fire management, and I'd like someone to talk through the benefits or otherwise of that and how that relates to severe fires.

Mr Tregurtha: I can maybe offer a couple of brief comments, but we have a specific climate change area of our department, and they're not here today, so I might have to take a broader question on notice.

Answer:

Savanna fire management projects under the Emissions Reduction Fund manage fire in their registered projects to achieve two main objectives:

- reducing greenhouse gas emissions from high-intensity fires;
- removing carbon from the atmosphere by increasing the amount of carbon stored in the landscape in dead wood

Projects achieve these objectives by reducing the extent and frequency of late dry season hot fires. This is done by increasing the area burnt in the early dry season with smaller, cooler controlled burns.

Through the Emissions Reduction Fund, savanna fire management project proponents in northern Australia are realising economic benefits by earning and selling Australian carbon credit units. This is providing jobs and revenue to support other projects. The environmental benefits of the Emissions Reduction Fund extend beyond reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The reduction in extent and frequency of severe fires in the late dry season has environmental benefits for the flora and fauna. It also reduces the impact and damage on human infrastructure caused by late dry season wildfires.

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Hearing date: 14 February 2019

Question No: 2

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CHAIR asked: Could there be an emissions reduction credit, for example, for a state government to conduct controlled burns? As I said, the Northcliffe fire that happened in early 2015 in Western Australia burnt an enormous amount of forest. It was an enormously hot fire that burnt for a long time and obviously released a lot of carbon emissions. Is there scope for a program whereby state governments could earn carbon credits by managing their forests so that those types of events don't happen?

Mr Tregurtha: I guess my answer would be that you are now getting into the area of government policy, and that would really be a question for the minister, in relation to the scope for that policy.

CHAIR: Technically, though, is it possible to measure those outcomes and—

Mr Tregurtha: I would have to take that question on notice, with our climate change colleagues, because the measurability is a key consideration in terms of the National Greenhouse and Energy Reporting system—the greenhouse gas emissions reporting system. That's not an area that either Kylie or I have expertise in.

Answer:

Savanna fire management projects in the Emissions Reduction Fund are subject to the following project-location requirements:

- the project can only occur in specified rainfall regions in savanna areas across northern Australia; and
- the project area must contain specific 'eligible vegetation types'.

A person or organisation who is able to demonstrate the legal right and eligible interest holder consents to conduct a project in the high and low rainfall zones specified under the method, can apply to register a project with the Clean Energy Regulator. This can include state governments. For example, Western Australia currently has four savanna fire management projects registered to the Western Australian Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions.