

**House of Representatives
Standing Committee on Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry**

Inquiry into Rural Skills Training and Research

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Public Hearing on 9 August 2006

1. How does the Department incorporate the findings of the different industry skills audits into government programs?

Answer

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry seeks input from many sources when reviewing the effectiveness and efficiency of its current programmes and importantly when developing new ones. This includes consideration of industry skills audits. As an example, the Department is currently reviewing the *Agriculture - Advancing Australia (AAA)* package taking into account the findings contained in various reports including *Creating our Future: Agriculture and Food Policy for the Next Generation* and the review of skills and workforce issues identified in the *2006 AgriFood Industry Skills Report*, to name a few.

2. What mechanisms does the Department have in place to ensure its agricultural education, training and research programs are complimentary to that of other Departments?

Answer

A range of mechanisms are used to ensure the Department's programmes compliment those of other Departments. All programmes are carefully targeted after consultation with key stakeholders including industry organisations, government agencies (both State and Australian) and portfolio Ministers (both State and Australian). All new Government programmes are established through a whole of Government approach.

3. How is the research undertaken under the Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry portfolio fed into the content of general/broader education programs?

Answer

Findings from research undertaken by the economic, scientific and research and development agencies, including ABARE, BRS, CSIRO, the R&D Corporations and the Cooperative Research Centres, are fed into the content of educational programs through the agencies' education, training and

adoption on-farm initiatives and activities. Some specific examples of course development are set out in the answer to Question 9 below.

The findings of the research is also communicated to stakeholders and other interested parties by a number of communication strategies.

4. What involvement has DAFF had in the review of the operation and effectiveness of the national VET training system mentioned on page 4 of the submission? If not, why not?

Answer

We had no involvement in the review of the operation and effectiveness of the national (Vocational Education and Training) VET training system. The Department maintains an on-going interest in the VET system but its implementation is the responsibility of the education, science and training portfolio.

5. What work is being done by the Department's Women in Rural Industries Program in relation to agricultural education, training and research?

Answer

The Women in Rural Industries Program is now a part of the Industry Partnerships Programme's new Pathways to Participation strategy. Under the Pathways to Participation Strategy, the Department will continue to work towards increasing the profile and contribution of women working in rural industries.

This new strategy will continue to build the skills and knowledge of women in rural industries through providing training and development activities. The strategy will help develop pathways to assist women to identify the actions, experiences and skills required for them to achieve their goal and enhance the opportunities available to women to participate in their industries. More detail on this strategy is set out in the answer to Question 6 below.

A communication campaign targeting women and industries is currently being developed. This campaign will provide clear and practical information addressing the importance of industries undertaking inclusive consultation and decision making and to increase the awareness of opportunities available for women to access support and training.

6. The committee has heard that training activities do not adequately cater for women in rural industries. What is the Department doing to specifically address the education and training needs of women in agriculture?
- What level of funding is allocated to these programs?
 - How does the level of funding compare to that of other education and training programs?

Answer

Through the Industry Partnerships Programme and its predecessors, funding has been provided to build the leadership skills of women since 1997. An outline of the funding provided to women's and young people's initiatives since this time are outlined in the Table below.

	1997-98	1998-99	1999-00	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07
Women	37,500	137,500	137,500	137,500	127,500	38,000	30,000	90,364	73,500	402,500
Young People			25,000	120,000	541,000	583,290	426,610	750,856	903,367	742,500

The Government decided in the late 1990's to put a greater focus to young people involved in agriculture, fisheries and forestry. The new strategy seeks to address this current imbalance. However, it is important to note that young women are encouraged to participate in the young people's initiatives on offer. A summary of female participants in the 2005-06 young people's initiatives are in the table below.

Initiative	MALE	FEMALES	% Female
Young Rural Leaders' Course	18	14	43.75
Young People's Development Awards	7	1	12.5
Export Market Development Training Course	18	12	40
National Young Farmers Forum	68	31	31.3
Corporate Governance Scholarships for Young People	7	7	50
TOTAL	118	65	35.5

In March 2006, the Department conducted a review of the women's initiatives provided by the Industry Partnerships Programme, other Australian Government agencies and industry, providing the Department

with information on how they could improve the delivery of training and education to women.

As a result of this review, the Department will aim to improve the effectiveness of its initiatives (through the new Pathways to Participation strategy as outlined in Question 5) by removing technical barriers to female participation in the new initiatives on offer. Initiatives will be delivered with a participatory learning approach that is consistent with women's preferred learning styles and offered at times and in a format that encourages women with children to be involved. The provision of childcare services will also be offered to make training more accessible for women. These strategies to reduce barriers for women's participation are already used in the FarmBis programme.

7. Does the Department have programs to improve the technical skills of agriculture trainers and teachers?
- How do these programs compliment those of the Department of Education, Science and Training?

Answer

Improving the skills of trainers and teachers is a responsibility of the education, science and training portfolio. However, in order to enhance the quality of learning delivery, the FarmBis programme introduced minimum national standards for trainers delivering FarmBis supported training activities. This strategy has been successful in increasing the quality of training supported through the FarmBis programme.

8. How does the Department ensure that extension and advisory services are being provided to those producers who need them the most?

Answer

Strengthening agricultural extension services is being progressed through consideration of a national strategy for Research Development and Extension being considered by Primary Industries Ministerial Council.

Traditionally agricultural issues such as extension and advisory services have been the responsibility of state governments and industry. The Australian Government engages with state governments on agricultural initiatives and issues through collaborative committees such as the Primary Industries Ministerial Council, Primary Industries Standing Committee and the associated industry development committee. This approach provides a mechanism to address agricultural extension and advisory issues if they are identified as an issue.

The Department seed funded and has been an active member of the Cooperative Venture for Capacity Development (CVCB) which was established in 2001 by R&D corporations to enhance capacity building in rural industries in Australia. The CVCB invests in R&D that focuses on; enhancing the understanding of learning, improving organisational arrangements to support rural human capacity building, and inspiring innovative farming practices. The CVCB seeks to overcome management impediments that can affect the effective utilisation of skill resources by industry.

Many of the projects funded through the CVCB have been completed and the work plan of the CVCB is now focusing on the roll out the findings. Reports on research findings and other resources on capacity building can be found at - www.rirdc.gov.au/capacitybuilding.

9. Is the Department supplementing the research funding to R&D corporations as they expand their operations to provide extension services?

Answer

No. Programmes like FarmBis however, dovetail with many of the extension programmes developed by research and development corporations. Programmes such as Meat and Livestock Australia's the EDGENetwork, Dairy Australia's Countdown Downunder, Horticulture Australia Ltd's Freshcare program are eligible for assistance under the FarmBis programme.

10. Has the Department discussed the possibility of a national extension network with Australasia-Pacific Extension Network?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of a national extension framework?

Answer

The Department has not held direct discussions with the Australasia-Pacific Extension Network (APEN) on a national extension framework. Members of APEN attended a workshop organised by the State Extension Leaders Network (SELN) on 3 March 2006 to discuss national extension network issues. The workshop included representatives from Commonwealth and state governments, research development corporations and companies.

Work on developing a national research, development and extension (RD&E) framework in consultation with state governments, is progressing through the Primary Industries Ministerial Council (PIMC).

11. Is the delivery of programs that DAFF is involved with, such as the NWI, being hindered by a lack of skills of participants and trainers?

Answer

Paragraphs 98 and 99 in the National Water Initiative recognise the need to build knowledge and capacity, including skills, in order to achieve the overall objectives of the initiative. It also recognises that there are “significant national investments in knowledge and capacity building through Cooperative Research Centres; the CSIRO Water Flagship; Land and Water Australia; state, territory and local government and higher education institutions”. These investments are targeted at addressing some of the skills gaps that have been identified.

Under paragraph 101 of the NWI, all jurisdictions have agreed to:

- i) identify the key knowledge and capacity building priorities needed to support ongoing implementation of the agreement; and
- ii) identify and implement proposals to more effectively coordinate the national water knowledge effort.

Under the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council’s NWI Workplan, the NWI Committee has responsibility for addressing Knowledge and Capacity Building issues expressed in the NWI Agreement. The NWI Committee identified 3 priority areas for the focus of activities:

- the coordination of science
- communicating with stakeholders on NWI objectives and implementation; and
- capacity within governments to deliver.

On behalf of the NWI Committee, a working group of representatives from state and territory agencies and the National Water Commission are undertaking a stocktake across jurisdictions of the knowledge and capacity building issues under the three focus areas. The stocktake will identify specific issues under each theme and identify gaps in current state and territory government programmes that address the issues. The gap identification and analysis process is likely to identify needs for nationally coordinated actions required to address knowledge and capacity gaps.

The Department is contributing to knowledge, capacity and skill development in the agricultural sector as part of responsibilities under the NWI and its broader objective to ensure Australia's agricultural, fisheries, food and forestry industries remain competitive, profitable and sustainable.

One example of where the Department is investing in building skills to help achieve the objectives of the NWI is the National Irrigation Skills Initiative. The Initiative is being funded by the National Landcare Program under the

Sustainable Industries Initiative. The National Irrigation Skills Initiative aims to improve water use efficiency in an NRM context to support industry uptake of sustainable irrigation practices. It aims for a sustainable and profitable irrigation industry able to recognise and in turn reward the skills and knowledge of it's practitioners through a national certification framework for best practice irrigation management.

12. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using major programs, such as the National Water Initiatives to incorporate training and skills development?

Answer

The needs for training and skills development to implement the objectives of the NWI are recognised in paragraphs 98 to 100. Paragraph 100 states "...that the outcome of Knowledge and Capacity Building will assist in underpinning the implementation of this Agreement". Training and skills development are an important part of building the knowledge and capacity base of those who are responsible for the management of water resources. The National Water Commission, on behalf of the NWI Committee is currently examining the knowledge and capacity needs of jurisdictions in the three priority areas mentioned in response to question 11. This work will help direct and focus training and skills development requirements.

13. **Mr SECKER asked** – for a comparison of Australian farm managers' education levels with farm managers from New Zealand, United States, Canada and Brazil.

Answer

Please refer to the table below.

Highest level of education reached in Primary Industry - Post Secondary Qualifications*		
	Farm Manager	Employed In Primary Industry
Australia	23.9%	38.2%
Canada	37.7%	31.4%
United States	40.0%	5.0%
New Zealand	n/a	39.7%

* Post Secondary Qualifications means completed post secondary education, i.e. trade qualifications, Diploma and Bachelor Degree or above.

We have not been able to obtain the specific education levels of Brazilian farm managers or farm workers. However, recent research reported by Deutsche Bank Research indicates that Brazil scores relatively low on human capital

and education indicators given its relatively low GDP per capita. The average years of schooling for the general population is only 6 years whilst 11.3 per cent of employed men aged 40 to 49 have attend 12 years and over of schooling. It is expected that these figures would be lower for the rural areas.

14. **Mr MARTIN FERGUSON asked**— I would have thought that is something we should be looking at. You also raised in the submission some specific programs such as the National Indigenous Forestry Strategy. What is that going to involve?

Answer

The National Indigenous Forestry Strategy encourages greater Indigenous participation in the forest and non-wood forest related industries. The implementation of the strategy also seeks to identify opportunities for Indigenous people to participate in the growth of Australia's forest and non-wood forest industries, and to develop a means of support for Indigenous people to participate in these activities, especially where they promote the economic independence of Indigenous communities.

To date the Department has concentrated on implementing the National Indigenous Forestry Strategy (NIFS) in Tasmania, Western Victoria, South West Western Australia, Queensland and ACT. The Department is continuing to work with Commonwealth and State agencies and the forest industry on a complementary approach and has been working with primarily Indigenous groups to develop business opportunities generally in plantation and harvesting projects.

15. **Mr MARTIN FERGUSON asked**— Could this program [NIFS] provide seed funding to assist in the delivery and execution of that training?

Currently the Department does not provide funds to the Tiwi Islands for commercial forestry operations. The Tiwi people hold inalienable freehold title to the land under the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*. As a result the land cannot be bought or sold. The sale of Sylvatech to Great Southern Plantations (GSP) provided a 30 year lease on 35,000 hectares on Melville Island and GSP has the option to lease another 65,000 hectares.

16. **Mr O'CONNOR asked** – To what extent are the farmers who participate [in the FarmBis programme] coming back for a second or third bite?

Answer

Within the current FarmBis programme:

- 24.1 per cent of the training activities are from participants who have undertaken a training activity previously with the assistance of the current programme; and
- 61.4 per cent of the training activities are from participants who have previously received assistance from the first, second and/or current FarmBis programme.

17. **Mr GAVAN O'CONNOR asked** – I am interested [in women's participation in FarmBis].

Answer

28.0 per cent of the training activities within the current FarmBis programme are by female participants. Similar participation rates were exhibited in the previous two FarmBis programmes.