



Department of the Environment and Heritage



Mr Quinton Clements
 Inquiry Secretary
 Joint Standing Committee
 on the National Capital and External Territories
 Parliament House
 CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Clements

I refer to the public hearing held on 28 March 2003 by the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories, as part of its review of the annual reports 2001-02 of the Department of Transport and Regional Services and the Department of the Environment and Heritage. Mr Bruce Leaver, Executive Director, Australian Heritage Commission (AHC), has provided a response to the questions on notice relating to Heritage issues. Responses to all other questions taken on notice by the Department are provided below.

NCET 177 – Senator Hogg question to Mr Hicks – *Is there a containment program operating on Norfolk Island (outside the National Park) for the Formosan lily? What sort of interaction is there between the Park's program and any island program?*

Formosan Lily *Lilium formosanum* has been a recognised problem on Norfolk Island for over a decade. This weed has been subject to regular management action in the Norfolk Island National Park since 1990. Parks Australia commissioned research and has published guidelines for control of the lily in the "Norfolk Island Weed Control Manual".

The Norfolk Island Parks and Forestry Service has a program for control on public lands (reserves and public road corridors). The Parks and Forestry Service, as the appropriate government agency, also encourages the control of the lily on private land.

Both agencies provide regular media coverage of the problem via the local newspaper "The Norfolk Islander". The articles point out the invasiveness of the weed, the difficulty of eradication and proven eradication techniques.

NCET 181 – Senator Scullion question to Mr Early – *What is the percentage of the remaining areas of primary rainforest on Christmas Island? What is the percentage of the areas of primary rainforest that you want to protect that remain on the island?*

Approximately 74% of Christmas Island contains closed canopy forest (rainforest) with about 1-2% vine forest, scrubby woodland and heath.

Of this rainforest 77% occurs inside the National Park, with the Park representing 62.5% of Christmas Island. Of land on Christmas Island outside of the National Park 45% is closed canopy forest.

In line with the moratorium on further clearance of rainforest on Christmas Island, which has been in place for more than a decade, the aim is to protect as much of the remaining primary rainforest as possible.

NCET 182 – Senator Scullion question to Mr Early – *Have any benchmark surveys been done in the Marine Park around Christmas Island of what exists and what is endemic at the moment?*

A comprehensive survey of the fishes of Christmas Island was conducted in the late 1970s. The subsequent survey report found the fish fauna of Christmas Island demonstrated no evidence of endemism, which according to the authors of the report was not surprising in view of the relatively short distance (280km) between the Island and Indonesia. Although, three species, the pygmy angelfish and two pseudochromids recorded during the survey are known only from the Christmas Island and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, the results of the survey indicated that the fish fauna of Christmas Island is best described as a slightly impoverished Indo-Malayan one belonging to the W. Pacific province of the Indo-W.Pacific faunal region. This impoverishment was concluded to be primarily due to the oceanic position of Christmas Island, its small size and the consequent low density of habitat. For example, brackish estuaries, silty bays and protected lagoon environments do not occur on the island.

In 1986 the WA Museum undertook the first comprehensive mollusc survey of Christmas Island waters since Tweedie's 1932 collection (stored in the Raffle's Museum, Singapore). A selection from the WA Museum collection was described in the Christmas Island Natural History Association publication 'Christmas Shells' in 1990. The marine mollusc species are mainly Indo-Pacific in origin. Neither endemic molluscs or known pest mollusc species were recorded in either survey.

NCET 183 – Mr Snowdon question to Mr Early – *If a water tower is built on a hill which is adjacent to the current IRPC site, what are the geographical limits to the exemption? Are there geographical limits?*

Attached is a copy of a map of the area covered by the IRPC exemption under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999* (EPBC Act).

The geographical limits to the exemption, as it relates to the IRPC site, are the boundaries of mining leases 138 and 139.

NCET 186 – Questions on notice from Senator Stott Despoja

(1) Could you please provide information on the effectiveness of the recent yellow crazy ant aerial baiting control program?

As mentioned in the response provided by Mr Hicks to Mr Snowdon during the public hearing (NCET 179), the aerial baiting of the crazy ant has been very effective. Early indications from follow-up monitoring are showing numbers of crazy ants to have been dramatically reduced over the target areas, including down to zero in some areas. However, crazy ant colonies are widespread and extend over 2500ha. A crazy ant

survey of the Island is planned again for mid 2003 - this will determine the full impact and longer-term effect of the aerial baiting program.

(2) Could you please provide information on the impacts of the yellow crazy ant aerial baiting control program on non-target species?

As mentioned in the response provided by Mr Hicks to Mr Snowden during the public hearing (NCET 179), the aerial baiting was done in a carefully targeted way to avoid non-target impacts. In particular, decoy lures were used to avoid impacts on robber crabs.

Possible impacts on non-target species and related issues were addressed as part of Parks Australia's environmental assessment of the baiting program, and the referrals process under the EPBC Act. An expert committee provided advice to Parks Australia on these matters.

(3) Could you please provide information on the extent to which the works that have been conducted in relation to the proposed Christmas Island Immigration Detention Centre have effected species listed as threatened under the EPBC Act (particularly the Abbott's Booby)?

In relation to the site designated for the Christmas Island Immigration Reception and Processing Centre (IRPC) only groundworks have been undertaken to-date, with construction of the Centre having not as yet commenced. The groundworks were undertaken in accordance with the environmental management plan for the construction of the IRPC.

During the construction of the IRPC threatened species under the EPBC Act will be afforded protection through the Government's commitment that the Centre will be established and operated in accordance with best practice environmental management measures including:

- the development of an environmental management plan for the construction and operation of the IRPC and associated infrastructure;
- the appointment of a suitably qualified environmental manager;
- monitoring for protected species; and
- the application of any necessary mitigation measures to protect the environment.

Examples of activities undertaken to date to minimise impacts on listed threatened species and protected species under the EPBC Act include, the installation of crab crossings (with more to be installed) under roads, the development and implementation of quarantine measures to prevent the importation and translocation of introduced species onto and across the island (eg. crazy ants). Parks Australia has also been involved in identifying vegetation which may also provide habitat for conservation important species.

In conjunction with the above measures, protected species will also be afforded protection through the operation of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Regulations 2000* which protects biodiversity on Christmas Island. Where necessary, permits have been sought and granted subject to conditions to

mitigate potential impacts on protected species for the IRPC and associated infrastructure projects such as housing and trunk services.

Further, any works that may affect the Christmas Island National Park also need to be consistent with the management plan for the Park and require appropriate authorisation.

Environment Australia, who is represented on the Interdepartmental Committee for the IRPC, provides ongoing advice on environmental matters, including in relation to environmental management plans for the IRPC and associated infrastructure.

It is through these measures that protection is and will continue to be provided to the National Park and the important flora and fauna on Christmas Island, including the Abbott's Booby and red crab.

(4) Could you please provide information on:

- a) the expected cumulative impacts of the proposed and recently completed infrastructure projects on Christmas Island (including the Detention Centre, Port Facility development, the road works between the Port Facility and Lily Beach roads, the Lily Beach development, airport expansion and the Phosphate Resources Ltd mining proposal) on the environment (particularly the species listed as threatened under the EPBC Act); and*

Proposed infrastructure activities on the Island are considered and managed to minimise likely impacts on the environment, including the recognition of environmental pressures resulting from existing land use activities. Consequently, the combined impacts of current and proposed infrastructure activities on the island are identified and managed through measures such as the design and implementation of project specific environmental management plans and approval conditions. These measures ensure that as proposed infrastructure activities commence on the Island, they are managed in recognition of existing land use activities so as not to, for example, impede the survival or recovery of threatened species.

The Minister for the Environment and Heritage, The Hon Dr David Kemp, and the Minister for Regional Services, Territories and Local Government, The Hon Wilson Tuckey, have agreed in principle to conduct a strategic assessment under Division 1, Part 10 of the EPBC Act, of a range of future activities on Christmas Island. Work is currently being undertaken between Environment Australia and the Department of Transport and Regional Services to finalise the assessment's terms of reference and formal agreement between the Ministers. Once the terms of reference has been agreed it will be released for public consultation.

- b) the steps being made to ensure the natural heritage values associated with Christmas Island are adequately protected from the impacts of these developments?*

The protection of Christmas Island's natural heritage values is provided for under the Commonwealth's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* and the *Australian Heritage Commission Act 1975*. Through the operation of these Acts measures, such as the development of infrastructure specific construction and

operational environment management plans, the implementation of monitoring programs, and the application of necessary impact mitigation measures, are undertaken to protect the natural heritage values of the island.

(5) Could you please provide information on the steps being made to protect the heritage values of the Kingston Historic Area from the impacts of residential development in surrounding areas?

The Australian Heritage Commission has provided a response to this question.

I also note that the attribution of responses to questions midway through NCET 179 to Mr Hicks should be to Mr Leaver. The incorrect segment of the Hansard record is as follows:

Dr Heffernan - The administration is also, I understand, a Commonwealth authority.

Mr Hicks (actually Mr. Leaver) - it depends who is proposing the action.

Mr Snowden - I appreciate that. I am just trying to establish, and I would be interested to see, what areas are covered. If you could provide us with the geographical limits to all of the sites on Christmas Island, I would be most appreciative.

Mr Hicks (actually Mr. Leaver) - Yes, that is on the database.

If the Joint Standing Committee requires any further information, please contact the Departmental contact officer on this matter, Mr Terry Soutberg, on (02) 6274 1238 or by e-mail: terry.soutberg@ea.gov.au.

Yours sincerely



Gerard Early
First Assistant Secretary
Approvals and Wildlife Division

6 June 2003



NOTE: RPC BOUNDARY SUBJECT TO SURVEY

LEGEND

- DENOTES REINFORCED BOUNDARY FROM DNA
- DENOTES MINING LEASE BOUNDARY FROM DNA
- DENOTES RPC BOUNDARY
- DENOTES PROPOSED RPC BOUNDARY FROM Q SURVEY

ISSUE	REVISION	DATE	APP'D



DO NOT SCALE

SINCLAIR KNIGHT MERZ

THE SPATIAL DIVISION OF SINCLAIR KNIGHT MERZ

SINCLAIR KNIGHT MERZ PTY. LIMITED
 ABN 37001 024 095
 CANBERRA OFFICE
 2/1 NORTHBRIDGE AVENUE
 DEWINGDON ACT 2617 8246 2700
 TELEPHONE + 61 2 6246 2789
 FACSIMILE + 61 2 6246 2789
 WEB ADDRESS - www.skm.com.au

TITLE
CHRISTMAS ISLAND

CLIENT
DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION & MULTICULTURAL & INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

ALL BOUNDARY DATA

SCALE	1:2500	JOB NO.	NL 10965
DATE	DEC 2002	DWG NO.	CR288A
DRN	CSD	CHK	CSD
APPROVED	ISSUE A		