

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
Answers to questions on notice
Environment portfolio

Question No: 174
Hearing: Supplementary Budget Estimates
Outcome: Agency
Programme: Director of National Parks
Topic: Kakadu Threatened Species Strategy - Feral Animal Control Program
Hansard Page: 59
Question Date: 19 October 2015
Question Type: Spoken

Senator Back asked:

Senator BACK: Thank you, Chair. I understand the government allocated \$750,000 for protection of threatened species as part of the Kakadu strategy. Can you give the committee an understanding of the implementation of that program, what funds have been expended and what funds are still to be expended on what projects?

Ms Barnes: Certainly. About last November, Senator Birmingham released the Kakadu threatened species strategy. It was the culmination of a lot of research projects undertaken by the National Environmental Research Program, which basically said that we needed to modify some of the management techniques in Kakadu to help protect small species mammals, mainly around the control of pests and weeds and also fire. With the announcement of the plan, there was money set aside for additional work in Kakadu. I am pleased to say that we have totally reoriented, based on the strategy. We have been looking at the structures in Kakadu and the skills and capabilities of our teams in Kakadu. We have realigned the team in Kakadu and we have new specialist positions in place.

The fruits of those new positions and the strategy are starting to show in that we have just had two big feral animal control programs. I do not have the numbers with me but I can provide those to you on notice.

Answer:

1. Can you give the committee an understanding of the implementation of that program?

- In 2014 the Federal Government, through the Threatened Species Commissioner committed \$750,000 to support a Kakadu Threatened Species Program. Funding has been approved for the following four projects:

(i) *Targeting threats from fire, weeds and feral animals* (\$450,000);

This project will actively manage pests and fire across targeted biologically significant areas of the park, to assess whether fine-scale management can reverse small mammal losses.

(ii) *Creating a wildlife refuge on Field Island* (\$50,000);

Field Island will be established and managed as a refuge for threatened species. Suitable threatened species will be transported to the island for future safeguarding against the impacts of cane toads and invasive weeds.

(iii) *Reintroducing 'toad smart' quolls to the park* (\$200,000);

Quolls will be relocated from Astell Island (near Nhulunbuy) to the Territory Wildlife Park, where they will be trained not to eat cane toads and then be released into the Mary River District in southern Kakadu.

(iv) *Rescuing Kakadu's threatened plants* (\$50,000).

This project involves the collection and storage of threatened plant seeds from the park for future safekeeping, and will include attempts to propagate and translocate some of these species.

- All four projects are creating numerous employment opportunities for local Aboriginal people. A number of Traditional Owners from southern Kakadu are presently working with Kakadu and NT Government staff to do baseline surveys before the introduction of toad smart quolls. A Traditional Owner will also be employed to work at the Territory Wildlife Park, 'toad training' the quolls. Furthermore, next year there will be multiple teams of Traditional Owners employed on the park, helping staff to install protection burns and control weeds as part of the fire, weed and feral animal project.
- The planning for these projects includes a comprehensive and ongoing consultation process, involving Traditional Owners and other key stakeholders. Traditional Owners are very supportive and actively participating in each project. At this planning stage expenditure of project funds is quite small and will increase as we enter the active implementation stage.

2. What funds have been expended? What funds are still to be expended on what projects?

Project	Expended	Unspent	Total
(i) Fire, weeds and feral animals	\$6,262	\$443,738	\$450,000
(ii) Field Island wildlife refuge	\$2,299	\$47,701	\$50,000
(iii) Toad smart quolls	\$11,160	\$188,840	\$200,000
(iv) Threatened plants	\$15,678	\$34,322	\$50,000
Total	\$35,399	\$714,601	\$750,000

3. What are the figures for the two recent feral animal programs?

- The recent animal culls were initiated primarily in response to reducing feral animal numbers adjacent to major highways, campgrounds and areas containing threatened species. A total of 2,279 animals were culled in the two programs.
- The first cull occurred in August and September 2015 and resulted in a total of 1,477 animals being shot. This included 371 buffalo, 666 horses, 53 donkeys, 103 cattle and 284 pigs. The second cull, initiated in response to pigs threatening Yellow Chat habitat, was conducted in October 2015 and resulted in 802 feral pigs being shot.