

Economics Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Industry, Innovation and Science Portfolio
2017 - 2018 Budget Estimates
31 May – 1 June 2017

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND SCIENCE

TOPIC: CRC advisory committee

REFERENCE: Questions on Notice (Hansard, 1 June 2017, page 82-83)

QUESTION No.: BI-46

Senator KIM CARR: I mentioned the Plant Biosecurity CRC, which is very close to the end of its time. I would ask the Minister—if you are looking at these questions, there is probably a very urgent issue there as well. And, again, this is a direct consequence of the government policy decision to preclude CRCs from seeking refunding. There was no assessment done on these, whether or not they were worthy or otherwise. Well may you argue the CRC committee said, 'Look, they've been around too long,' but they were not even given that opportunity. These are critically important research areas, and if there is to be another source of money—I know I had to do this with the reef and rainforest CRC—I would suggest to you there might be a few others that might require attention quite urgently, so I put that to you. Can I turn to the question of the review and audits of the CRCs. Is the mid-term review still required?

Mr Stirling: Not under the guidelines.

Senator KIM CARR: When was that changed?

Mr Stirling: It was changed post the Miles review.

Senator KIM CARR: Is there any check admission on the activity or compliance of CRCs?

Mr Stirling: Yes, CRCs are required to provide a quarterly return to the department, which is assessed, and they are also required to provide significant detail in their annual return, which forms a part of their annual reporting obligations to the program.

Senator KIM CARR: They put in a return to the department, and you check it, do you?

Mr Stirling: That is correct. As part of that checking, if there are any concerns that are identified from the department's perspective, there is a referral to the CRC Advisory Committee.

Senator KIM CARR: Have you had any cause for concern?

Mr Stirling: At the moment, we are finalising our reviews of the CRC annual reports, which were provided to us late last calendar year.

Senator KIM CARR: We are now in the middle of the year, and you have not finalised them?

Mr Stirling: We have not had cause to provide any referrals to the advisory committee.

Senator KIM CARR: But you have not finalised them.

Mr Stirling: That is correct.

Senator KIM CARR: You have had six months and you have not finalised them.

Mr Stirling: I have to check the timing of the exact provision of the report. I can come back to you on that. But our initial review has identified no issues, and we go through a formal, fairly detailed process of analysis of the performance criteria et cetera that are included in those reports.

Senator KIM CARR: What is the resourcing that you have available to you to undertake this review?

Mr Stirling: In terms of ASL?

Senator KIM CARR: Yes, people. How many?

Mr Stirling: I will have to take on notice the exact number in terms of staff that we have on board at the moment, but it is around 15.

Senator KIM CARR: So 15, and we have gone from a situation where each CRC had a mid-term review to a situation now where they put in a report to you annually. Is that the situation?

Mr Stirling: That is correct.

Mrs Urquhart: And the four times a year.

Senator KIM CARR: You do not think there is any risk exposure in that process?

Mr Stirling: I will have to take that on notice.

Senator KIM CARR: Thank you. I will be particularly interested in whether or not the reduction actually exposes a risk.

Mr Stirling: Reduction in terms of the formal review?

Senator KIM CARR: Yes, whether or not the reduction in the review process poses a risk to the program.

ANSWER

Annual reports are required to be submitted to the Department by 31 October each year. All assessments of annual reports submitted in 2016 are complete. Issues are raised and addressed with CRCs on a case by case basis throughout the year.

As at 31 May 2017 there were 16 staff in the CRC Programme delivery area of the Department.

No, there is not expected to be any greater risk exposure as a result of the current reporting and review requirements. CRCs report to the department quarterly and annually and the department can undertake a review at any time.