

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates May 2015

Agriculture

Question: 75

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Animal Division

Topic: Animal Health Laboratory Standards

Proof Hansard page: 30 (26.05.2015)

Senator BACK asked:

Senator BACK: Thank you. For the benefit of the committee, there is still in existence, I think—soon to be discontinued—the Subcommittee on Animal Health Laboratory Standards. That obviously oversees, from the viewpoint of international integrity, our postborder surveillance or our laboratory standards that will ensure our postborder surveillance is at a level that is accepted internationally. The concern that I have is: what is replacing it and how can we assure ourselves and the international community that we can guarantee the ongoing standards of our animal health laboratories around Australia?

Mr Glyde: I think I will have to take on notice the question of what actually is replacing it. As you are probably aware, the government has a smaller government initiative, which is to try to reduce the number of bodies and authorities et cetera that have grown up over the years. I think the intent was to make sure that the committee would be—that its functions might not necessarily need to have the full trappings of a committee. I take the point that the activities it was undertaking were really quite important, so I will have to take on notice the question of what we are doing in terms of replacing it and how we are going to move towards a more efficient way of maintaining that communication and understanding amongst state and territory officers as well as the federal officials.

Answer:

In February 2015, the Animal Health Committee (AHC) reviewed the essential functions of the Subcommittee on Animal Health Laboratory Standards (SCAHLs) with the understanding that the abolition is not about ceasing these functions but ensuring they are as streamlined as possible. The proposed outcomes of this rationalisation process are outlined as follows:

SCAHLs functions that have been routinely managed or coordinated by various existing government or public entities will continue to operate as before but report directly to AHC. These entities include: (1) the Victorian Government Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources for the Australian National Quality Assurance Program; (2) CSIRO's Australian Animal Health Laboratory (AAHL) for AAHL-based national and international reference laboratories and the Laboratories for Emergency Animal Disease Diagnosis and Response network; and (3) Animal Health Australia (AHA) for two state-based national reference laboratories (Johne's disease and anthrax) and the Australian Animal Pathology Standards Program.

Question: 75 (continued)

For other functions such as the Australian and New Zealand Standard Diagnostic Procedures and new test evaluation, relevant laboratory experts will come together to support them on an as-needed basis with coordination by the Department of Agriculture (the department).

The National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA), Australia is an international laboratory accreditation provider and has an ongoing memorandum of understanding with the department for collaboration in various quality management areas. The department will continue to work closely with NATA to ensure standards and quality of Australia's laboratory testing for emergency animal diseases are internationally recognisable through NATA accreditation.

AAHL will continue to lead national laboratory biosecurity and biosafety functions as before and report directly to AHC as needed. AAHL will also continue to support the department in addressing technical gaps for international/national engagement on an as-needed basis.

AHC will ensure laboratory-specific issues are communicated to stakeholders through its newsletters. Local state laboratory experts will be invited to join regular AHC meetings to discuss specific laboratory issues as necessary.

All laboratory functions for aquatic animal diseases will now be managed directly under the Subcommittee on Aquatic Animal Health (SCAAH) which reports to AHC.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates May 2015

Agriculture

Question: 76

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Animal Division

Topic: Animal Health Laboratory Standards

Proof Hansard page: 30 (26.05.2015)

Senator BACK asked:

Senator BACK: Would you also take this on notice for me: what has been the cost to the department in supporting the Subcommittee on Animal Health Laboratory Standards to date? I understand that the Commonwealth contribution has always been low. It has been other members of the subcommittee, including state and other authorities, that have actually met the cost. So, with the Animal Health Committee taking over this responsibility, what if anything will be, are or have been the savings? Because if indeed the Commonwealth's financial contribution servicing the subcommittee to date has been minimal and if the Animal Health Committee is now taking over this responsibility, my concern is that, if anything, the actual cost will go up rather than down. Again, I just had this concern that the laboratory standards and the guarantee of ongoing high standards may in some way be compromised. That really is the area in which I have real concern.

Mr Glyde: As you know, Senator, the intention is that the Animal Health Committee will try to make sure that these groups of experts, which do tend to be state and territory officials and advisers, will come together to make sure that we do maintain that preparedness function. But I think the best thing is to come back to you with an answer in relation to the costs and what have you in relation to the previous arrangements and what we envisage going forward as well.

Senator BACK: Sure. So it is those two issues—it is cost, as you say, but it is also the guaranteed ongoing integrity and quality of those standards. Thank you.

Answer:

Question 1 (the guaranteed ongoing integrity and quality of laboratory standards): Please refer to the answer to Question on Notice 75.

Question 2 (cost): The abolition of the Subcommittee on Animal Health laboratory Standards (SCAHLs) is primarily about streamlining its essential functions rather than ceasing them – they will be rationalised for management under new arrangements (please refer to the answer to Question on Notice 75. There are no cost savings.

The Department of Agriculture provided in-kind support for SCAHLs and this will continue as part of any new arrangements.

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates May 2015

Agriculture

Question: 77

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Animal Division

Topic: Statement by Minister

Proof Hansard page: 62-63 (26.5.2015)

Senator CAMERON asked:

Senator CAMERON: The minister said on 6 November that there is an imminent deal to export up to a million head of live cattle to China annually and that that would be a significant boost for Australian farmers. That is what the minister said. So ABARES has not provided any advice on the practicalities or reality of that. The minister has not sought any advice from ABARES on that. Mr Glyde, has the minister sought any advice from the department on this issue?

Mr Glyde: I would have to check the record, but not that I am aware.

Senator CAMERON: Have you provided any advice to the minister following that statement?

Mr Glyde: I would have to check the record on that. I am not sure what advice might have been provided in the lead-up to that statement. My recollection is that the trigger of that statement was, as I said before, a successful discussion and negotiation that we had with our Chinese counterparts, who are dealing with the animal health protocol, as I mentioned earlier. The only other thing I would add is that the minister, and indeed the department, rely on advice not only from ABARES but also the players in the industry. We tend to provide estimates based on what we understand to be the economic and climatic conditions and the like. For a particular market in a particular place, it is often the industry and the various companies involved that have the more detailed information. So there may well have been other information provided to the minister that might not necessarily have come from his department, including ABARES.

Answer:

The Australian Government Department of Agriculture is in the process of finalising access for Australian live slaughter and feeder cattle to China. During negotiations on the health requirements, Chinese officials indicated that they estimated a potential demand for over a million head of slaughter and feeder cattle per year.

The minister made a number of statements in relation to this potential trade, including:

1. *"Now this has the potential market size of a million head a year"* Mr Joyce told reporters in Tamworth which was recorded in an ABC media article by Simon Cullen at 4.35 pm on 7 November 2015.

Question: 77 (continued)

2. *“Obviously you won't start with a million head of cattle, you will build to a million head of cattle*” Minister Joyce said in an ABC radio interview with Elizabeth Jackson at 1:31 pm 7 November 2015.

Australian exporters will need to demonstrate that they comply with the Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System (ESCAS) before trade can begin. New markets generally start with relatively small numbers of cattle and gain over time. As this is consistent with the Minister’s statements, no further advice was provided.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates May 2015

Agriculture

Question: 78

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Animal Division

Topic: Trade of one million head of cattle to China

Proof Hansard page: 62-63 (26.05.15)

Senator CAMERON asked:

Senator CAMERON: Has the minister sought any advice from ABARES about a trade of one million head of cattle to China?

Mr Glyde: Not that I am aware.

Senator CAMERON: Has the minister sought any advice from the—

Senator Colbeck: I want to clarify a point. You have just said that the minister indicated there would be a market for a million head of cattle. Is that correct?

Senator CAMERON: An imminent deal.

Senator Colbeck: Well, you said a market for a million head, which is why I have asked you to clarify your point.

Senator CAMERON: No. An imminent deal, as I quoted. I may have been talking about a market for a million. If that is all there is, that is the market.

Senator Colbeck: That is correct. That is very different to what might go there. That is the point I want to make.

Senator CAMERON: The minister said on 6 November that there is an imminent deal to export up to a million head of live cattle to China annually and that that would be a significant boost for Australian farmers. That is what the minister said. So ABARES has not provided any advice on the practicalities or reality of that.

The minister has not sought any advice from ABARES on that. Mr Glyde, has the minister sought any advice from the department on this issue?

Mr Glyde: I would have to check the record, but not that I am aware.

Answer:

Please refer to the answer to Question on Notice 77.

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates May 2015

Agriculture

Question: 79

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Animal Division

Topic: Import of Marmosets

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator RHIANNON asked:

1. Has there been, since April 2012, there has been a shipment of 37 common marmosets from France to Australia for research purposes?
2. May I have the following details:
 - a. The date or dates on which the animals arrived in Australia?
 - b. The airline that transported them?
 - c. The reason they were imported?
 - d. Details explaining why importation was allowed, considering Australia has a colony in which marmosets are bred specifically for research?
 - e. The name of the ethics committee which approved the research?
 - f. The nature of the research they will be subjected to?
 - g. The name of the company or institution which imported them?

Answer:

1. A consignment of 37 marmosets was imported into Australia from France on 19 September 2014.
2.
 - a. See response to question 1.
 - b. The information requested relates to commercial parties or commercial-in confidence information which could identify the commercial parties involved. Commercial business information communicated to the Department of Agriculture is considered in-confidence and is used and stored in accordance with the privacy principles. Personal or commercial information is not disclosed to another party without the written permission of the information owner (this is sometimes another party separate to the applicant such as the airline in this instance).

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- c. The department does not require importers of non-human primates to detail the reason they want to undertake a specific import on import permit applications. The department's regulatory role is to manage biosecurity risk and this is achieved through a number of mechanisms including containing the animals in quarantine approved premises of an appropriate containment level upon arrival.
- d. The import was permitted because the importer demonstrated an ability to meet the relevant import conditions that manage the biosecurity risk. Non-human primates from certain sources such as zoos and institutions that are licensed by the exporting country can be imported into quarantine approved premises of an appropriate containment level. Imports are also subject to other import conditions that manage the biosecurity risks of diseases such as rabies, yellow fever and tuberculosis.
- e. The department does not require this information as part of an import permit application. The use of animals in Australia for scientific purposes, including research, is regulated under the laws of the states and territories.
- f. State and territory laws refer to the Australian code for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes. This code is managed by the National Health and Medical Research Council.
- g. See response to questions 2(c) and (e).
- h. As per the response to question 2(b), the information requested is commercial in-confidence.