

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates May 2017

Department of Agriculture and Water Resources

Question Number: 36

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Policy and Implementation Division

Topic: Plant Biosecurity CRC

Proof Hansard Page: 7 (24.05.2017)

Senator CARR asked:

Senator KIM CARR: Could you perhaps assist me here? When you said that they are setting up a program, what progress has been made on that establishment?

Mr Quinlivan: I would have to get the relevant people at the table to answer that.

Ms O'Connell: The seven plant based RDCs, along with Plant Health Australia, announced last month—I think it was then, but I can come back to you on the date—a cooperative and shared arrangement on R&D in plant based biosecurity. So they have announced that and they have set that up, in terms of increasing effort into R&D in plant based biosecurity.

Answer:

The announcement was made by Horticulture Innovation Australia on 8 March 2017.

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Department of Agriculture and Water Resources

Question Number: 37

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Policy and Implementation Division

Topic: Partnership of R&D corporations – biosecurity related matters

Proof Hansard Page: 11 (24.05.2017)

Senator BROWN asked:

Senator CAROL BROWN: How is that assembly or partnership locked into place? What mechanism is used?

Ms O'Connell: The RDCs have reached an agreement to do this and set this up and also include Plant Health Australia.

Senator CAROL BROWN: So they have all signed an agreement or something.

Ms O'Connell: I am not sure of the mechanics of how they have done that.

Senator CAROL BROWN: They have not just shaken hands.

Senator Ruston: While you are continuing your questioning, I will get the answer for you.

Answer:

The partnership between Plant Health Australia and the seven plant-based Research Development Corporations is formed by a programme management agreement.

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Budget Estimates May 2017

Department of Agriculture and Water Resources

Question Number: 38

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Policy and Implementation Division

Topic: Plant Biosecurity CRC

Proof Hansard Page: 12 (24.05.2017)

Senator RICE asked:

Senator RICE: Let me clarify: my understanding was that, in fact, they were not intending to continue as a CRC but that they did want to have further federal funding to enable this broader partnership to continue. They wanted federal funding and not just what is currently going through the RDCs. Can I confirm that that further federal funding has not been forthcoming?

Senator Ruston: I will certainly check that for you. I certainly know that the CRC was very, very active and has been extremely active in terms of where it goes to in the future. But the industry has made a decision about how it wishes to handle biosecurity in the plant space. I am more than happy to get a specific answer to your question notwithstanding the fact that they have been very active in their lobbying for government funding for the continuation of their own—

Senator RICE: And to confirm at this stage, in terms of that extra federal funding, it is currently not forthcoming?

Senator Ruston: Not that I am aware of, but I will certainly check that for you.

Answer:

The Plant Biosecurity Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) will cease on 30 June 2018 and the CRC Programme guidelines established in December 2015 do not allow the term of existing CRCs to be extended. The Department of Industry, Innovation and Science manages the CRC Programme.

All CRCs are obliged as part of their funding agreement to plan for legacy arrangements before their funding agreement ends.

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Budget Estimates May 2017

Department of Agriculture and Water Resources

Question Number: 39

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Policy Implementation Division

Topic: Calici K5 virus

Proof Hansard Page: 59 (24.05.2017)

Senator BACK asked:

Senator BACK: I am wanting to get an update on the release of the new calici K5 virus. How is it being released and how effective is it?

Mr Koval: There are 600 trial sites around the country.

Senator BACK: How was the virus delivered to the 600 trial sites?

Mr Koval: I might have to take that one on notice to confirm. As far as I recall, it was delivered to the groups who were going to release the virus via Australia Post. Is that the question you were asking in terms of the logistics of it?

Senator BACK: What was the medium in which the virus was released? Presumably infected rabbits were not sent to Australia?

Mr Koval: As I understand it—and I will clarify on notice, as I am not a scientist or veterinarian—the virus was in vials; they were released to the trial sites that people had nominated; and the virus was then put into rabbits which were then released. I will confirm that on notice for you.

Answer:

Following the national release in March 2017, the NSW Department of Primary Industries, who are the lead jurisdiction for release of RHDV1 K5, have reported a 42 per cent average decline in rabbit populations where the virus was released. While it is important to note that further research is required to fully evaluate the effectiveness, this preliminary analysis is encouraging and higher than expected.

RHDV1 K5 was mixed in oats or chopped carrots and fed to rabbits at release sites. Infected rabbits then spread RHDV1 K5 to other rabbits by direct contact or indirectly through faeces and vectors such as insects like bushflies and blowflies.

The release was the first new rabbit biocontrol agent in 20 years and relied heavily on government, industry and community collaboration with 600 community release sites.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates May 2017

Department of Agriculture and Water Resources

Question Number: 40

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Policy and Implementation Division

Topic: Unsuccessful grant applications to the Established Pest and Weeds section

Proof Hansard Page: Written

Senator ROBERTS asked:

In a recent case, I understand an innovative new idea to trap wild pigs was submitted to Established Pest Animals and Weeds; Dan Passer, it was rejected by what seems to be a misunderstanding of context or a technicality:

1. What is the assessment process for determining if a project is eligible for grant funding? Is there an objective measure or measures?
2. What is the final step before a project is given approval is it signed off by a committee, or an individual?
3. Is the approver or approvers' subject matter experts in the area where the grant application has been made? If not, why not?
4. As a part of the assessment process is "innovation" considered as a qualifying measure? If so how much weight does it hold?
5. Why does the department not have an appeals process once an application has been rejected?
6. What is the grant budget allocated to the Established Pest Animals and Weeds section of the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources?

Answer:

1. The grant round was very competitive with 91 applications requesting over \$50 million in funding for \$10 million in available grants. Eligible applications were assessed and ranked by the expert assessment panel and a number of good applications were not funded because available funding was allocated.

The guidelines for determining eligibility for funding under the control tools and technologies for established pest animals and weeds competitive grants program are available on the department's website ([here](#)). The guidelines establish initial eligibility requirements and a merit based assessment process involving an expert assessment panel.

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2. The Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources gave the approval to fund the successful projects, on recommendation of the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources. The recommendations reflected the assessment advice provided by the expert assessment panel. Four of the six panel members were external to the department.
3. Further to the response to Question 2, the recommendations made to the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources were informed by the views of the expert assessment panel (the panel).

The panel assessed eligible grant applications for merit and advised the department on project suitability in accordance with the assessment criteria set out in the guidelines, including a relative ranking. The panel included members with expertise in: research and development relating to agriculture, particularly in relation to control tools and technologies for managing pest animals and weeds, animal and plant biosecurity including in relation to policy, programs and on-ground management and animal welfare, agricultural veterinary chemicals regulation and regulatory process, farming and agricultural industry, and environmental biosecurity and biodiversity.

4. The merit assessment process took into consideration innovation in context of whether the applications proposed to develop new or improved control tools or technologies. This was assessed as a part of Criterion 2 of the assessment criteria.
5. As set out at item 20 of the grant guidelines, there is no established appeal mechanism for unsuccessful applicants under the control tools and technologies for established pest animals and weeds competitive grants program.

If an applicant is dissatisfied with the way an application has been handled by the department, they can email the program coordinator and lodge a complaint. The complaint will be reviewed by one or more independent areas of the department. If no resolution is achieved, the applicant can contact the Commonwealth Ombudsman. The Ombudsman will usually not investigate a complaint unless the matter has first been raised with the department and the department has been provided with a reasonable opportunity to respond.

6. The department was allocated \$25.7 million from 2015-16 to 2018-19 under the Established Pest Animals and Weeds measure of the Agricultural Competitiveness White Paper. For this round of the control tools and technologies for established pest animals and weeds competitive grants program, the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources approved up to approximately \$10 million for funding, as per the grant guidelines. The Established Pest Animals and Weeds Section is responsible for administering this program.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Budget Estimates May 2017

Department of Agriculture and Water Resources

Question Number: 41

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Policy and Implementation Division

Topic: Managing biosecurity imported food risk

Proof Hansard Page: Written

Senator ROBERTS asked:

Has cost-benefit-analysis (CBA) been done on managing biosecurity & imported food risks to ensure that such measures do not act disproportionately as barriers-to-trade that hurt Australian import businesses & consumers and may lead to trade-partner countries counter-measures?

Answer:

Australian takes a risk-based approach to managing biosecurity and imported food.

Our biosecurity and imported foods risk mitigation measures are supported by research, science and information that directs resources to where the greatest risk reduction can be achieved. This approach does not take into account potential benefits to consumers or import businesses.