

**Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee**

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2013

**Agriculture**

**Question:** 184

**Division/Agency:** Australian Chief Plant Protection Office

**Topic:** National Fruit Fly Strategy

**Proof Hansard page:** 19

**Senator RUSTON asked:**

**Senator RUSTON:** What would you need to be able to take on the overall, overarching responsibility for the National Fruit Fly Strategy and the ongoing operation? You do not have to do it now, but if you could tell me what you think you would need, that would be great.

**Mr Fraser:** We currently—

**Senator RUSTON:** You can take it on notice.

**CHAIR:** You can take it on notice.

**Answer:**

Plant Health Australia (PHA) is a public company limited by guarantee. It has as its members the Australian Government, all state and territory governments and 34 plant industry peak bodies. PHA undertakes work on subscription and non-subscription funded projects. Work on established pests such as fruit fly is funded by non-subscription funding as fruit fly only affects a sub set of PHA members.

For PHA to take on overall responsibility for the National Fruit Fly Strategy (NFFS) two actions would need to occur. Funding for the NFFS advisory body would need to be provided, which has been identified as \$220 000 per year for two or three years, funded by state/territory governments, the Australian Government and industry (\$65 000 each) and PHA (\$25 000). Many of the 15 broad project initiatives identified in the NFFS implementation action plan have been completed and others are significantly progressed. The opportunity now exists to review the future of fruit fly management, research and development and coordination across responsible parties, particularly given the changed arrangements in New South Wales and Victoria and the renewed focus on market access.

PHA proposes this to be the first task of the advisory body, leading to delivery of the second necessary action – to prepare a new implementation plan which is endorsed by all relevant parties.

**Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee**

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2013

**Agriculture**

**Question:** 185

**Division/Agency:** Australian Chief Plant Protection Office

**Topic:** Training for Chinese farmers

**Proof Hansard page:** Written

**Senator Xenophon asked:**

Can the Minister elaborate on recent proposals from the Department's Chief Plant Protection Officer to cooperate with China by establishing training programs here in Australia for Chinese foreign farmers. Further to this can the Minister elaborate if there will be a tendering process for this skills training program.

**Answer:**

Several leading horticultural industries (comprising the Australian Table Grape Association, Summerfruit Australia Limited, Australian Apple and Pear Limited, Cherry Growers Australia) have coalesced on an industry-led initiative aimed at improving the balance in the negotiating environment associated with horticultural market access.

The intent of these industries is to promote long-term sustainable relationships with our key trading partners with a focus on mutually beneficial outcomes and growth in exports. In China, the industry has developed a package that will build links with growers; the research, development and education community; and extension and marketing organisations. A broad range of potential projects have been identified for discussion with Chinese officials and industry.

The initiative is supported by the Department of Agriculture, and sits comfortably with the approach that the department takes into its negotiations for plant-based products. The Victorian Government is a strong supporter of the initiative and has been active in pursuing its objectives.

All currently proposed projects are to be funded by industry; potentially with support from state governments. No Commonwealth funding has been allocated to date. There are a number of potential sources of support from the Commonwealth's grant programs that industry may pursue in the future. Access to Commonwealth Government programs would be subject to established governance and accountability arrangements.

**Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee**

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2013

**Agriculture**

**Question:** 186

**Division/Agency:** Australian Chief Plant Protection Office

**Topic:** Import fresh potatoes from New Zealand

**Proof Hansard page:** Written

**Senator XENOPHON asked:**

Can the Minister please clarify the advice that has been provided by the Department's Chief Plant Protection Officer over the request to import fresh potatoes from New Zealand for processing. It is understood that the Chief Plant Protection Officer has refused to answer industry questions about whether the Department will respect the request of the Senate Rural Affairs and Transport Committee and delay its decision until the Committee has tabled its report into the matter. Can the Minister advise if the department will be respecting the request from the Committee Chairman?

**Answer:**

Subsequent to the calling of the Federal Election on 4 August 2013 and the swearing in of the new government on 18 September 2013, the Australian Chief Plant Protection Officer (ACPPO) met with a number of industry groups where various policy questions and timeframes were raised.

Consistent with caretaker conventions, the ACPPO stated that it was inappropriate to speculate on the direction and commitment of the government until the election outcome was known and, in the event of a change in government, until the new government had been appointed. In particular, the ACPPO made it clear that issues relating to parliamentary committees and outstanding reports should be taken up with the incoming government.

Prior to the calling of the Federal Election, the Chair of the Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Reference Committee wrote to the department on three occasions noting a delay to its reporting timeframe and requesting that no decision be made regarding the importation of potatoes for processing from New Zealand. Each time the department replied stating that a policy decision was unlikely to be finalised prior to the committee's reporting dates of 21 November 2012, 24 June 2013 and subsequently 19 July 2013. There has been no further correspondence from the Senate Committee.

**Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee**

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2013

**Agriculture**

**Question:** 187

**Division/Agency:** Australian Chief Plant Protection Office

**Topic:** Fruit fly in stone fruit

**Proof Hansard page:** Written

**Senator STERLE asked:**

Is the Minister concerned about fruit fly in our stone fruit?

**Answer:**

Yes. Many species of fruit fly, including Queensland and Mediterranean fruit fly are a pest of quarantine concern to our trading partners, and can cause significant damage to a range of horticultural products.

While state and territory governments and industry have primary responsibility for established pests and diseases; under both the Australian Constitution and the *Quarantine Act 1908*, the Commonwealth is responsible for matters relating to quarantine, including monitoring Australia's pest and disease status to meet international obligations and support market access.

**Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee**

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2013

**Agriculture**

**Question:** 188

**Division/Agency:** Australian Chief Plant Protection Office

**Topic:** Fruit fly blight

**Proof Hansard page:** Written

**Senator STERLE asked:**

The growers suggest that hundreds of thousands of fruit would need to be destroyed if there was fruit fly blight – can the Minister confirm those figures?

**Answer:**

Outbreaks operate differently depending on the on the species of fruit fly; whether the species was exotic or established in Australia; prevalence in a given area; distribution over a local, regional or national area; and what control measures were in place. Governments and industry work together to manage such outbreaks—quantifying destruction of plant material given the high number of variables is difficult.

**Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee**

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2013

**Agriculture**

**Question:** 189

**Division/Agency:** Australian Chief Plant Protection Office

**Topic:** Fruit fly infestation

**Proof Hansard page:** Written

**Senator STERLE asked:**

If a fruit fly infestation did ruin Australia's crop and destroy the livelihood of Australian fruit growers, what mechanisms for compensation or support would be available to the farmers – Does this fit under "Exceptional Circumstances" funding guidelines?

**Answer:**

The Australian Government has a number of programs available to assist farmers in need including: an income support payment; concessional loans; and free rural financial counselling. In addition, state and territory governments also offer support programs in certain situations, and growers have the opportunity to take out crop insurance.

Whether the impacts of a fruit fly infestation would fit under Exceptional Circumstances (EC) arrangements would depend on the circumstances. Guidelines for EC arrangements, which are due to end on 30 June 2014, can be found at [www.daff.gov.au/agriculture-food/drought/ec/ec\\_handbook](http://www.daff.gov.au/agriculture-food/drought/ec/ec_handbook).

**Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee**

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2013

**Agriculture**

**Question:** 190

**Division/Agency:** Australian Chief Plant Protection Office

**Topic:** Work being undertaken

**Proof Hansard page:** Written

**Senator STERLE asked:**

Provide the committee with an update of the work being undertaken by the Australian Chief Plant Protection Officer.

**Answer:**

The Australian Chief Plant Protection Officer is the primary representative of, and an advisor to, the Australian Government on all matters relating to the management, maintenance and improvement of Australia's plant health status and the systems that support it. The Australian Chief Plant Protection Officer is also Australia's international representative through the International Plant Protection Convention.

The Australian Chief Plant Protection Officer provides leadership and strategic direction to manage, maintain and improve Australia's plant health status and trading environment, with a particular focus on:

- a shared vision for plant health in Australia
- reform and innovation in plant health policies and systems
- national and international partnerships to reflect shared responsibilities
- international plant health and protection
- strategic opportunities for Australian exports
- intelligence and foresight capabilities
- integrating research into decision making
- plant pest prevention, preparedness and response
- expert advice and education on plant health issues and the global trading environment.

Current priority activities include working closely with the Australian horticulture industries and Chinese Government to deliver opportunities for Australian exports, providing technical oversight of import risk assessments, strengthening partnerships with the states and territories through the Plant Health Committee and leading the national response to emergency plant pests, such as banana freckle.