

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2013

Agriculture

Question: 314

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management Division

Topic: Feral camels

Proof Hansard page: 127

Senator EDWARDS asked:

Senator EDWARDS: What a hospital pass you have logged. How do you know that is right given that you have been so wildly and spectacularly wrong on these numbers for 4½ years. Can you tell me that we have extinguished 160,000 camels out of the centre of Australia?

Mr Talbot: I will have to take that on notice as to how good the techniques are that they have used.

Answer:

The advice to date from Ninti One Ltd is that the project has removed over 160,000 feral camels through a combination of commercial and non-commercial means. The final report from the project is due 31 December 2013.

Ninti One Ltd has advised that, except for camels shot for pet-meat, all aerial culls were recorded with location and date of the kill (GPS logs) and all camels mustered and transported to the abattoirs were recorded through transport and abattoir records. Pet-meating operations ceased before the implementation of digital recording of kills and reporting of these kills was less rigorous.

Details of the numbers of camels removed will be included in the final project report, due by 31 December 2013, and the department will consider the final report and its content as part of the regular process for finalising the project.

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2013

Agriculture

Question: 315

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management Division

Topic: Feral camels

Proof Hansard page: 127

Senator EDWARDS asked:

Senator EDWARDS: Dr Grimes, you have inherited this as well. I get it: it all happened on a different watch. Are you likely to launch an investigation into the practices of this campaign using \$16.6 million worth of taxpayers' money and we have no idea?

Dr Grimes: As a first step, the processes that Mr Talbot indicated still are to occur—that is, the reporting of the provider. I think the appropriate thing is to allow that to play itself out first.

Senator EDWARDS: But you would be cross, Dr Grimes. This is not representing that well.

CHAIR: Obviously you have got some work to do on camels. Do they get so much a head?

Senator EDWARDS: It worked out to be \$104 a head if you divide \$16.6 million by 160,000.

Mr Talbot: With commercial removal, I have got here in my notes, around \$40 per head.

CHAIR: So they do not have to provide you with a scalp or a tail like a fox?

Mr Talbot: With non-commercial removal it is around \$25 to \$40 per head depending on size.

CHAIR: But how do they confirm to you, 'I went out and shot 300 camels'?

Senator EDWARDS: I think I just asked that question.

Mr Talbot: I will provide further information on notice.

Answer:

Ninti One Ltd has advised that, except for camels shot for pet-meat, all aerial culls were recorded with location and date of the kill (GPS logs) and all camels mustered and transported to the abattoirs were recorded through transport and abattoir records. Pet-meating operations ceased before the implementation of digital recording of kills and reporting of these kills was less rigorous.

Details of the numbers of camels removed will be included in the final project report, due by 31 December 2013, and the department will consider the final report and its content as part of the regular process for finalising the project.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2013

Agriculture

Question: 318

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management Division

Topic: Feral Camels

Proof Hansard page: 128

Senator RHIANNON asked:

Senator RHIANNON: Could you take on notice whether any organisations, including the one that I have mentioned, raised concerns about an overstating of the figures. Mr Tucker, you made an earlier comment that these figures were not an estimate by the government, but surely you agree that the whole basis of this program is you accepting those figures from the Australian Feral Camel Management Project. So you may not have made the estimations but you have accepted the figures as the premise for going ahead with this work.

Dr Grimes: Again, I think we are now going into levels of detail that it would probably be best for us to take on notice.

Answer:

The grant was predicated on mitigating the unacceptable level of damage to environmental, pastoral and Indigenous assets and values caused by feral camels, and not on the culling of a specific number of feral camels.

The initial estimate of the population of feral camels and their distribution and density, while relevant to project planning, was not the basis for approval of the grant.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2013

Agriculture

Question: 322

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management Division

Topic: Drought Relief Program

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator SIEWERT asked:

1. What specifically will the recently announced Drought Relief project fund? How many bores does this project plan to construct?
2. What proportion of drought affected farmers in Queensland and NSW will this Drought Relief project support?
3. Who will be doing the Drought Relief project implementation and assessment of applications?
4. Is the Drought Relief project intending to pay for associated infrastructure (i.e. pipes, pumps and troughs)?
5. What level of co-investment is required from landholders?
6. What public benefits are being sought for this Drought Relief project investment and how will these public benefits be measured?

Answer:

1. The funding allocated to Queensland Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebates will be additional to current Queensland Government drought relief assistance measures, and therefore not administered as an individual project. Australian Government and Queensland Government funding will provide rebates to producers for new water infrastructure including pipes, tanks, bores, troughs and pumps to supply water for emergency animal welfare needs. This can include cost of purchase, delivery and if applicable, the labour cost to install water infrastructure purchased for emergency animal welfare need. There is no planned number of bores to be constructed.

The department is in discussions with the New South Wales Government as to how Australian Government support could be implemented.

2. The proportion of eligible drought-affected producers is not defined.

Question: 322 (continued)

3. State authorities will be responsible.

4. Yes, see response to question one.

5. There is no defined level of co-investment required from landholders under the Queensland Government's Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate.

The department is in discussions with the New South Wales Government as to how Australian Government support can be implemented.

6. This investment will ensure improved animal welfare in areas experiencing drought. The farm businesses that participate in these programmes will be more prepared for drought in the future. Farmers that are more prepared for drought are likely to be more resilient, less reliant on government assistance and better placed to contribute to the national economy in the long term.

The state governments will be responsible for continued monitoring and evaluation of the programmes.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2013

Agriculture

Question: 324

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management Division

Topic: Drought relief funding

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator SIEWERT asked:

Why was it considered appropriate to use funds allocated to important NRM and agricultural productivity and sustainability to fund this drought relief program?

Answer:

Funds are being made available for water-related infrastructure to assist farmers. This funding has come from uncommitted funds across the department. More detail will be released in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Supplementary Budget Estimates November 2013

Agriculture

Question: 329

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management Division

Topic: National Landcare Program

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator STERLE asked:

Can you provide further information about the National Landcare Programme?

Answer:

The Minister for Agriculture is working with the Minister for the Environment to design the delivery of the National Landcare Programme. The National Landcare Programme will incorporate the principles of simple, local and long-term and will:

- maintain existing Caring for our Country and Landcare funding levels
- focus on local projects that reflect regional priorities
- provide combined operational funding of \$1 million per annum to support national and state-based Landcare networks
- expand existing guidelines to better enable feral animal and weed control projects, including the management of wild dogs
- link to the Green Army policy which could provide logistic and labour support
- recognise the Peel-Harvey catchment as an independent natural resource management (NRM) region in Western Australia
- recognise OceanWatch as the natural resource management (NRM) organisation with responsibility for enhancing fish habitats and improving water quality in estuaries and coastal marine environments.

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Question: 332

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management Division

Topic: Impact to division on red and green tape cuts

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator SEARLE asked:

How will the government's plan to cut red and green tape impact on this division?

Answer:

The division is committed to reducing the cost of compliance.

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Agriculture

Question: 337

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management Division

Topic: Landcare

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator STERLE asked:

Can the Minister explain how Landcare will be “back at the centre of our land management programs” (statement made by Environment Minister Hunt) when its budget is being raided?

Answer:

The government announced it would merge Caring for our Country and Landcare to create a single National Landcare Programme and that the full budgets will be maintained.