

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee**

Answers to questions on notice

Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities portfolio

Additional Estimates, February 2011

Program: Division or Agency: 1.1: AGLC

Question No: 12

Broad Topic: Importation of fox scats into
Tasmania

Proof Hansard Page and Date 116 (21/2/11)
or Written Question:

Senator Abetz asked:

Senator ABETZ— ... I will move onto the importation of fox scats into Tasmania. Does the federal department have any involvement in that?

Mr Flanigan—I do not believe we have any involvement in this portfolio. This is recollecting previous discussions?

Senator ABETZ—Yes. As I understand it, federally we fund the program substantially and there is now the question being asked as to whether the importation of fox scats could potentially reintroduce hydatids into Tasmania, which is a matter of very real concern. If you could take that on notice—

Mr Flanigan—So it is particularly a question about the hydatids?

Senator ABETZ—Yes, because the state government thought it would be a good idea to import 600 of these scats to try to help dogs find the foxes that people are starting to believe do not actually exist. We are spending many millions of dollars on trying to eradicate this fox that does or does not exist—I will not go there. But to import 600 of the fox scats with the potential of reintroducing hydatids into Tasmania was, to my way of thinking, not a clever idea. I just want to know whether there was any federal involvement or regulation in relation to that or, as I suspect, if it was all the Tasmanian government's good idea. You guys, I assume, would then be off the hook, but I just want that confirmed.

Mr Flanigan—I will check with my colleagues in DAFF.

Answer:

The Tasmanian Government imports fox scats from the mainland of Australia under the guidance of Tasmania's Chief Veterinary Officer (CVO). It imports the scats for the ongoing training of its scat detector dogs, and for the current scat degradation project. The Tasmanian Government's Fox Eradication Program (FEP) scat detector dogs require regular exposure to known fox scats to maintain their abilities.

Until recently there were no restrictions on importing scats under the Tasmanian *Animal Health Act 1995*. All scats imported by the program have always been stored and used following standard operating procedures designed to minimise any risk.

In recognition of public concern, the Tasmanian Minister for Primary Industries, Bryan Green, recently declared fox and dog scats to be restricted material under the Tasmanian *Animal Health Act*, on the recommendation of the CVO. Any scats imported now require a Special Authority from the CVO, including those imported by the FEP.

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Any scats imported by the Program now come either from captive foxes treated for hydatids or, if this cannot be achieved, from specimens that have been deep frozen at -80°C for 48 hours. Freezing at this temperature is proven to eliminate risk of hydatids from the scats. All existing scats held by the Program have also been subjected to the freezing process.

The Department and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry have been aware of importation of fox scats into Tasmania through membership on the FEP's Management Committee.

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Question No: 13

Broad Topic: Green Corridors Policy

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written
or Written Question:

Senator Siewert asked:

1. Has there been any progress in implementing this policy?
2. What liaison and consultation has been undertaken with existing initiatives?
3. What consultation is planned for the coming year?
4. Is the \$10 million allocated in the policy 'new funds' or is it a reallocation of NRM expenditure already committed to specific regions?
5. Has the pilot program been designed yet?
6. Will the pilot be run through the NRM regions or will it follow the example of the already well established, successful initiatives such as Gondwana Link, Great Eastern Ranges, Habitat 141 where the NRM regions have given support but are not the leaders?

Answer:

1. The Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities has commenced foundational planning for the National Wildlife Corridors Plan. Details are expected to be announced in the 2011-2012 Budget.
2. Liaison and consultation with existing initiatives will be undertaken as part of broader stakeholder engagement.
3. It is anticipated that details will be announced in the 2011-2012 Budget. The Australian Government has committed to working with stakeholders in developing this initiative.
4. Funding details are expected to be announced in the 2011-2012 Budget.
5. No. Consideration of pilots will commence in the 2011-2012 financial year.
6. The location of the pilots and the specifics of the governance arrangements are yet to be determined. Such decisions will be informed by the nature of the draft Plan and consultations with stakeholders.