

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee**
Answers to questions on notice
Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities portfolio
Additional Budget Estimates, February 2013

Program: Division or Agency: 1.3: BCD **Question No:** 027
Topic: Biodiversity Fund – progress reports
Proof Hansard Page and Date 124
or Written Question: (11/2/13)

Senator Birmingham asked:

Senator BIRMINGHAM: That being the project plans, which have to be provided within 20 days of the execution date of their funding agreement, but I was asking about progress reports, which I understand were due within the first 40 days of this year.

Ms Lane: I believe we have received a large number of those progress reports. I would have to take the question on notice to give you the exact details of whether or not there are any progress reports still outstanding.

Answer:

The progress reports for Biodiversity Fund Round One projects were due 40 business days after the end of the 2012 calendar year. Allowing for public holidays and weekends, this results in the reports being required back to the Biodiversity Conservation Division by 27 February 2013.

As of 16 April 2013, a total of 278 progress reports have been received by the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (the department), with 26 still outstanding.

A number of progress reports are outstanding for a range of reasons, including a number of environmental factors such as the recent flooding in New South Wales and extreme weather events in Queensland. The department is currently working with proponents to obtain outstanding reports.

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Program: Division or Agency: 1.3: BCD **Question No:** 028

Topic: Biodiversity Fund – koala populations on the New South Wales far south coast

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Rhiannon asked:

Referring to the project: "Corridors & core habitat for koalas on the NSW far south coast" which received \$1.9m under the Biodiversity Fund, to enable, inter alia NSW Government agencies to defer logging in some koala habitat forests for 6 years:

1. Are maps of the areas to be excluded from logging available to the public? If so, where? If not, why not?
2. Has the federal Government been advised of results of surveys undertaken as part of the project which have verified the presence of koalas in a number of areas not included in the project, particularly nearby Tanja State Forest?
3. Has the Commonwealth been advised that the NSW State Government agency the Forestry Corporation, as a result of the latest data on koala numbers, wishes to reduce or remove logging exclusion zones intended to protect koalas?
4. The project appears to recognise that logging is a threat to koalas. What, therefore, is the scientific rationale for reducing protection as a result of this project?
5. What would be the Commonwealth's attitude if NSW were to use the results of data generated by this Commonwealth funded project as a pretext for removing or reducing protection for koalas in Murrah – Mumbulla – Bermagui and under its own IFOA logging prescriptions?
6. Last year, I was advised that Tanja was not included in the project because it was not known to be koala habitat. Now that we know of their presence there, why does the Commonwealth not insist that it be included, particularly at a time when there is little or no market for native forest woodchips, the principal product to be sourced from that forest?

Answer:

1. Maps of the areas to be excluded from logging in New South Wales is a matter for the New South Wales Government.
2. The Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (the department) is aware that the grant recipient has conducted surveys in the broader area, including part of the Tanja State Forest. The department has been advised that at least one koala was present in a small area of the Tanja State Forest.

3. No.
4. The project has the potential for beneficial outcomes for koalas across the south east New South Wales region. The project aims to improve the koala population by protecting and enhancing 2,800 hectares of high conservation koala habitat. It is a landscape scale approach that brings together public and private land managers to further improve koala conservation in the area.
5. The impacts of logging on threatened species, including in the Tanja State Forest, are regulated by the Eden Regional Forest Agreement (the Agreement). Under the Agreement, ongoing forest management, including the protection of listed threatened species is the responsibility of the New South Wales Government.
6. The project area as proposed by the grant recipient was defined as the New South Wales Far South Coast Forests, which includes the Tanja State Forest. The Tanja State Forest is part of a series of forests where surveys are being conducted by the grant recipient.

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Program: Division or Agency: 1.3: BCD **Question No:** 029
Topic: Biodiversity Fund
Proof Hansard Page and Date Written
or Written Question:

Senator Waters asked:

1. Was the intention to use the first round of the Biodiversity Fund to pilot different kinds of projects around the country?
2. Did you consult with the NRM regional plans to determine criteria for the first round of grants?
3. How did existing NRM regional plans and projects inform grants? How did they go about ensuring no duplication?
4. Given the first round was so rushed and the intention was to pilot, why were multi-year grants given? Surely by locking in money to the very first round over multiple years it increased chances of funding dud projects and if there was any duplication, locked that in as wasted money?

Answer:

1. The first investment round of the Biodiversity Fund was deliberately broad in its approach and achieved its goal to maximise participation and the potential to secure innovative and varied proposals from applicants new to the program.

This first round of investment was treated as a 'development phase', whereby the outcomes have been used to inform the longer term delivery arrangement of the program.

2. The assessment criteria for the first round of the Biodiversity Fund were as follows:

Criterion 1 – Biodiversity Fund themes

Criterion 2 – Ongoing management and benefits

Criterion 3 – Value for money of the proposal

Criterion 4 – Capacity

Criterion 1 – Biodiversity Fund themes encouraged applicants, where relevant, to draw on existing conservation planning tools, including regional Natural Resource Management plans, in determining the location and level of activity for their proposal.

3. The Biodiversity Fund Round One grant application guidelines encouraged applicants to consult relevant planning tools and management information, such as regional Natural Resource Management plans, when considering, for example, how an improved biodiversity outcome could be achieved in the landscape through a Carbon Farming Initiative project.

The first round of the Biodiversity Fund did not fund activities and/or items that:

- had already been completely funded through other initiatives or programs, or by other third parties; and
 - formed part of the business-as-usual practices of the land manager or were required by law.
4. Multi-year grants offer the potential to achieve more enduring conservation outcomes, particularly given the Program's interest in improving the condition, extent and connectivity in native habitat, as well as managing the threat of invasive species in connected landscapes, in a changing climate. Stakeholder feedback from the first investment round of the Biodiversity Fund indicated the longer term funding options to be a real strength of the program.

All Biodiversity Fund Round One funding recipients are required to actively manage the delivery of their projects. The Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities monitors the progress of projects against funding agreements through the collection and assessment of progress reports, which include components related to financial management and accountability of the project, and by conducting site visits as necessary.

In relation to potential duplication, see answer to question 3.