

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

Program: Division:	1.3 BCD	Question No:	036
Topic:	Biodiversity Fund – Tasmania Forests agreement		
Proof Hansard Page and Date or Written Question:	83 (28/05/13)		

Senator Birmingham asked:

Ms Howlett: Under the Tasmanian forests agreement—I believe you were here when I was discussing this with Senator Milne earlier—one of the components was a request by the environmental non-government organisation signatories for a landscape-scale conservation program, and this round of the Biodiversity Fund meets that request. It is part of the Australian government's commitment in support of the implementation of the Tasmanian forests agreement.

Senator BIRMINGHAM: Yes, but the agreement did not specify the value of such a program.

Ms Howlett: I would have to take that on notice, but the signatories did request a quantum of funding in the order of \$20 million or \$30 million. I cannot recall exactly.

Answer:

Clause 38 of the Tasmanian Forest Agreement calls for a landscape conservation program for Tasmania's parks system to support the conservation outcomes of the Agreement. The Signatories sought government funding of approximately \$20 million for such a program.

In response to that request, and as part of the broader package to support implementation of the Tasmanian Forest Agreement, the Australian Government released the Biodiversity Fund: Investing in Tasmania's Native Forests 2013-14 funding round. This round of the program builds on the targeted approach of previous Biodiversity Fund rounds and seeks to deliver landscape scale conservation outcomes consistent with the Tasmanian Forest Agreement. Applications for this round closed on 12 June 2013. The quantum of funding allocated to this round has not yet been specified.

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Program: Division:	1.3 BCD	Question No:	037
Topic:	Biodiversity Fund – Flying fox		
Proof Hansard Page and Date	95		
or Written Question:	(28/05/13)		

Senator Macdonald asked:

Senator IAN MACDONALD: I am not sure where the Charters Towers city council and their application for funding to address a flying fox problem is, but it is a classic case of the type for which the Biodiversity Fund was set up, as I understand it. I do not think they were even shortlisted. I am interested to know whether they have been told why and been invited to apply again. Can you explain to me—it will have to be on notice, unfortunately—why it is that this application did not even get to first base. I have been told by those who know these things a lot better than I that is a classic case and is just what this fund was made for—it is the northern fund, as well. I would be very interested if you could explain why it was that they were not chosen. I do not know whether you can tell me this, but I am interested to know whether the local member of parliament made submissions either for or, perhaps, against the granting of the funding. You may not be able to tell me that.

CHAIR: You can take those on notice.

Mr Thompson: I actually don't know, so I will have to take it on notice.

Answer:

The Biodiversity Fund has three funding themes: enhancing existing native vegetation; biodiverse plantings; and managing invasive species in a connected landscape. The Northern Australia Targeted Investment expression of interest round had 183 applications of which 59 were invited to submit full applications. The Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities has no record of an application being received from Charters Towers City Council.

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Program: Division:	1.3: BCD	Question No: 038
Topic:	National Parks water availability for stock	
Proof Hansard Page and Date or Written Question:	64/65 (28/05/13)	

Senator Cameron asked:

CHAIR: Dr Dripps, I am not sure if you are the person to ask on this. I want to return to the issue of the national parks and using them for stock that need agistment. I am looking at the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries fact sheet called Primefacts. It indicates the average water requirements of stock. It says that a lactating cow consumes between 40 to 100 litres per day in grassland. In saltbush, it is 70 to 140. Young stock would be 25 to 50. Horses would be 40 to 50. What water in the national parks could stock access if there were an influx of 6,000 head of stock?

Dr Dripps: For those parks in Queensland, I would have to take that question on notice. If they were former grazing properties, there may be watering points in place. But I do not have that information here.

CHAIR: Are there rivers or streams running through these properties or these parks?

Dr Dripps: I do not have that information here with me; I am sorry. My colleague may have further information on the water availability in those parks.

CHAIR: Could you also take on notice, if there are rivers or streams, the impact of cattle accessing those streams? Would they degrade the banks? Are there environmental issues associated with tens of thousands of stock going onto a national park?

Dr Dripps: I can take that question in a general sense. Undoubtedly there is an impact on rivers and streams from cattle going into them and near them to drink and take water. That is why there are a number of programs across both Commonwealth and state agencies that are involved in fencing water courses to prevent access by stock.

What water in the national parks could stock access if there were an influx of 6,000 head of stock?

Answer:

The eight National Reserve System properties (Bedourie, The Canyon, Eight Mile, Gilbert River, Littleton, Rungulla, Redcliffevale and Wairuna) referred to in the letter of 14 May 2013 sent by the Hon Steve Dickson MP, Queensland Minister for National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing, to the Commonwealth Minister for Environment, Sustainability, Water, Population and Communities, the Hon Tony Burke MP, were acquired with funding from both the Queensland and Commonwealth Governments for inclusion in the National Reserve System. Each includes natural water courses that stock could access.

Based on further information provided by Queensland Government officials, the Department has been advised that on these properties off-stream watering points, artificial dams, bores and troughs are plentiful in several locations and operational.

Are there rivers or streams running through these properties or these parks?

Answer:

Yes.

If there are rivers or streams, the impact of cattle accessing those streams?

Answer:

While it is difficult to be specific, the impact of cattle accessing rivers or streams could result in environmental degradation if any access were not appropriately managed.

Would they degrade the banks?

Answer:

While it is difficult to be specific, the impact of cattle accessing rivers or streams could result in environmental degradation if any access were not appropriately managed.

Are there environmental issues associated with tens of thousands of stock going onto a national park?

Answer:

Possible environmental impacts would need to be assessed on a case by case basis.

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Program: Division:	1.3: BCD	Question No:	039
Topic:	Biodiversity Fund - rephasing		
Proof Hansard Page and Date	79/80		
or Written Question:	(28/05/13)		

Senator Birmingham asked:

Senator BIRMINGHAM: So the biodiversity fund was announced with an expectation it would be an ongoing program funded annually yet there might be different tranches in terms of the government indicating what that funding in future would be. But short of a government coming along and saying, 'We are axing the biodiversity fund', they would always be refunding it in one way, shape or form. It was originally funded for a six-year profile period, which would have taken it to the end of 2016-17 to the tune of the \$945.8 million that you indicated before, Ms Howlett.

Ms Howlett: That is correct, Senator.

Senator BIRMINGHAM: That is all correct. Is it not a little cute to be talking about rephasing \$225 million into the future? Is there a demonstrable increase in what would have been available in 2017-18 and 2018-19 than would otherwise have been available as a result of this budget decision?

Ms Howlett: Well, Senator, what it means is that there is \$225 million more in those forward years than there was already notionally allocated beyond the forward estimates.

Senator BIRMINGHAM: So what was already notionally allocated in those forward years?

Ms Howlett: I do not have that with me, Senator. I will have to take that on notice.

Answer:

As part of the 2013-14 Budget process, \$221.127 million was rephased evenly across four years beyond forward estimates (2017-18 to 2020-21). This resulted in an increase of \$55.282 million per year compared to the previous notional annual allocation of \$160.461 million.

As announced by the Government on 17 July 2013.

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Program: Division:	1.3: BCD	Question No: 040
Topic:	Biodiversity Fund - rephasing	
Proof Hansard Page and Date or Written Question:	80	
	(28/05/13)	

Senator Birmingham asked:

Senator BIRMINGHAM: Is it possible that all that will be spent in 2017-18 and 2018-19 on the biodiversity fund is \$225 million of so-called rephrased funding?

Mr Sullivan: I could answer that in a couple of ways. What will be spent in years beyond the forward estimates would be a matter for the government of the day. My understanding of the notional ongoing budget is that it was reasonably static in profile. We will get you that figure. My understanding is that the \$225 million that has been reprofiled has been reprofiled across those two years in addition to that figure. But I will have to check that and take it on notice, Senator.

Answer:

As part of the 2013-14 Budget process \$221.127 million was evenly rephased across four years beyond forward estimates (2017-18 to 2020-21). This was an increase to the previous notional allocation of \$160.461 million in those years.

As announced by the government on 17 July 2013, in the context of the move to a floating price on carbon in 2014, savings of \$213 million has been applied to the Biodiversity Fund over the forward estimates.

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Program: Division:	1.3: BCD	Question No: 041
Topic:	Biodiversity Fund – Tasmania Forests agreement	
Proof Hansard Page and Date or Written Question:	84 (28/05/13)	

Senator Birmingham asked:

Senator BIRMINGHAM: Thank you. Finally, on Tasmania: Tasmanian projects get their usual fair share of funding out of round 1?

Ms Lane: I am not sure I have those details with me. From memory, I think Tasmania had a smaller number of applications and funded projects in round 1 compared to other states, but I would have to take the detail on notice. I do not have the exact number of projects that we funded through round 1 with me.

Answer:

The 2011/2012 Biodiversity Fund Round One program invested \$270 million across 313 projects to revegetate, rehabilitate and restore the Australian landscape over six years. Of this funding, 13 projects were funded in Tasmania with an investment of \$6.8 million. Information on projects funded across Australia are at:

<http://www.environment.gov.au/cleanenergyfuture/biodiversity-fund/round-1/index.html#lists>.

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Program: Division: 1.3: BCD **Question No:** 042
Topic: Land Sector Initiatives – Northern Australia Biodiversity Fund
Proof Hansard Page and Date or Written Question: Written

Senator Macdonald asked:

1. How much funding has been allocated to the Aboriginal Ranger Program in 2012/13?
 - a. How much was allocated to this program in 2011/12?
 - b. How much is allocated for 2013/14?
 - c. Is there a similar stewardship program for non-aboriginal pastoralists?
2. How much of the funding is allocated to Aboriginal Australians who hold pastoral leases? Does the department consider the distinction?
3. What funding/programs have been approved in the past three months (April-June 2013)?
 - a. What is the total dollar value of funding allocated by the department in the December and March quarters 2012/13?
 - b. What was the total amount of funding allocated for the same periods in the 2011/12 year?
 - c. How much departmental funding/grants money remains unallocated for 2012/13?
 - d. How much of this funding does the department anticipate allocating by June 30, 2013?
4. Can you provide the full list of organisations that have received funding from the department in the 2012/13 financial year?
 - a. How many of these organisations are not connected to land management?
 - b. What criteria was applied to qualify these non-land management organisations for funding?

Answer:

1. There was no allocation of funding for the Working on Country program from the Biodiversity Fund in 2012-13.
 - a. There was no allocation of funding for the Working on Country program from the Biodiversity Fund in 2011-12.
 - b. \$15.1 million (GST exclusive) has been approved for Indigenous rangers projects to be paid from Biodiversity Fund in 2013-14. This investment is separate to the Biodiversity Fund: Northern Australia Targeted Investment 2013-14.

- c. All land managers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous were eligible to apply for funding under the Biodiversity Fund: Northern Australia Targeted Investment 2013-14.
2. All investments under the Biodiversity Fund: Northern Australia Targeted Investment 2013-14 will be allocated through a competitive merit based process, with no allocation to specific groups.
3. No funding was allocated in 2012-13 under the Biodiversity Fund: Northern Australia Targeted Investment 2013-14.
4. As required under Commonwealth Grant Guidelines and statutory reporting requirements, organisations that have received funding from the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities in the 2012-13 financial year can be found at <http://www.environment.gov.au/about/grants/>.
 - a. All Biodiversity Fund projects must contain on-ground work as the main focus of the project.
 - b. Not applicable.

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Program: Division: 1.3: BCD **Question No:** 043
Topic: Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy
Proof Hansard Page and Date or Written Question: Written

Senator Waters asked:

Re the Implementation Plan for Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010-30, National Reserve System Strategy and Native Vegetation Framework

- a. What actions has the Department taken to support the preparation of the Implementation Plan?
- b. Will the Implementation Plan be ready for completion by SCEW by end 2013?
- c. What indicators (measures) have been proposed for use in the plan (noting that an important set of actions in the strategies is reporting against nationally agreed targets and that the first of the reports on progress towards meeting the targets is due in 2015)?
- d. What actions has the Department itself taken to implement the three national conservation strategies?

Answer:

- a. The COAG Standing Council on Environment and Water (SCEW) has in its 2012-2013 work plan the development of an implementation plan for *Australia's Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010-2030* <http://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/strategy/index.html> together with related national biodiversity policies:
 - *Australia's Strategy for the National Reserve System 2009-2030* <http://www.environment.gov.au/parks/publications/nrs/nrsstrat.html> and;
 - *Australia's Native Vegetation Framework (2012)* <http://www.environment.gov.au/land/vegetation/nvf/index.html>

In this context, the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities (the department) is considering the contribution of Commonwealth investments including Caring for our Country, the Biodiversity Fund and the recently finalised National Wildlife Corridors Plan towards the implementation of Australia's biodiversity policies.

- b. While COAG is still to consider the 2013-2014 work plan for SCEW, the milestone for the implementation plan is expected to carry over into 2013-2014.
- c. Specific indicators have not yet been finalised. The development of indicators will be considered in developing the implementation plan.

To support this, the department is undertaking an analysis of the three strategies, in order to assess:

- How Australian Government policies and programs are progressing towards the targets and how best to measure and report on progress.
 - Availability of baseline data, indicators and monitoring methodologies to track progress against each target.
- d. The Australian Government undertakes a wide range of activities that directly contribute to the objectives of the national conservation strategies. Administration of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) to protect and manage nationally and internationally important species, landscapes and ecosystems is an integral component of the Government's effort to maintain and improve Australia's natural resources.

The Australian Government's ongoing investment in a range of natural resource management programs aims at improving the extent, connectivity and condition of Australia's native vegetation, consistent with the Government's national strategies and also seeks to maintain and improve health and resilience of environmental assets and support provision of essential ecosystem services. Ongoing protection and management of Commonwealth reserves (both terrestrial and marine) and supporting Indigenous communities to manage Indigenous Protected Areas as part of Australia's National Reserve Systems also underpin conservation objectives. In addition, in November 2012 the Australian Government National Wildlife Corridors Plan was published laying the foundation for a new, collaborative, whole-of-landscape approach to conserving Australia's native plants, animals and other organisms through the development of an enduring network of wildlife corridors

The department also commissioned the Australian Bureau of Statistics to research the number of Australians who participate in biodiversity conservation activities. The resulting report, *Community Engagement with Nature Conservation, Australia, 2011-12*, is available here <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4602.0.00.002?OpenDocument>

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Program: Division: 1.3: BCD **Question No:** 044
Topic: National Reserve System
Proof Hansard Page and Date Written
or Written Question:

Senator Waters asked:

The NRS website states “all Australian governments have agreed to minimum standards that protected areas must meet to be included in and managed the National Reserve System.”

- a. Where is this agreement?
- b. When was it signed off?
- c. What is its current status?
- d. Please provide a copy.

Answer:

- a. Australia’s Strategy for the National Reserve System 2009-2030 is available publicly online at <http://www.environment.gov.au/parks/publications/nrs/pubs/nrsstrat.pdf>.
- b. Endorsed by the Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council in May 2009. The Natural Resource Management Ministerial Council consisted of the Australian Commonwealth, state, territory and New Zealand government ministers responsible for primary industries, natural resources, environment and water policy.
- c. Australia’s Strategy for the National Reserve System 2009-2030 is Australian government policy.
- d. See answer to a.

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Program: Division: 1.3: BCD **Question No:** 045
Topic: National Reserve System
Proof Hansard Page and Date Written
or Written Question:

Senator Waters asked:

The website also states that NRS land must be designated a 'protected area' to be conserved forever (legally), and must be managed to protect and maintain biological diversity according to one of six international classes developed by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) – none of which identify large scale mining as being appropriate. Why is the Department assessing a proposal to completely destroy an NRS property (Bimblebox) given this clear commitment?

Answer:

The states and territories are primarily responsible for the legal mechanisms that protect private land in Australia, such as statutory conservation covenants. Bimblebox is listed as a Nature Refuge under section 45 of the Queensland Government's *Nature Conservation Act 1992*. Land protected as a Nature Refuge under this legislation is not exempt from mining.

As the Bimblebox property includes matters of national environmental significance (NES), the Waratah Coal proposal (which includes a portion of Bimblebox) is currently being assessed under the Commonwealth Government's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* in a joint assessment with the Queensland Government.

All potential impacts on matters of NES are being considered as part of the environmental assessment process.

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Program: Division: 1.3: BCD **Question No:** 046
Topic: National Reserve System
Proof Hansard Page and Date Written
or Written Question:

Senator Waters asked:

Does the Department agree that either or both of these statements could mislead the public about:

- a. the Australian and state and territory Government's legal framework for protecting the NRS? If not, please provide reasoning; and
- b. and the regulatory protections provided to the National Reserve System? If not, please provide reasoning.

Answer:

- a. No. All Australian governments have agreed to minimum standards that protected areas must meet in order to be included in the National Reserve System. These standards are set out in Australia's Strategy for the National Reserve System 2009-2030. Private land must be reserved in perpetuity.
- b. No. Commonwealth, state and territory lands included in the National Reserve System are protected under the legal frameworks applicable in the jurisdiction to which they belong. Each jurisdiction's mechanisms include provisions for the protection and maintenance of biological diversity.

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Program: Division:	1.3: BCD	Question No:	073
Topic:	ICOMOS report to the World Heritage Commission		
Proof Hansard Page and Date or Written Question:	57 (29/05/13)		

Senator Colbeck asked:

Senator COLBECK: Do you consider that clause 40 from the RFA has been given full consideration as part of the nomination?

Dr Dripps: I am sorry, but I do not have the RFA in front of me, Senator. Can we take that question on notice?

Answer:

During the Tasmanian Forest Agreement process, a number of socio-economic assessments were undertaken. These assessments examined the impacts of the protection of over 500,000 hectares of public native forest. Approximately 123,000 hectares of this land was included in the request to extend the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area boundary. The balance of the World Heritage nomination was comprised of land already in reserve and land included at the request of the owners. The Tasmanian Government agreed to the nomination.