

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

Answers to questions on notice

Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities portfolio

Supplementary Budget Estimates, October 2011

Program: Division or Agency: 3.1: AAD **Question No:** 68

Topic: Issue of permits for Australian waters

**Proof Hansard Page and Date
or Written Question:** 111 (17/10/11)

Senator Birmingham asked:

Senator BIRMINGHAM: Would there be a circumstance at all where Australia would consider not issuing a permit to an aforementioned vessel on the basis of concerns about maritime safety?

Ms Schweizer: The delegation for the issuing of those permits sits with the Antarctic Division, but they are required to follow the provisions under the act which have a set of criteria that are based primarily upon potential environmental impacts. If you would like more detail on that I would have to take it on notice or perhaps you could ask the Antarctic Division.

Senator BIRMINGHAM: Perhaps you could take it on notice. I am not sure whether we indicated we had questions on notice for the Antarctic Division this time but maybe we will sneak them through anyway.

Answer:

The permit relates only to the environmental impact assessment of the proposed activity. The Australian Maritime Safety Authority is the national agency responsible for maritime safety matters.

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Program: Division or Agency: 3.1: AAD

Question No: 69

Topic: Cetacean Data

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written
or Written Question:

Senator Siewert asked:

1. How much has been spent by Commonwealth Government on cetacean research in the last 5 years, broken down by year, by marine bioregion (if possible) and by species (if possible)?

Answer:

1. It is not possible to break down cetacean research in the last five years by bioregion or species. Below is a breakdown by year.

Whales:

2006/07	\$1,467,051
2007/08	\$1,745,185
2008/09	\$4,800,363
2009/10	\$8,394,422
2010/11	\$2,291,553

Dolphins:

2006/07	\$61,272
2007/08	\$79,505
2008/09	\$161,823
2009/10	\$368,182*
2010/11	\$591,707

* A grant of \$0.5m was made by the Commonwealth Government to the International Whaling Commission's Small Cetacean Research Fund in 2009-10. This funding was allocated to a series of research projects by the IWC at its meeting in 2011.

The substantial difference in the amount of money spent by the government on whale research in 2009-10 compared with 2010-11 is due to the different focus of research activities during these two years. In 2009-10, government researchers undertook a major program of fieldwork, including aerial surveys of minke whales in the Antarctic pack-ice, satellite tagging and other field based research of whales along the coast of Australia, and a six week joint whale research voyage to Antarctica, with New Zealand, as part of the Southern Ocean Research Partnership. Other major expenses for the year included extensive capital expenditure to support the fieldwork, and a major lab refurbishment. In 2010-11 the focus of activity shifted from fieldwork to laboratory work, data analysis and report writing. Consequently the required budget was significantly smaller.

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The activities and expenses described above have been delivered through the: International Whale and Marine Mammal Conservation Initiatives (IWMMCI) program, a six year program to 2013-14; the Australian Antarctic Science Program; and the Commonwealth Environment Research Fund. This IWMMCI program supports Australia's increased engagement in the International Whaling Commission (IWC) and Australia's efforts to bring an end to so-called 'scientific' whaling. The difference in focus of research activity for 2009-10 and 2010-11, and consequent difference in research expenditure, was forecast in the original business case for the program.

Looking ahead, 2011-12 is expected to see a moderate increase in research expenditure as research focus once again shifts to fieldwork. The AMMC will conduct a series of acoustic surveys of blue whales off southern Australia as they refine research techniques ahead of a planned major research voyage to Antarctica in the summer of 2012-13, which will involve a significant increase in research expenses. These activities will contribute directly to the Antarctic blue whale project, a flagship project of the Southern Ocean Research Partnership, involving a multi-nation, multi-vessel scientific survey of blue whales in the Southern Ocean, as announced by the Minister at the annual meeting of the IWC in Jersey in July this year.

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Program: Division or Agency: 3.1: AAD

Question No: 70

Topic: Krill harvesting

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written
or Written Question:

Senator Siewert asked:

1. Does Australia issue any licences to harvest krill?
2. Is there a sustainable harvest plan for krill?
3. How does Australia influence krill harvesting undertaken by other countries? Through which mechanisms or agreements?
4. Can you provide a short summary about the current krill population levels and the impact that harvesting has had upon those populations?
5. Can you provide a short summary of the measures used to establish changes to the krill population and Australia's work in monitoring those changes?
6. What are the major threats to the krill population?
7. What work is being undertaken to ensure a stable krill population? Please specific programs undertaken by the Australian Government and programs undertaken internationally to which Australia contributes.

Answer:

1. While no Australian companies currently fish for krill, Australia has legislative provisions to regulate Australian harvesting of krill for scientific research and other purposes, including commercial harvesting. To date, only non-commercial harvesting of krill has been authorised, typically by researchers to harvest small, non-commercial amounts of krill.

2. Management of Antarctic krill fisheries is regulated by the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) and its 25 Members.

CCAMLR has agreed to a range of conservation measures to manage Antarctic krill fishing to ensure it remains sustainable, with specific provision for the needs of other species. These measures are legally binding on all Members and include precautionary total catch limits – with additional catch limits for smaller areas to ensure a spatial spread of catches – and detailed catch, effort and by-catch reporting.

3. CCAMLR is the main forum through which Australia works to influence krill harvesting by other nations. As a result of its extensive scientific and policy work, Australia been influential in getting CCAMLR to agree to, and regularly refine, the now considerable range of conservation measures which manage krill harvesting.

4. Fishing for krill is currently only undertaken in the South Atlantic sector of the Southern Ocean. The estimate of biomass of krill in the Atlantic Sector is 60.3 million tonnes. The total allowable catch for krill in this area is 5.61 million tonnes. As a precautionary measure and because there are many uncertainties in estimating krill and ecosystem dynamics, CCAMLR has put in place a trigger limit of 620,000 tonnes for this area, which if reached would require further controls on the fishery. The total catch in 2009/10 was 211 974 tonnes.

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5. Australia plays a leading role within CCAMLR in researching changes in the krill population, regularly conducting research on krill distribution and abundance using a variety of research techniques. Large-scale, ship-based acoustic surveys of Antarctic krill biomass have been conducted by Australia and other nations. The biomass estimates of these surveys have been scientifically reviewed by CCAMLR's Scientific Committee, which has used these research data to provide advice to CCAMLR about a range of management aspects, including maximum sustainable catch limits.

The most recent major krill survey conducted by Australia was the marine science voyage in 2010 which established an accurate estimate of krill distribution and abundance in the South West Indian Ocean. This estimate was subsequently used by CCAMLR to, inter alia, set the precautionary catch limit for that region.

The AAD is also a leading researcher on the biology of krill, focussing on krill growth rates, ageing, reproduction and other aspects; this work has been conducted at sea on board research vessels and at the AAD's unique krill research aquarium. The findings of this research have significantly improved scientific population models used to estimate krill growth, spawning and mortality, all critical elements when considering suitable precautionary catch limits.

6. Several issues have the potential to significantly affect krill abundance over the longer term, including the impacts of climate change – and resultant changes to sea ice extent and ocean acidification – and harvesting activities.

7. Successive Australian Governments have regarded CCAMLR as the key mechanism to ensure the conservation of all Antarctic marine living resources, including krill.