

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 2012

Program: Division or Agency: NWC **Question No:** 320

Topic: Atlas of Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

1. How much funding did the NWC provide towards the Atlas of Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems?
2. How much ongoing funding is the NWC providing towards the Atlas of Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems if any?

Answer:

1. Total funding provided by the National Water Commission (the Commission) from the Raising National Water Standards program towards development of the Atlas of Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems was \$6,001,169.65 (GST inclusive).
2. The Commission is not providing any on-going funding towards the Atlas of Groundwater Dependent Ecosystems. The Bureau of Meteorology, the host agency for the Atlas, is providing for its ongoing support.

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
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Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities portfolio
Supplementary Budget Estimates, October 2012

Program: Division or Agency: NWC **Question No:** 321

Topic: NWC – cost of leased premises

Proof Hansard Page and Date 43

or Written Question: (16/10/12)

Senator Joyce asked:

Senator JOYCE: How many floors do you have?

Mr Cameron: Three.

Senator JOYCE: Are they fully occupied?

Mr Cameron: No. Because the commission has reduced its staffing levels, it is consolidated on two of those floors.

Senator JOYCE: Have we tried to sublease the other floor out?

Mr Cameron: There have been some informal discussions with our landlord, but at this stage nothing has eventuated.

Senator JOYCE: What is it costing us?

Mr Cameron: I would have to take the specific costs on notice.

Answer:

The cost of the lease of the [vacant] third floor is \$133,877.42 per annum (GST exclusive).

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Supplementary Budget Estimates, October 2012

Program: Division or Agency: NWC **Question No:** 322

Topic: NWC – Water Act 2007

Proof Hansard Page and Date 43

or Written Question: (16/10/12)

Senator Joyce asked:

Senator JOYCE: That March date—that is for the amended act, not for the original act. The original act passed would have to have an audit by September.

Mr Cameron: I would have to take on notice your suggestion that September is the correct commencement date. My advice is that—

Senator JOYCE: That was when the original act was passed. There was an amendment passed in March. But September 2007 is when the act was passed.

Mr Cameron: As I said, my advice is that it is 3 March. I am happy to take on notice the provision of further information about the basis on which we believe that to be so.

Answer:

Section 88(1) of the *Water Act 2007* requires the National Water Commission (the Commission) to complete the first audit under Part 3 within five years after commencement of the *Water Act 2007*.

Section 2 of the *Water Act 2007* sets out the commencement provisions for the *Water Act 2007*, and identifies two dates:

- the short title and commencement provisions of the *Water Act 2007* (sections 1 and 2) commenced on 3 September 2007; and
- the remaining, substantive provisions of the Act commenced on 3 March 2008.

In developing the audit program, the Commission sought advice on which date should be used as the basis for calculating the five-year timeframe for delivery of the first audit.

That advice indicated that for the purposes of section 88(1), the five-year period for the first audit should be taken to commence from the time at which the substantive provisions of the *Water Act 2007* came into operation (3 March 2008).

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Program: Division or Agency: NWC **Question No:** 323

Topic: NWC – annual report 2011-12
knowledge and adaptive
management

Proof Hansard Page and Date 46

or Written Question: (16/10/12)

Senator Cameron asked:

CHAIR: On page 10, under 'Knowledge and adaptive management', you say:

The Commission has long held that water planning decisions should be based, and be seen to be based, on the best available scientific evidence and socioeconomic information.

We have run out of time, so could you take on notice to give us a brief on how you achieve your best available scientific evidence and can you also give us a brief on how you achieve your socioeconomic information?

Mr Cameron: Happy to take that on notice.

Answer:

Water planning in Australia is the responsibility of State and Territory governments and, in the case of the Murray-Darling Basin, the Murray-Darling Basin Authority.

Australia's water reform agenda, codified in the 2004 Intergovernmental Agreement on a National Water Initiative (NWI), recognises that delivering results with competing pressures on water systems involves judgements that should be informed by best-available science, socio-economic analysis and community input. The NWI identifies a range of significant knowledge needs for the ongoing implementation of the reform agenda.

The National Water Commission (the Commission) supports the use of best available evidence, including scientific evidence, when making water management decisions. The process of water planning requires planning agencies to be transparent about the evidentiary base of proposed plans. A well-constructed consultation process during the development of water plans enables that evidence base to be the subject of constructive debate and for stakeholders to contribute new or alternative information.

The Commission has found that there has been considerable effort made by NWI parties to improve their environmental knowledge and that this has translated into water plans that have clearer environmental objectives and associated management strategies. Further detail can be found in the 2011 National Water Planning Report Card on the Commission's website. Social and economic knowledge to inform water planning decisions is less developed, but there have been improvements made since 2004.

Sound water management will incorporate adaptive management principles. While achieving a perfect information base is an aspiration that may never be fulfilled, continued investment to understand the economic, social and environmental impacts of alternative water management decisions and to understand changes that affect water management, such as climate variability or developments in regional economies, are important to enable water management decisions to respond to changing circumstances. The Commission has therefore made the observation in a number of our assessment products that a coordinated, strategic approach to ongoing water knowledge investment effort is needed.