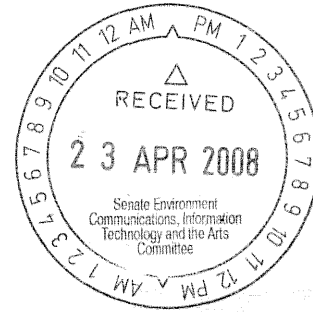




Australian Government

Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts

Senator A McEwen
Chair
Senate Standing Committee on Environment
Communications and the Arts
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Senator McEwen,

On 19 February 2008 Ms Donna Petrachenko, First Assistant Secretary, Marine and Biodiversity Division, appeared as a witness before the Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts.

At those hearings Senator Siewert asked the following questions which appear on ECA 62 and ECA 65 of the transcript.

1. With respect to biodiversity hotspots, is there a list that you were presented with of property purchases to consider? How did the process work? Did the advisory committee advise you on property purchases and then you investigated them? In response Ms Petrachenko said: "Through the delivery agents and the public tender process, we look and see what is available and look at what the contribution to biodiversity is, in discussion with the advisory panel."
2. What is the status of that list now? In response, Ms Petrachenko said: "We are working on finalising the list now, and we will have final decisions before the end of this fiscal year on the allocation of the remaining funds".
3. Is that list available publicly? In response Ms Petrachenko said: "No, not yet. It will be reviewed by the minister".
4. I would like to go back to the Biodiversity Hotspots program again; once or twice is never enough. Can you tell me how properties were identified? From our previous conversation I may have mistakenly taken the idea that it was the committee that did the process of identification. Is that correct? In response, Ms Petrachenko said "The Advisory Committee provides advice. The department would look at them as guidelines and criteria for the program set out. We got to the Advisory Committee for advice and then make recommendations to the minister."



Ms Petrachenko wishes to advise the Committee that the correct answers to Senator Siewert's questions are as follows:

1. The panel of delivery agents, who were appointed through a tender process, were required to identify eligible properties and submit proposals to the Department. Their submissions included biodiversity information about the properties. The Advisory Committee gave advice on the spread of proposed acquisition and stewardship investments. The Advisory Committee was not involved in sourcing individual properties for acquisition."
2. A list of properties was submitted to the former Minister for his decision in 2007.
3. No, the list of properties approved for purchase by the former government will not be released until contracts for sale have been signed between the delivery agents and the landholders.
4. Properties are identified by the panel of service providers. We go to the Advisory Committee for advice and then make our recommendations to the Minister. The Advisory Committee's advice is also provided to the Minister.

Yours sincerely



Mike Callaghan
Deputy Secretary
21 April 2008