

Senate Standing Committee on Environment, Communications and the Arts

Answers to questions on notice

Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts portfolio

Supplementary Budget Estimates, October 2008

Outcome:	Outcome 1 – Australia benefits from meteorological and related science and services	Question No:	84
Division/Agency:	Bureau of Meteorology		
Topic:	Sea surface temperature		
Hansard Page ECITA:	No. 138 (21 Oct)		

Senator Ian Macdonald asked:

Senator IAN MACDONALD— Sea surface temperatures as opposed to land surface temperatures? Can you, on notice, give me details of however you measured surface temperatures between 1999 and 2006 and then between 2006 and 30 August 2008?

Dr Smith—This is on the method of how we measure—

Senator IAN MACDONALD—No, not how you measure it but just what the temperature has been over that seven-year period and then what it has been in the last 18 months. Do you say it is 23 degrees on average this year and 24 in that year? Is that how you do it?

Dr Smith—We can take that on notice.

Answers:

The global average surface temperature for the 7-year period 2000-2006 inclusive was 14.4°C. The corresponding temperature for the 18 months May 2007 to October 2008 was 14.3°C. These are based on a global temperature dataset made available by the United Kingdom Climatic Research Unit in collaboration with the United Kingdom MetOffice.

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Outcome:	Outcome 1 – Australia benefits from meteorological and related science and services	Question No:	85
Division/Agency:	Bureau of Meteorology		
Topic:	BOM staffing reduction		
Hansard Page ECITA:	139 (21 Oct)		

Senator Ian Macdonald asked:

1. You have said the observers are reducing, from what to what? What are the current staff numbers at Cairns Airport? On notice, could you give me the number of staff at Cairns, what each of them do? As at 20 February, which you had already given me, there were 11. Tell me what those 11 do, please, and then tell me what is proposed for 2011.
2. Let me quickly say that this report goes on to mention Mackay and Longreach. Perhaps if I can simply ask you to indicate to me what the situation is now and what is proposed. Could you do that? That was in the *Courier-Mail*, but in the *Sydney Morning Herald* there is a quote—again, I assume, from the same source, the Community and Public Sector Union:
The changes will affect weather stations across the country, including Canberra, Launceston, Kalgoorlie, Port Hedland, Mount Isa— which I am particularly interested in— Cobar, Moree, Tennant Creek, Mildura, Halls Creek, Cairns, Longreach, Mackay and Coffs Harbour.

Because of the time constraints, on notice could you comment to me on what the situation is in all of those that I have mentioned in relation to current staffing and what is proposed into the future?

Answers:

1. Please see Table 1 below.
2. Please see Table 2 below.

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Table 1

Position at Cairns Meteorological Office	Role	Staff numbers as at November 2008	Proposed staff numbers at 2011
Observer	Take manual and electronic equipment surface, upper-air and visual observations and monitor local, and remote (electronically) meteorological phenomena, check instrumentation performance, provide factual information briefings from prepared forecast material, plot appropriate charts, assist with public enquiries.	5	1
Meteorologist	In conjunction with the Townsville and Brisbane Offices, provide aviation forecasts for Far North Queensland. In conjunction with the Brisbane Regional Office, provide liaison, interpretation and meteorological advice to Emergency Services and Disaster Mitigation Committees in Far North Queensland during periods of severe weather. Provide limited public and marine weather services for Far North Queensland.	4	7
Technical Officer	Undertake complex electronic and other equipment inspections, diagnostics, maintenance and repair tasks to maintain equipment performance and infrastructure, implement equipment modifications, assess and report on equipment and systems, install new minor equipment locally and assist with major installation activities.	3	3

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Table 2

Meteorological Office	Staff numbers as at November 2008	Proposed staff numbers 2011
Canberra	4 forecasters, 2 Observers	4
Launceston	1	1
Kalgoorlie	2	1
Port Hedland	2 (+ 1 Technical Officer (Eng))	1
Mount Isa	2	1
Cobar	2	1
Moree	2	1
Tennant Creek	3	1
Mildura	4	1
Halls Creek	2	1
Longreach	3	1
Mackay	3	1
Coffs Harbour	3	1
Cairns	See Table 1	

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Outcome:	Outcome 1 – Australia benefits from meteorological and related science and services	Question No:	86
Division/Agency:	Bureau of Meteorology		
Topic:	BOM CPSU Media release		
Hansard Page ECITA:	140 (21 Oct)		

Senator Ian Macdonald asked:

Senator IAN MACDONALD—For my benefit, if no-one else's, Dr Smith,

(a) it might help if you could provide me with a copy of the CPSU media release, which no doubt you have—I have not—and perhaps you could highlight what you consider to be the inaccuracies.

...

(b) could Dr Smith let me have the press release and then in a separate document say: 'They're wrong in the third line where they say 10 down to five. It is really 10 down to two,' or whatever. So could you do that?

Dr Smith—We can do that, certainly.

Answers:

(a) A copy of the CPSU media release is at Attachment A.

(b) A separate document outlining errors of fact in the media release is at Attachment B.

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ATTACHMENT A

BoM cuts threaten climate change action: CPSU media release

21 October 2008, 5:23am

Regional weather stations play a vital role in climate change

Bureau of Meteorology plans to slash jobs across regional weather stations could jeopardise future action needed to tackle climate change, Australia's largest public sector union warns.

The Community and Public Sector Union said moves by the Bureau to downsize 50 regional weather stations would undermine the collection of critical climate data.

Under the Bureau of Meteorology restructuring plan, 23 weather stations would be whittled down to a single trained meteorology observer, and three stations would lose their staff altogether as employees retired or relocated to metropolitan centres.

Regional weather station staff play a vital role informing climate change policy, contributing important data that give scientists and decision-makers the most accurate understanding of changes in Australia's climate.

CPSU National President, Louise Persse said staff are alarmed by the Bureau's plans. She said budget cuts over many years, including the recent "efficiency dividend" of two per cent cuts were to blame for the Bureau's job cuts push.

Ms Persse said a properly staffed and funded network of regional weather stations ensured the Federal Government was equipped with the best and most accurate climate data before making tough decisions in the fight against climate change.

"Climate Change is arguably the biggest challenge the Federal Government and decision-makers face. The decisions our leaders make need to be evidence based. Now is not the time to be cutting jobs and slashing funding in an area critical in meeting this massive challenge," Ms Persse said.

"What we need are the best people working with the best technology to ensure we achieve the best outcomes in the fight against climate change.

Ms Persse said regional weather stations were also important in delivering up-to-date and accurate weather reports to local communities, including early storm warnings, as well as educational programs for local school groups.

"Scaling back regional weather stations would deny many in local communities, especially farmers and school kids, some of the services they rely on," Ms Persse said.

The Bureau of Meteorology job cuts plan would impact regional weather stations in areas including Antarctica, Canberra, Launceston, Eucla, Kalgoorlie, Learmonth, Meekatharra, Port Headland, Woomera, Mount Isa, Cobar, Moree, Williamtown, Carnarvon, Tennant Creek, Mildura, Halls Creek, Cairns, Longreach, Mackay, Coffs Harbour, Ceduna and Mount Gambier.

The CPSU have written to the Environment Minister Peter Garrett, and sought an urgent meeting with to discuss ways to ensure the future of the nation's regional network of weather stations.

For comment:

Louise Persse CPSU National President, on 0408 346 917

For background

Matthew Harrison (CPSU) 0407 944 285

Tim Fitzsimmons (EMC) on 0423 375 522.

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ATTACHMENT B

Errors or misleading statements in CPSU media release of 21 October 2008

“...moves by the Bureau to downsize 50 regional weather stations...”

- Compared with staffing in March 2008, the proposed reconfiguration reduces staffing at 23 stations, increases it at six, and staffing remains the same at 21 stations.

“23 weather stations would be whittled down to a single trained meteorology observer, and three stations would lose their staff altogether”

- 21 stations are proposed to have one observer as the only Bureau staff and no station will lose its staff altogether.

“Regional weather station staff play a vital role informing climate change policy, contributing important data that give scientists and decision-makers the most accurate understanding of changes in Australia's climate. “

- Staff at Bureau offices in regional areas play no direct role in informing climate change policy, and many of the data that are used in recording and monitoring climate and climate change are collected by automated or remote sensing equipment, such as satellites, and this trend to new technology and automation is continuing.

“...budget cuts over many years, including the recent "efficiency dividend" of two per cent cuts were to blame for the Bureau's job cuts push.”

- The Bureau is not cutting jobs– the organisation needs all the highly-trained and specialised staff it has and is endeavouring to make the most of those skills in its revised arrangements; and
- As staff retire or choose to leave through normal circumstances, most will be replaced through recruitment and training of new staff.

“Climate Change is arguably the biggest challenge the Federal Government and decision-makers face. The decisions our leaders make need to be evidence based. Now is not the time to be cutting jobs and slashing funding in an area critical in meeting this massive challenge.”

- Maintaining the climate record remains an extremely high priority for the Bureau and the climate record will not be put at risk by the changes, including staff changes, proposed in the reconfiguration. Most climate data are now recorded by advanced technology, largely automating the process of data collection;

“...regional weather stations were also important in delivering up-to-date and accurate weather reports to local communities, including early storm warnings, as well as educational programs for local school groups.”

AND

"Scaling back regional weather stations would deny many in local communities, especially farmers and school kids, some of the services they rely on..."

- Preparation and delivery of Bureau data, forecasts and warnings are not affected by observer staff changes in the reconfiguration;
- Weather forecasts and warnings are prepared primarily by Bureau forecasters in capital city offices and access to Bureau data, and forecasts and warnings by all sectors of the community is increasingly through web-based services; and
- The reconfiguration plans include an increased emphasis on supporting the delivery of services. Specifically, week-day attendance will address the peak times for provision of information through radio interviews and for public and educational visits to the station.

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Outcome:	Outcome 1 – Australia benefits from meteorological and related science and service	Question No:	87
Division/Agency:	Bureau of Meteorology		
Topic:	Launceston Weather shop		
Hansard Page ECITA:	Written Question on Notice		

Senator Barnett asked:

1. What are the current staffing levels for the Launceston Weather Shop (LWS)?
2. What services are provided from the LWS?
3. Are there any current plans or proposals to alter the Services provided by the LWS or the staff levels?
4. If there are changes to the Services provided by the LWS and reductions to staff levels, what effect will these have on the quality of data and forecasting provided (where quantifiable)?
5. If there are changes, can the department provide assurance that the quality of data collected will not diminish?
6. Can the Bureau confirm that the forecaster currently employed at the Launceston Weather Shop will be retained in Launceston?

Answers:

1. The Launceston Weather Shop (LWS) is currently staffed by one person.
2. The LWS provides operational interpretation of the forecasts provided by the Regional Forecasting Centre in Hobart, for the Launceston and northern Tasmania area via electronic media (routine radio broadcasts); via telephone; and via face to face briefings (ie visitors to the LWS itself.). The LWS also provides Public Education services to Launceston and northern Tasmania, in general, in the form of talks, lectures, and hosting visits to the LWS.
3. No.
4. Not applicable.
5. Not applicable.
6. Yes. There are no plans to move the current occupant of the position from the Launceston office.

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Outcome:	Outcome 1 – Australia benefits from meteorological and related science and services	Question No:	88
Division/Agency:	Bureau of Meteorology		
Topic:	BOM – Annual Report		
Hansard Page ECITA:	Written Question on Notice		

Senator Birmingham asked:

If the Bureau annual report has not yet been tabled, when will it be tabled and was any consideration given to having the annual report ready in advance of Supplementary Estimates as a courtesy?

Answers:

The Bureau of Meteorology Annual Report 2007-08 was tabled out-of-session on 29 October 2008.

The report was tabled in accordance with Section 70 of the Public Service Act 1999 which specified that the report must be tabled before 31 October of that reporting year.

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Outcome:	Outcome 1 – Australia benefits from meteorological and related science and services	Question No:	89
Division/Agency:	Bureau of Meteorology		
Topic:	BOM - staff		
Hansard Page ECITA:	Written Question on Notice		

Senator Birmingham asked:

1. How many permanent staff recruited since the budget estimates?
2. What level are these staff?
3. How many temporary positions exist or have been created since budget estimates?
4. Since budget estimates, how many employees have been employed on contract and what is the average length of their employment period?
5. Have staffing numbers been reduced as a result of the efficiency dividend and/or other budget cuts?
6. If so, where and at what level?

Answers:

- 1-2. Permanent staff recruited since 10 May 2008 by staffing category and levels are listed below.

Administrative Services Officer Level 3	5
Administrative Services Officer Level 4	1
Administrative Services Officer Level 5	1
Administrative Services Officer Level 6	2
Information Technology Officer Class 1	2
Information Technology Officer Class 2	2
Professional Officer Class 1 (Eng.)	9
Professional Officer Class 2 (Eng.)	9
Senior Executive Service Band 2	1
Senior Information Technology Officer B	1
Senior Information Technology Officer C	1
Senior Officer Grade B	3
Senior Officer Grade C	1
Senior Professional Officer A (Eng.)	1
Senior Professional Officer B (Eng.)	4
Senior Professional Officer B (Met.)	7
Senior Professional Officer C (Eng.)	7
Senior Professional Officer C (Met)	2
Trainee Technical Officer (Radio)	2
Total	61

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3. There were 184 non-ongoing staff employed by the Bureau at 30 October 2008. 24 non-ongoing positions have been created since 10 May 2008.
4. There have been 52 non-ongoing commencements since 10 May 2008 with an average contract length of 6 months.
5. No.
6. Not applicable.

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Outcome:	Outcome 1 – Australia benefits from meteorological and related science and services	Question No:	90
Division/Agency:	Bureau of Meteorology		
Topic:	BOM – Razor Gang		
Hansard Page ECITA:	Written Question		

Senator Birmingham asked:

1. What discussions has the Bureau had with the Razor Gang Mk II?
2. Has the Razor Gang indicated any cuts/savings to be made by the Bureau?

Answers:

1. The Bureau has provided information to the Expenditure Review Taskforce as part of the Gershon review.
2. The Bureau will be expected to play its part in implementing targeted strategies and actions to improve the Commonwealth's use of information and communication technology, as indicated in a press release from the Minister for Finance and Deregulation on 24 November 2008 stating the government's intention to implement the recommendations of the Gershon review in full.

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Outcome:	Outcome 1 – Australia benefits from meteorological and related science and services	Question No:	91
Division/Agency:	Bureau of Meteorology		
Topic:	BOM – Special Accounts		
Hansard Page ECITA:	Written Question on Notice		

Senator Birmingham asked:

1. What special accounts does the Bureau currently hold? How much is in these accounts?
2. Does the Bureau use the interest from these funds to fund ongoing operations?
3. Has the Razor Gang Mark II given any indication about the future of these special accounts?

Answers:

1. The Bureau operates one special account, Services for Other Entities and Trust Monies. The Balance at 24 November 2008 was \$737,642.70.
2. The Bureau does not use the interest from this fund.
3. There has been no government indication about the future of this special account.

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Outcome:	Outcome 1 – Australia benefits from meteorological and related science and services	Question No:	92
Division/Agency:	Bureau of Meteorology		
Topic:	BOM – Underspend		
Hansard Page ECITA:	Written Question on Notice		

Senator Birmingham asked:

1. How many programs were underspent in 07-08 financial year?
2. What requests have been made to roll-over underspends to 2008-09?
3. Were these requests successful?

Answers:

1. Two programs.
2. None.
3. Not applicable.

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Outcome:	Outcome 1 – Australia benefits from meteorological and related science and services	Question No:	93
Division/Agency:	Bureau of Meteorology		
Topic:	Media Monitoring and Communications		
Hansard Page ECITA:	Written Question on Notice		

Senator Birmingham asked:

1. How much has been spent on media monitoring to date this year?
2. What communications programs has the Bureau undertaken, or are planning to undertake?
3. For each program, what is the total spend?
4. Please detail date, location, purpose and cost of each event.

Answers:

1. As at 26 November 2008, \$4992.14 has been spent on media monitoring.
2. The Bureau has not undertaken, and is not planning, any communications programs.
3. Not applicable.
4. Not applicable.

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Outcome:	Outcome 1 – Australia benefits from meteorological and related science and services	Question No:	94
Division/Agency:	Bureau of Meteorology		
Topic:	BOM – FOI		
Hansard Page ECITA:	Written Question		

Senator Birmingham asked:

1. Has the Bureau received any advice on how to respond to FOI requests?
2. How many FOI requests has the Bureau received?
3. How many have been granted or denied?
4. How many conclusive certificates have been issued in relation to FOI requests?

Answers:

Financial Year ended June 2008

1. No.
2. 4.
3. Access provided in 3 cases and part access provided in 1 case.
4. Nil.

Period 1 July 2008 to 30 October 2008

1. No.
2. 1.
3. Access provided.
4. Nil.

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Outcome:	Outcome 1 – Australia benefits from meteorological and related science and services	Question No:	95
Division/Agency:	Bureau of Meteorology		
Topic:	BOM – Reviews		
Hansard Page ECITA:	Written Question on Notice		

Senator Birmingham asked:

1. How many Reviews are currently being undertaken in the Bureau?
2. When will each of these reviews be concluded?
3. Which Reviews have been completed since Budget Estimates?
4. When will the Government be responding to the respective reviews that have been completed?

Answers:

1. Nil.
2. Not applicable.
3. Not applicable.
4. Not applicable.