

**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

<b>Outcome:</b>	1	<b>Question No:</b>	59
<b>Output:</b>	1.2		
<b>Division/Agency:</b>	Marine Division		
<b>Topic:</b>	Australian Weeds Research Centre – Permanent CEO		
<b>Hansard Page ECITA:</b>	111 (21 Oct)		

**Senator Ian MacDonald asked:**

Has a permanent CEO been appointed for the Australian Weeds Research Centre?

**Answer:**

Responsibility for funding and management of the Australian Weeds Research Centre falls within the portfolio of the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Minister Tony Burke has appointed an interim advisory Board to oversee the establishment of the Centre. The appointment of a CEO will be a matter for consideration once negotiations with partners have been finalised.

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<b>Outcome:</b>	1 and 3	<b>Question No:</b>	60
<b>Output:</b>	1.2 and 3.1		
<b>Division/Agency:</b>	AGLC, PAD, WG		
<b>Topic:</b>	Caring for our Country – Toorale Station		
<b>Hansard Page ECITA:</b>	Written Question on Notice		

### Senator Nash asked:

I refer you to the Australian Government website [www.nrm.gov.au](http://www.nrm.gov.au) which states ‘Australian Government Land and Coasts (AG Land and Coasts) is a unique cross-departmental team, comprising staff from the Australian Government departments of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, and Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. Staff from both departments work side by side to jointly manage delivery of Caring for our Country and develop and implement environment and resource management policies of joint interest.’

1. Is this a correct statement about the role of the Department in the delivery of the Caring for our Country programmes?
2. What advice did the department provide prior to the purchase of Toorale Station near Bourke by the Commonwealth and NSW Government’s?
3. What is the financial, social and economic impact of the purchase of Toorale Station on the Bourke Shire and surrounding districts?
4. Was funding providing from the Caring for our Country programme for the purchase of Toorale Station?
5. Isn’t it a fact that rural press has reported the Minister for the Environment as saying that \$3.5 million was providing from the Caring for our Country programme towards the purchase of Toorale Station? Is this \$3.5 million figure correct?
6. What role does the Department have in administering the Caring for Country programme?
7. Has the funding being paid yet for the purchase of Toorale Station?
8. Under what component of the Caring for our Country programme is/was funding being provided for the purchases of Toorale Station?
9. When was this program open for funding and what date did it close? (latest round, name of program)? Please provide a list of all the criteria and amounts of funding that can be sought under this program, including what organisations or individuals can apply and how much funding is available in the current round of funding and when other successful applicants will be named?
10. What is the process for funding to be provided under this programme?
11. Has any officer from the Department visited Toorale Station prior to the purchase or since the purchase to evaluate whether the property meets all of the guidelines outlined above? If not why not and when are you planning to that?

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12. Who provided the due diligence needed to sign off on the funding for this project?
13. Who made the application for funding under the Caring for Country programme for funds for the purchase of Toorale Station?
14. When was the application made?
15. Was the Department informed prior to the funding being approved?
16. Was the Prime Minister, his department, or the Minister for Climate Change and Water or her department involved in the application and approval of the funding for the purchase of Toorale Station under the Caring for our Country programme?
17. Did the department received any advice or instructions from the Prime Minister, his department, or the Minister for Climate Change and Water or her department? What was the nature of this advice?
18. What conditions have been attached to the funding under the Caring for our Country programme on the purchase and approval of funding prior to the funding being granted for the purchase of Toorale Station?
19. Was due process followed in the granting of funding under the Caring for our Country programme when funds were or are being provided for the purchase of Toorale Station?
20. Has the funding, being made available under Caring for our Country, been included on the website <http://www.nrm.gov.au/projects/nsw/west/index.html>? If not why not?
21. Does the Department believe the purchase of Toorale Station represented value for money?
22. Can the department please provide a breakdown of the value of the water purchased on Toorale Station and the value of the land given the purchase prices was \$23.75 million? If not why not? Especially in light of the fact you are a lead agency for Caring for Our Country which provided a significant amount of funding?
23. Is the purchase of Toorale Station a blue print for the Government purchase of other iconic prime agricultural land?

#### Answers:

1. Yes. The government has agreed that the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts would be the decision maker on all activities relating to the National Reserve System (NRS).
2. An assessment of the property was undertaken against the NRS criteria. This information was provided to the Minister when approval was sought to contribute towards the purchase of the property.
3. The NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change and Department of Water and Energy are nearing the completion of a report on the local impacts of the purchase of Toorale. While accepting there will be changes associated with the retirement of irrigation and grazing activities at Toorale it is understood that there have been significant benefits identified. These include: direct local expenditure from park management activities, new jobs in the National Parks and Wildlife Service, benefits to downstream floodplain graziers, tourism benefits, Commonwealth investment in

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the retirement of water infrastructure, and flow-on effects into the local and regional economy. This response was provided by the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change.

4. Yes.
5. Yes.
6. The Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) supports the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, in his joint decision making and management in the delivery of Caring for our Country with the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
7. No
8. The NRS component of the Caring for our Country initiative will provide part of the funding.
9. The last call for applications for NRS funding opened on 17 May 2008 and closed on 27 June 2008, however significant properties may be considered if they come onto the market outside this period.

The criteria against which applications are assessed for funding under the NRS are

- The ecological importance of the area including diversity of species and ecosystems, presence of centres of endemism or refugia, importance for migratory species and the presence of habitat for rare or threatened species.
- The ecological integrity of the area.
- Capacity to contribute to the comprehensiveness, representativeness and adequacy of the NRS including the capacity to increase the area that is protected in under-represented bio-regions.
- The extent to which the area and its proposed future management will meet the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) protected area definition, principles and objectives.
- Capacity to provide benefits in building resilience in native ecosystems against climate change.
- Value for money.
- Capacity to build partnerships with a range of stakeholders to enhance landscape scale biodiversity conservation.
- Achievement of multiple outcomes for Caring for our Country to enhance the condition, connectivity and resilience of habitats and landscapes.

There is no limit to the amount of funding that can be sought under the NRS component. Any individual or organisation can apply for funding. \$25.7 million is available in 2008-09. Successful applicants will be informed by the end of 2008.

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Public announcements will be made once the commercial-in-confidence period surrounding any purchase is past.

10. Proponents submit an application, which is then assessed by the department. The Minister is advised of the applications and the department's assessment and approval is sought to fund recommended projects. Funding is provided through a financial agreement.
11. In 2006 an officer of Parks Australia Division undertook a survey of biodiversity values on Toorale as part of a regional survey. The officer concluded that Toorale had high biodiversity values for the region. In October an officer from Water Efficiency Division visited Toorale with NSW Government officials, for a preliminary assessment of the water storage and diversion infrastructure on the property.
12. A number of officers in the Water and the Parks Australia Divisions in DEWHA contributed to the due diligence research and analysis. Valuations were conducted by NSW Lands Department and Arche Consulting (for the Water Division). The Australian Government Solicitor provided advice regarding contractual arrangements.
13. NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change
14. NSW made its first inquiries regarding Toorale in early August 2008 and completed its application in early September 2008.
15. Yes. The department recommended the approval to the Minister
16. No. The Minister for Climate Change and Water was aware of the application for funding under Caring for our Country however was not involved in the application or approval of this funding.
17. The department did not receive any advice or instructions from the Prime Minister or his department.

Officers from the DEWHA Water Group provided general information to the NRS team regarding the potential purchase of Toorale to ascertain if there was interest in considering its potential NRS values and if so in preparing advice to the Minister on recommending Caring for our Country funding to assist NSW with the purchase of the land.

18. Conditions were noted in a letter dated 10 September 2008 from the DEWHA Secretary Mr David Borthwick to the Director General of the NSW Department of Environment and Climate Change. The detail of these conditions is commercial-in-confidence.
19. Yes.

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20. Once the financial agreement is signed between the Commonwealth and NSW, further details about the Toorale project will be uploaded to various websites.
21. Yes. The investment was consistent with advice from an independent licensed valuer. The purchase price is within the district range and, given the proximity to Gundabooka National Park, its large size, biological diversity, natural heritage values and cultural heritage values, it represents good value for money.
22. A price of \$23.75 million was negotiated by the New South Wales Government for the land and water entitlements of Toorale as a whole. Within that overall price, the notional values of land and water (for the purposes of determining contributions from various sources of funding) were as follows:

Land	\$12.39 million
Water	\$11.36 million

23. The government will consider investing funds in the purchase of other appropriately located properties, where properties have high conservation value and state governments or other appropriate proponents are interested in purchasing them to add to the national reserve system.

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<b>Outcome:</b>	1	<b>Question No:</b>	61
<b>Output:</b>	1.2		
<b>Division/Agency:</b>	Australian Land and Coasts		
<b>Topic:</b>	National Parks – Reserves increase – Caring for our Country		
<b>Hansard Page ECITA:</b>	Written Question on Notice		

### Senator Nash asked:

I refer you to a Joint Media Release from the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, and the Minister for the Environment which states; Specific five-year outcomes have been identified across the six national priority areas for the program including:

- increase the size of the protected-area estate under the National Reserve System to 125 million hectares – a 25% increase;
- increase the area of native habitat and vegetation managed to reduce critical threats to biodiversity by at least one million hectares;
- reduce the impact of invasive species including rabbits and rodents on Macquarie Island, Tasmania and cane toads; and maintain viable Tasmanian Devil populations;
- assist at least 30% of Australian farmers to adopt sustainable land management practices; and
- contribute to at least 30 partnerships with Indigenous groups and at least five major regional partnerships.

1. What are the names of the individual programmes in place and how much funding has been allocated to each programme to achieve each of the six national priority areas under the Caring for our Country programme?
2. How will each of these individual programmes work? Will there be rounds of funding if so when or will these rounds be opened? Have any already been open? Which ones, when were they opened, when did/will they close? How much funding was available and what were the assessment criteria for each one?
3. What will be the socio-economic impact of taking an additional 25 million hectares out of agriculture land out of production?
4. What modelling has been done on the socio-economic impact of increasing the National Reserve System by 25 %? If none, when will it be done and why wasn't it done prior to announcing the policy objectives?
5. How will the policy objective of increasing the national reserve system by 25% be achieved?
6. What funding is available for each of those components?
7. Will state governments be eligible for funding?
8. Is it the Government's intention to continue to buy prime agriculture land and convert it into national parks?
9. What impact will this have on the nation's food security – has any modelling been done on this? If not, why not?

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### Answers:

1. In March this year the government announced that \$2.25 billion would be available to support the new Caring for our Country initiative over the next five years. This includes a guaranteed base-level allocation to the 56 regional NRM bodies of \$159 million in 2008-2009 and \$138 million annually in the next four years and a number of 2007 election commitments such as the \$200 million Reef Rescue and \$100 million Community Coastcare. Since Caring for our Country commenced on July 1, the government has announced a number of additional programs under the Caring for our Country initiative to achieve outcomes under the six national priority areas. Table 1 provides details on those programs and sub-elements that have been announced in 2008-09 under Caring for our Country.

**Table 1: Caring for our Country- Funding Allocations**

Title	Amount \$	Election commitment	Announcement date
<b>General C4oC 2008-13</b>	<b>\$2.25 b</b>		<b>14/03/2008</b>
<b>Regional investment (2008-09)</b>			
Tasmania	\$5.83m		31/07/2008
Queensland	\$25.7m		28/07/ 2008
Victoria	\$32.3m		12/09/2008
New South Wales	\$41m		12/09/2008
Western Australia	\$29.4m		19/09/2008
South Australia	\$18.9m		20/10/2008
<b>Other</b>			
National Reserve System (2008-13)	\$180m		31/03/2008
Reef Rescue	\$200m	Yes	13/05/2008
<i>Monitoring &amp; Evaluation, Research &amp; Development &amp; Land and Sea Indigenous (2008-09)</i>	<i>\$7.5 m*</i>		7/08/2008
<i>Regional &amp; Indigenous Partnerships (2008-09)</i>	<i>\$23 m*</i>		15/09/2008
Open Grants (2008-10)	\$28.5m		20/11/2008
Landcare/ Sustainable Farm Practices (2008-11)	\$28m		21/07/2008
Coasts (general) (2008-13)	\$100m	Yes	23/05/2008
Stewardship (2008-11)	\$37.5m		30/08/2008
Indigenous Protected Areas (2008-13)	\$21.65m	Yes	14/10/2008
Indigenous Rangers (2008-09)	\$2.662m	Yes	14/10/2008
Threatened Species Network (2008-09)	\$0.5m		5/09/2008
World Heritage (2008-09) including:	\$13m		13/10/2008
<i>Tasmania</i>	<i>\$3.4m</i>		
<i>Wet Tropics</i>	<i>\$2.7m</i>		
<i>Macquarie Island</i>	<i>\$1.77m</i>		
<i>Other World Heritage</i>	<i>\$1.9m</i>		

\* = component of the 2008-13 funding allocation



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2. Caring for our Country integrates a number of pre-existing measures – including Landcare, Natural Heritage Trust, Environmental Stewardship, Working on Country and the National Reserve System – into a consolidated initiative. During the transitional year of 2008-09 a number of elements had separate calls for funding (see table 2). From 2009-10, all public calls for funding will come through the Caring for our Country Business Plan. This will reduce stakeholder burden, and increase efficiency by managing all elements of Caring for our Country through a common application process and administrative arrangements.

**Table 2: Funding Rounds called for in 2008-09**

Program	Funding available	Dates of calls
Landcare Sustainable Practices	\$28m*	Applications for these grants opened on 17 November 2007 and closed on 25 February 2008.
Community Coastcare	\$20m	Applications opened on 20 May 2008 and closed on 25 July 2008.
Open Grants	\$25m	Applications opened on 21 June 2008 and closed on 1 August 2008.
Working on Country	\$6m*	Applications opened on 16 June 2008 and closed on 11 August 2008.
National Reserve System	\$25m	Applications were invited on 17 May 2008, and closed on 27 June 2008
Environmental Stewardship	\$5.3m	The first round opened in August 2008 and will close on 12 December 2008. A second round opened in October 2008 and will close in April 2009.
Reef Rescue	\$23m	Applications opened on 1 August 2008 and closed on 12 September 2008.

\* Multiple year funding

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*Caring for our Country - assessment criteria 2008-09*

### **Landcare Sustainable Practices Grants**

Project proposals were assessed against the following criteria:

- Encourages the uptake of sustainable production practices within the NRM region or across regions
- Practical and technical competency
- Demonstration of good value for investment and a clear public benefit
- Outcomes are clearly defined and can be delivered within the specified timeframe
- Consistency with priorities in regional NRM plans (applicants should consult with your regional NRM organisation)
- Compliance with any relevant legislation and other relevant intergovernmental arrangements
- Identification of key risks and proposed risk management strategy.

### **Community Coastcare**

All Community Coastcare applications were assessed against the following criteria:

- Anticipated environmental and sustainable land management outcomes in line with Caring for our Country national priorities
- Knowledge sharing and potential to raise community awareness and enhance skills
- Value for money of the proposed activities
- Demonstrated high public benefit, and
- Level of partnership with other organisations (e.g. community, regional natural resource management organisations, non-government, industry).

### **Open Grants**

Open Grants proposals were assessed against the extent to which they:

- deliver outcomes that are likely to significantly advance outcomes in the Caring for our Country national priority areas targeted for 2008-09
- demonstrate a strategic and integrated delivery approach
- demonstrate a high level of partnership and/or engagement with other organisations, and
- deliver value for money as evidenced by demonstrated public benefits and secured leveraged investments.

### **Environmental Stewardship**

Environmental Stewardship takes a market-based approach to investment which is targeted at improving the quality and extent of targeted high public value environmental assets. These assets are chosen from matters of National Environmental Significance under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*. Individual land managers opt to participate through an expression of interest process run within target areas by a Delivery Agent appointed through a tender process.

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Individual sites are assessed and scored for their environmental significance and the management actions that are agreed to be undertaken. Individual land managers submit a price for which they would be prepared to undertake the agreed management actions on the site. Each proposal is ranked in order of value-for-money.

An independent evaluation committee considers the ranking using a marginal cost curve, and other relevant information such as the unimproved capital value of the land and the available budget, in determining a list of successful bids which are then recommended to Ministers for approval.

### **The National Reserve System**

The criteria against which applications are assessed for funding under the NRS are

- The ecological importance of the area including diversity of species and ecosystems, presence of centres of endemism or refugia, importance for migratory species and the presence of habitat for rare or threatened species.
- The ecological integrity of the area.
- Capacity to contribute to the comprehensiveness, representativeness and adequacy of the National Reserve System including the capacity to increase the area that is protected in under-represented bio-regions.
- The extent to which the area and its proposed future management will meet the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) protected area definition, principles and objectives.
- Capacity to provide benefits in building resilience in native ecosystems against climate change.
- Value for money.
- Capacity to build partnerships with a range of stakeholders to enhance landscape scale biodiversity conservation.
- Achievement of multiple outcomes for Caring for our Country to enhance the condition, connectivity and resilience of habitats and landscapes.

3. The sale of land for addition to the NRS is voluntary, working with willing sellers and those who want to protect conservation values on their properties through voluntary covenants. Land incorporated into the NRS does not necessarily come from land under agricultural production. It is usually land that has not been extensively modified and that still retains strong ecological integrity. Some land will be protected by the application of covenants by landowners on part of their properties while continuing to earn a sustainable living from the rest.

A significant part of this increase in the NRS is expected to be in the establishment of new Indigenous Protected Areas on Indigenous owned land. A recent review of the impacts of the IPA program (IPA) found that in addition to important biodiversity and conservation outcomes, communities involved in the IPA Program report significant additional benefits including providing pathways to meaningful jobs looking after land and a framework for skills development and important social benefits in childhood development and school attendance.

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The establishment of new protected areas provides long term benefits in creating direct local jobs in land management and supporting businesses in rural areas by buying goods and contract services locally. In addition, protected areas boost tourism. Nature based tourism makes a huge contribution to the Australian economy – over \$25 billion last year, with an estimated 100 million visits to parks and reserves in 2007. Much of this is spent in the regions.

4. Refer to part 3 above. No modelling has been done on the socio-economic impact of the increase in the NRS. It is anticipated that significant conservation and socio economic benefits will result from the establishment of the NRS.
5. The objectives of the NRS will be achieved through the implementation of the Caring for our Country Business Plan which was released on 28 November 2008.
6. The Caring for our Country initiative has been allocated \$2.25 billion over five years. Of this, \$180 million is available for the National Reserve System component.
7. Yes.
8. Refer to part 3 above.
9. The government has not done any modelling on the impact on the nation's food security from buying agricultural land for national parks. To date, the impact on domestic food security has not warranted modelling as Australia exports approximately two thirds of the food it produces. (Answer provided by DAFF Agricultural Productivity Division)