

Senate Standing Committee on Economics
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Innovation, Industry, Science and Research Portfolio
Additional Estimates Hearing 2010-11
23 February 2011

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: COMMONWEALTH SCIENTIFIC AND INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH ORGANISATION

TOPIC: Eradication of the Asian honey bee incursion

REFERENCE: Question on Notice (Hansard, 23 February 2011, E10)

QUESTION No.: AI-3

Senator MILNE—I would actually prefer to hear it from CSIRO in this committee rather than just rely on news reports. You just told us a moment ago that you work in collaboration with state governments and with the federal government, and you advise and work closely with the department of the environment. How is it that, on a decision like this, you were not consulted or did not seek to advise, considering how serious this could be for Australia's biodiversity?

Dr Johnson—Just to be clear, this is a matter not for the department of environment I think it is a matter for the department of agriculture. As I said, to the best of my knowledge, we did provide advice in 2007 around the identification of this particular organism and any pathogens associated with it. We have provided advice that the bee would be expected to spread widely in Australia. This is based on our work that we have undertaken in the Pacific area, in both the Solomon Islands and in New Guinea. We have been very clear on the public record saying that the impact would also have a significant environmental consequence. We have also been on the public record to state that the current view that is out there that the bee would not spread south of Brisbane is not accurate, based on our understanding of the biology and ecology of this bee. We have provided that advice.

Senator MILNE—You have provided that advice to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry—

Dr Johnson—To the best of my knowledge, that is true, yes.

Senator MILNE—That it would spread, that it is serious for biodiversity. What is the technical advice about whether or not it is eradicable?

Dr Johnson—I am not in a position to comment as this is outside my area of expertise. I would have to take that on notice.

ANSWER

CSIRO does not have the data to be able to provide technical advice on whether or not the Asian honeybee can be eradicated. CSIRO was represented at a meeting of the Consultative Committee on Emerging Plant Pest: Asian Honeybees, in Canberra on 29 October 2010 at which technical advice was presented by the Queensland Government on the potential for eradication of the Asian honeybee in Cairns. The advice given at that meeting was that there was not enough technical data at that time to arrive at an evidence-based decision on whether the bee could be eradicated or not. CSIRO is not privy to any further technical advice provided to the Committee.