

Senate Standing Committee on Economics

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Treasury Portfolio

Additional Estimates

23 – 24 February 2011

Question No: AET 125

Topic: Staff Qualifications

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Senator Ludlam asked:

Senator LUDLAM—If you want to correct the record after we have done, that is fine. Have there ever been any periods when the commission was in breach of that section, that is, you had nobody with that expertise on your team?

Dr Kirby—Not to my knowledge in the time I have been with the commission.

Senator LUDLAM—For how long is that?

Dr Kirby—Since 2004.

Senator LUDLAM—That is a bit of history. How many senior staff have you currently got with qualifications in ESD, environmental conservation or environmental economics or any of those related fields?

Dr Kirby—I would have to take that on notice.

Answer:

The Commission has surveyed its permanent staff and Commissioners (excluding corporate services and administrative support staff, and those on leave) for “qualifications in ESD, environmental conservation or environmental economics or any of those related fields”.

Of the 144 operational staff available, over 13% indicated that they had formal tertiary qualifications which fitted the above description. The formal tertiary qualifications included graduate and post graduate degrees in science (eg zoology, forestry, agriculture, fisheries), environmental science, environmental studies, natural resource management, and environmental and resource economics. There were also a small number who, while not having formal qualifications in the area, had extensive relevant “practical experience” (eg Chair of Earthwatch Australia, Chair of Bush Heritage Australia).

In addition, numerous staff have undertaken various units fitting the above description as part of their tertiary qualifications. Subjects studied included environmental economics and policy, resource economics, ecological economics, environmental law, environmental sustainability and development, soil science and

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conservation, renewable resources, conservation, biology, ecology, and forest economics.

When account is taken of such study units, over 40 per cent of current staff and Commissioners have undertaken tertiary studies in the fields of interest to this question on notice.

There are also many staff and Commissioners who over the years have gained knowledge and experience in environmental issues through participation in relevant inquiries and research studies. Since the formation of the Productivity Commission in 1998 major projects relating to environmental issues include Murray Darling Basin water (2010), drought (2009), urban water reform (2008), waste management (2006), rural water use (2006), heritage (2006), energy efficiency (2005), native vegetation and biodiversity (2004), water rights (2003), Great Barrier Reef (2003), foot and mouth disease (2002), pastoral leases and non-pastoral land use (2002), private sector conservation of biodiversity (2001) and ecologically sustainable development (2000), as well as the current projects on carbon pricing and urban water.