

Senate Standing Committee on Economics
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Innovation, Industry, Science and Research Portfolio
Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearing 2010-11
20 October 2010

AGENCY/DEPARTMENT: COMMONWEALTH SCIENTIFIC AND INDUSTRIAL RESEARCH ORGANISATION

TOPIC: Outcomes as result of contributions by Mr Les Bett

REFERENCE: Question on Notice (Hansard 20 October 2010, E14)

QUESTION No.: SI-10

Senator BACK—With regard to outcome 1, Innovative solutions for national challenges opportunities to benefit industry, I want to ask some questions regarding the contribution of the late Mr Les Bett, who was a Riverina grazier. I believe he contributed some \$1 million in the mid-1980s to the CSIRO from his estate and in the early 1990s contributed another \$2 million in an attempt to come to some resolution of the overwhelming problem of flystrike in sheep. Could you give me some indication as to the outcomes and the work being undertaken as a result of those contributions and, no doubt, matching funds.

Dr Clark—The head of our Food, Health and Life Science Industries Group, Dr Alastair Robertson, is with us and he will have detailed knowledge of the flystrike area.

Dr Robertson—I can give you a very quick answer to your question: not to my knowledge. I cannot give you detail, but I can take that question on notice. I would be happy to respond to that. It would part of our overall biosecurity of work.

Senator BACK—Is that the extent of the information at the moment?

Dr Robertson—It is.

ANSWER

CSIRO has worked on developing a solution to sheep blowfly strike since the early 1980's. The funding from the late Mr Les Bett, \$1 million (GST exclusive) in the mid 1980's and a further \$2 million (GST exclusive) in 1991 has provided a significant and welcome contribution to this work.

In the early stages, CSIRO scientists attempted to develop a vaccine and whilst early results were promising, this research was ultimately unsuccessful. CSIRO partnered with the Centre for Animal Biotechnology at the University of Melbourne in the later stages of this work.

Following the termination of this project, Bett funds were used to support a new activity within the Australian Sheep Industry CRC of which CSIRO was a partner. This work included the investigation of an electronic sniffing device to detect fleece rot and fly strike. While the device was promising, existing technology was not sufficient to extend the concept from the laboratory to a practical application for use on sheep in the field.

More recently, new projects are using modern molecular biology techniques, including gene silencing, to attack the problem at the larval stage of the blowfly. The current stage of the project is for two years and is expected to cost around \$900,000.

The division (of livestock industries) is also doing related work, which is funded by Australian Wool Innovation, based on the selective breeding of merino sheep with the aim of reducing breech skin folds thereby reducing the susceptibility to fly strike.