**Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR)**

**Question 1**

Topic: ACIAR’s engagement in Burma

Hansard, pp. 91-92

**Senator Ludlam asked:**

ACIAR was asked to provide more information relating to ACIAR project work in Burma

**Answer**

**Background**

* ACIAR’s program in Burma is fully aligned with the Australian Government’s approach to development assistance in that country.
* ACIAR’s strategy is to develop a small number of multilateral collaborative research projects that can have impact on improving nutrition and food security, either directly or through increases in farmers’ cash incomes.
* Our program aligns with the Ministerial Statement on Burma dated 8 February 2010 by the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, Stephen Smith, that the Australian aid program should focus on humanitarian assistance targeting the most vulnerable and to provide agricultural expertise to alleviate rural poverty. Half of Burma’s almost 50 million people live in extreme poverty.

ACIAR’s program with Burma developed after exploratory visits in 2002 to determine the feasibility of collaborative research activities. The first projects commenced in 2003.

* Projects are based in areas where Australia has similar agroecological zones and associated agricultural research expertise.
* There is a strong need for training due to the isolation of many of Burma’s agricultural scientists from international cooperation over recent years.

There have been limited opportunities to pursue new activities through multilateral organisations, and currently there is one active ACIAR project in Burma, led by the Hyderabad, India based International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) on increasing food security and farmer livelihoods through enhanced legume cultivation in the central dry zone of Burma involves.

**Project details**

* The project commenced in January 2007 with partners: Myanmar’s Department of Agricultural Research (DAR) and Myanmar Agricultural Service (MAS), the University of New England (UNE), Australia, and ICRISAT. The project is due to be completed at the end of 2010.
* The expected outputs of the project are to improve production of groundnut, pigeonpea and chickpea in the Central Dry Zone (CDZ), through varietal improvement (50% of activities), supply of high-quality rhizobial inoculants (20% of activities) and capacity building (30% of activities). Now in its fourth and final year, a workshop will be held in Burma in November 2010 to evaluate the progress made so far and to discuss future research needs.
* Areas and production of the grain legumes have increased steadily during the past two decades, from 1.5 million ha in 1992 to 3.5 million ha by 2002. It was projected that by 2010, Burma would be cultivating >4 million ha legumes. The main reason for this significant growth is that the pulse sector was one of the few crop sectors that had been accorded a fully liberalized market regime, providing incentives for farmers to grow them.
* Increasing legume productivity represents one of the few strategies for alleviating poverty, particularly in the climatically disadvantaged CDZ. Legumes not only offer a viable option for disadvantaged farmers to increase incomes and improve livelihoods, they also play an important role in the nutrition of the people of Burma. Typically, 2–3 legumes are eaten in various ways with each meal. Legumes are a rich source of protein (range of 20–40%), and complement the amino acid deficiencies of the cereals (e.g. lysine).

Relevant pages from the ACIAR Annual Operational Plan 2010-11 are *attached*.