

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

Supplementary Budget Estimates 17-20 October 2011

Question: 10

Topic: Northern Australia Ministerial Forum Communiqué

Asked By: Senator MACDONALD

Type of Question: Hansard F&PA 112

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 2 December 2011

Number of pages: 2

Senator IAN MACDONALD: Were some minutes kept or was there a communiqué at the end of it that could be made available to the committee?

Ms Fleming: Yes, there is.

Senator IAN MACDONALD: There was a communiqué, a statement or minutes?

Mr O'Brien: It was a media statement.

Senator IAN MACDONALD: Could we have a look at that, please?

Answer:

A copy of the media statement released regarding the Northern Australia Ministerial Forum meeting held on 28 July 2011 in Port Hedland is attached, and can also be found on the Department's website at: www.regional.gov.au/regional/ona/namf.aspx.

Port Hedland, 28 July 2011

WORKING TOGETHER TO DELIVER A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC FUTURE FOR AUSTRALIA'S NORTH

Building and sustaining a strong economic base for Northern Australia was the focus of today's meeting of the Northern Australia Ministerial Forum in Port Hedland.

Through this Forum, the Commonwealth, Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory governments work cooperatively to ensure a sustainable future for Australians living across the North.

It has a particular focus on addressing the infrastructure and policy settings that will allow industries, including the beef and mining industries, to grow and prosper. It is chaired by federal Regional Development Minister Simon Crean.

Outcomes from the forum meeting today include:

- Agreement to the importance of a coordinated approach to the northern beef industry
- The formation of an Indigenous Experts Forum, and the naming of its chair and deputy chair.
- The formation of an Expert Advisory Panel.
- Agreement to fund additional work examining resource industry development, skills and community and social infrastructure needs.

Following presentations from David Crombie and ABARES, Ministers acknowledged that the northern beef industry and communities face significant immediate and long term challenges.

Ministers also noted the positive opportunities for the beef industry over the longer term. In this context, Ministers announced the Ministerial Forum had agreed to undertake a comprehensive logistical analysis of the northern beef industry.

Ministers agreed longer term flexibility of land use, availability of water, infrastructure and research focusing on east-west connections were critical elements in underpinning the sustainability of northern agriculture, including the beef industry.

Ministers agreed that jurisdictions would continue to cooperate and leverage solutions to short-term challenges to strengthen the longer-term economic development of Northern Australia.

Minister Simon Crean also announced the Ministerial Forum had reinforced the importance they place in engaging Indigenous Australia closely in the development of the north with the establishment of an Indigenous Experts Forum on Sustainable Economic Development to report directly to Ministers.

Minister Crean said "I am pleased to announce that Mr Pat Dodson and Mr Peter Yu, both well respected and recognised Australian leaders, have agreed to lead the Indigenous Experts Forum."

The forum will advise the Northern Australia Ministerial Forum on key policy issues being considered by Ministers. The first meeting of the Forum will be held before the end of the year and will build on the meeting of Indigenous water experts held at the Mary River, NT 5-6 August 2009.

Minister Crean, with his state and territory colleagues, said they look forward to working with Mr Dodson and Mr Yu to examine strategic options and to map a sustainable way forward for all northern Australians.