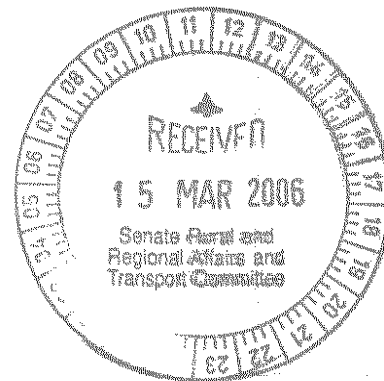




Australian Government
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry



Ms Roxanne Le Guen
Secretary
Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Le Guen

In the course of reviewing comments made by officers of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry during the Supplementary Budget Estimates hearings conducted by the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee on 14 February 2006, it has been determined that several of the answers provided were not accurate in relation to the specific questions asked.

I would like to note that these errors occurred through not having precise details to hand at the hearing and attempting to answer the Committee's questions, in good faith, from memory. We have since had the opportunity to check the answers provided at the hearings and the following pages present our corrections and/or further information for the consideration of the Committee.

In all cases, where incorrect or incomplete information was supplied at the hearings we sincerely apologise for any misunderstanding that may have arisen as a result. It would be appreciated if these corrections could be brought to the attention of the members of the Committee.

If you have any queries on this matter please contact Ms Nicola Hinder, General Manager, Parliamentary and Media on 6272 5590.

Yours sincerely

Don Banfield
Deputy Secretary

8 March 2006

Corrections for the consideration of the Committee as follows:

In answering Senator O'Brien's question (Hansard pages 11 and 74; 14 February 2006):

Senator O'Brien—Are the details of the assessment—the details of who is assessing the claim, what departmental area it is being assessed in and the time of the process—being communicated to the claimant? (Hansard page 11)

Senator O'Brien—With the process that is under way now, are you saying that it will be resolved by the end of February? (Hansard page 74)

Mr Grant answered:

Mr Grant—I understand that the original time frame for the assessment of the claim was that it was to be completed by 31 January 2006. Unfortunately, the claim is quite complex, and the minister has approved an extension of the assessment until 28 February 2006. (Hansard page 11)

Mr Grant—Yes, it will be resolved by the end of February. (Hansard page 74)

Mr Grant wishes to advise the committee that the above responses require further clarification. The minister approved that the investigation be assessed in two stages. The first stage to be completed by 28 February 2005 to determine if defective administration had occurred. The second stage, if applicable, to determine if the claimant suffered any actual detriment and determine the level, if appropriate, of any compensation to be offered to the claimant. Mr Grant apologises if this has in any way been misleading to the committee as this was not his intention.

In answering Senator O'Brien question (Hansard page 59; 14 February 2006):

Senator O'Brien — How much of the \$444 million allocated has now been spent?

Mr Mortimer answered:

Mr Mortimer - The total amount spent as at 3 February 2006 is \$225 million.

Senator O'Brien — Can you break that down into components for us, please?

Mr Mortimer answered:

Mr Mortimer - The sustainability grant is the largest element at \$146.1 million. Of the remainder, re-establishment grants are at \$36.7 million; income support is at \$17.9 million; restructuring grants are at \$13.5million; business planning support is at \$3.9 million; regional community projects are at \$1.1 million; business planning assistance to mills is at \$0.8 million; crisis counselling is at \$1.2 million; IOG and RAG support is at \$3.9 million; retraining grants are at \$0.024 million; and intergenerational transfer is at \$0.152 million.

Mr Mortimer wishes to advise the Committee that there were anomalies in the statistics provided. Centrelink provided corrections to DAFF in relation to the information provided to the Department

and these are indicated below. Mr Mortimer apologises if this has in any way been misleading to the Committee as this was not his intention.

Mr Mortimer— The total amount spent as at 3 February 2006 is \$227 million.

Mr Mortimer -The sustainability grant is the largest element at \$146.1 million. Of the remainder, re-establishment grants are at \$36.7 million; income support is at \$17.9 million; restructuring grants are at \$13.5 million; business planning support is at \$3.9 million; regional community projects are at \$0.82 million; business planning assistance to mills is at \$0.8 million; crisis counselling is at \$3.1 million; IOG and RAG support is at \$3.9 million; retraining grants are at \$0.24 million; and intergenerational transfer is at \$0.162 million.

In answering Senator Webber's question (Hansard page 91; 14 February 2006):

Senator Webber — Which one?

Ms Schneider answered:

Ms Schneider — Minister Macfarlane

Ms Schneider wishes to advise the committee that the minute was addressed to the Prime Minister and copied to Deputy Prime Minister/Minister for Trade; Treasurer; Minister for Foreign Affairs; Minister for Finance and Administration; Minister for the Environment and Heritage; Minister for Transport and Regional Services; Minister for Education, Science and Training; Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources; Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry; Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation. Ms Schneider apologises if this has in any way been misleading to the committee as this was not her intention.

In answering Senator O'Brien's question (Hansard page 96; 14 February 2006):

Senator O'Brien—The communiqué that followed the 26 October Primary Industries Ministerial Council stated:

The Commonwealth will continue to develop bilateral agreements to deliver rural financial counselling services with participating states and territories?

Mr Thompson answered:

Mr Thompson—Minister McGauran wrote to his state counterparts following that meeting outlining proposals for rural financial counselling services, and no states have indicated that they are not participating. The letters went out at the beginning of January this year and replies are still coming in, but we do have replies from Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania. We have been in contact with officials in other states and expect replies from them shortly.

Mr Thompson wishes to advise the committee that his answer was incomplete. At the time of the hearings a reply from Victoria had also been received. Mr Thompson apologises if this has in any way been misleading to the committee as this was not his intention.
