

Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Budget Estimates Feb 2006

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question no: NRM 01

Division/Agency: NRM

Topic: Lower Balonne Scoping Study

Hansard page: 126

Senator Joyce asked:

For the record, I imagine your hydrology study was on the macroinvertebrates, including such things as the ecological effects on the river. There was no benchmarking against other what would be known as pristine systems, such as the Paroo Valley?

Answer:

The draft ecological study, which forms part of the Lower Balonne Scoping Study, identifies a number of data sets for which macroinvertebrates formed a component of their ecological indicators. These included: Sinclair Knight Merz 2000 and 2001, *Lower Balonne Environmental Condition Report*; NSW Department of Natural Resources, 2000 *Condamine-Balonne WAMP Current Condition and Trend Report*; EM, 2002, 2003, 2004, *Lower Balonne Ecological Condition Report*, and the Murray-Darling Basin Commission, 2004, *Sustainable Rivers Audit Pilot Project*.

As the Lower Balonne Scoping Study identifies only existing data and information, undertaking benchmarking against other river systems is outside the capacity of the study.

Question no: NRM 02

Division/Agency: NRM

Topic: Lower Balonne Scoping Study

Hansard page: 126

Senator Joyce asked:

The main point I am trying to express is that there is no comparative analysis. It is basically looking at the Lower Balonne in an 'as is' scenario rather than in a comparative analysis with another like system. Does your study take into account the economic usage of the water and a comparative analysis to other usages should there be a change in the licensing structure?

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Answer:

As the Lower Balonne Scoping Study identifies only existing data and information for that system, no comparative analysis with other river systems was undertaken.

The draft socio-economic study, which forms part of the Scoping Study, identifies knowledge gaps to enable comparison of water use for different purposes. The study recommends a series of research topics to address this, including a research topic which would inform trade-off discussions between extractors and in-stream uses (including the environment, cultural, tourism, recreation and floodplain uses).

Question no: NRM 03

Division/Agency: NRM

Topic: Invasive grasses

Hansard page: Written

Senator Milne asked:

Has the Commonwealth held discussions with the Northern Territory Government regarding alien invasive species of grasses like Buffalo and Elephant grass?

Is there any joint action planned to prevent their further planting and to begin containment and eradication processes?

Answer:

The Commonwealth has not held any discussions with the Northern Territory Government regarding alien invasive species of grasses like Buffalo and Elephant grass.

There is no joint action planned to prevent further planting of such grass species, nor to begin containment or eradication processes.

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Question no: NRM 04

Division/Agency: NRM

Topic: National evaluations

Hansard page: Written

Senator Siewart asked:

At Supplementary Estimates November 2005 the Committee was informed that both NAP and the Trust were being reviewed via 10 national evaluations.

1. Have these reviews all been completed?
2. If not, which ones are still outstanding and when will they be completed?
3. What was the cost of each review? What was the total cost of the review process?
4. Are the reports to be made publicly available?
5. If not, why not?

Answer:

1. No.
2. The following evaluations remain to be completed: salinity outcomes of regional investment (due March 2006); sustainable agriculture outcomes of regional investment (due March 2006), coastal, estuarine and marine outcomes of regional investment (due May 2006); and the national facilitators' network (due July 2006)

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3. The costs of the consultant for each evaluation were as follows (including GST):

Biodiversity outcomes of regional investment	\$164,592
Significant invasive species (weeds) outcomes of regional investment	\$90,286
Current governance arrangements to support regional investment	\$182,572 (plus \$17,820 in travel and accommodation)
Salinity outcomes of regional investment	\$138,038
Sustainable agriculture outcomes of regional investment	\$171,694
Coastal, estuarine and marine outcomes of regional investment	\$127,969
The impact of the national natural resource management facilitator network	Up to \$250,000 approved. Contract will be signed shortly.
The effectiveness of bilateral agreements between the Australian Government and state/territory governments for the regional component of the extension of the Natural Heritage Trust	\$156,640
The Australian Government Envirofund	\$78,400
The National Investment Stream of the Natural Heritage Trust	\$77,737

Expenditure to date (5 December 2005) on the evaluations is \$853,324.15. This includes the costs of steering committees associated with the evaluations and administration costs. Estimated total expenditure will be \$1.76 million, including administration).

4 & 5. Ministers are still to consider the public release of the evaluation reports.