

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2008

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: CP 01

Division/Agency: Corporate Policy Division

Topic: Policy Advice written by DLOs

Hansard Page: 18 (18/02/2008)

Senator Scullion asked:

Senator SCULLION—Have any DLOs assigned to the office written policy advice, papers or opinion pieces, formally or informally, for Labor members or senators prior to last year's federal election? I appreciate that you may not be able to provide all the answers to that broad-ranging question now, but if it is possible to take that on notice I would appreciate it.

Mr Pahl—In answer to that last one: so far as we are aware, the answer would be no.

Senator SCULLION—I accept that. However, if other issues come to your attention, I would appreciate it if you could bring that to our attention.

Mr Pahl—Certainly.

Answer:

No.

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Question: CP 02

Division/Agency: Corporate Policy Division

Topic: Ministerial staff

Hansard Page: 18 (18/02/2008)

Senator Scullion asked:

Senator SCULLION—I am pleased to hear that. Let us just hope it is the same with other departments. There were two DLOs with the minister's staff. Could you tell me how many other staff the minister has?

Dr O'Connell—We might have to bring the number back during the day, if that is okay. According to the government's guidance on numbers of staff, it is very clear what the limits are. We will bring back the minister's exact number.

Answer:

The minister has been allocated nine ministerial staff (this does not include Departmental Liaison Officers or electorate staff).

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Question: CP 03

Division/Agency: Corporate Policy Division

Topic: Answers from previous committee hearings

Hansard Page: 20-21 (18/02/2008)

Senator O'Brien asked:

Ms Hinder—In relation to some of the other questions that you were asking, interim answers had been provided for AQIS 01, 02 and 06, and those were from the February 2007 committee hearings. We also had fisheries and forestry 01 from the supplementary October 2006 hearings. Full responses to those questions were also provided to Minister Burke's office on 4 February for approval, and they are in the current batch, which is coming back to the committee this morning.

Senator O'BRIEN—Were they previously provided to the previous minister?

Ms Hinder—I am sorry—I would have to take that on notice, unfortunately.

Senator O'BRIEN—If you would. In relation to the answers to be provided today, do I understand from your response that they were available to be provided essentially in that form last September?

Ms Hinder—I would need to double-check as to whether or not those particular responses were updated in light of current events but, as I said in my previous response, responses to the questions were provided to the previous minister throughout August and, I believe, September of last year and approval was not given for them to be provided to the committee because we went into the caretaker period.

Answer:

Answers to AQIS 01, 02 and 06 from the 2007 Additional Estimates hearings were not provided to the previous minister prior to the commencement of the caretaker period.

The answer to F&F 01 from the 2006 Supplementary Estimates hearings was provided to the former Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation's office on 25 September 2007.

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Question: CP 04

Division/Agency: Corporate Policy Division

Topic: Legal action regarding taro industry claims

Hansard Page: 69 (18/02/2008)

Senator Milne asked:

Senator MILNE—..... My second question in relation to that is that during the election campaign the growers say that they were contacted by Norm Blackman, Senior Adviser to Mr McGauran, who told them that DAFF had agreed that illegal taro had come into Australia and that growers would be compensated. The next thing is that when the growers put that out to their membership they were threatened with legal action from the department. Can you go through with me what actually happened and whether that legal action has now been dropped and what action you are currently taking?

Dr O'Connell—On the issue of the suggestion that one of the advisers to Minister McGauran had made some commitments to taro growers and that then there were some issues around the potential for legal action, I would have to take that on notice in terms of what occurred there, because we do not have the information right here.

Senator MILNE—Surely you have the information about the department threatening legal action.

Dr O'Connell—With regard to the legal action I do not want to say anything in case I get it wrong—

Senator MILNE—Could you again take it on notice. Specifically, I want to know whether it is agreed that a phone call was made to the taro growers, what was promised to the taro growers in that phone call, whether there was legal action threatened and if that has now been dropped, and what is happening about this issue of compensation because of the taro coming into Australia. In particular, I want to know about the IRA and where it is up to.

Answer:

In October 2007, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (the department) became aware of an email sent by the Secretary of Taro Growers Australia. The email made a number of allegations about the department and specifically alleged that a staff member of the then Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry had made statements in relation to a number of issues, including possible compensation that could be sought by the taro industry. These statements were expressly denied by the member of staff involved.

The department's legal advisers wrote to Taro Growers Australia requesting that the record be corrected. The department did not threaten Taro Growers Australia with legal action. Taro Growers Australia were advised that the ministerial staff member involved was considering his personal legal position.

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A response to the question about Biosecurity Australia's recent risk analysis work on taro was provided during the hearing by Ms Van Meurs and Mr Cahill.

(RRAT Hansard 18 February 2008, pages 69-70)

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Question: CP 05

Division/Agency: Corporate Policy Division

Topic: Taro industry claims for compensation

Hansard Page: 70 (18/02/2008)

Senator Milne asked:

Senator MILNE—It does, but if you cannot answer then I will ask anybody on the panel. Is there a concession from AQIS that the growers were right and AQIS were wrong in terms of the import of the small taro in the first place and is there a process now for compensation?

Mr Hunter—My understanding is that all imports of taro met the import conditions that existed at the time. I am not aware of any compensation claims or activities that are underway.

Senator MILNE—I am gobsmacked by the fact that you are not aware because the growers have argued in the first place that the conditions that were set were not adequate. They have been proven to be right and they have suffered accordingly, and the whole issue of compensation is one that they have been discussing at length. I cannot understand why you do not know about it.

Mr Hunter—I will take the question on notice, but I am not aware of it. I am not aware of the requests for compensation.

Answer:

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry is not aware of any formal claim for compensation made by the taro industry in relation to illegal importation of taro.

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Question: CP 06

Division/Agency: Corporate Policy Division

Topic: Portfolio Appointments

Hansard Page: written question

Senator Minchin asked:

All appointments which have been made by the Government (through Executive Council, Cabinet and Ministers) to Statutory Authorities, Executive Agencies and Advisory Boards, with a brief outline of the respective appointee's credentials.

Answer:

Senator the Hon Chris Evans as Minister representing the Prime Minister in the Senate responded to this question in answering part (1) of Senate Question on Notice No. 117.

In addition, the following Ministerial appointments, other than those going through Cabinet, were made over the period November 2007 to February 2008:

- Presiding Member of the Australian Wine and Brandy Corporation Selection Committee.
- industry nominated members of the Australian Wine and Brandy Corporation Selection Committee.
- industry nominated members of the Sugar Research and Development Corporation Selection Committee.
- Chair and six members of the Wheat Industry Expert Group.

A brief outline of the appointee's credentials are included in the table below.

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Ministerial appointments completed November 2007 to February 2008, other than those going through Cabinet

Appointee	Name of body	Position	Credentials
Mr Robert Granger	Australian Wine and Brandy Corporation Selection Committee	Presiding Member	Mr Granger is the principal of a management consulting firm. He is a former General Manager of the Queensland Fruit & Vegetable Growers Ltd (1980-2001) and former Chairman of the Sugar Research and Development Corporation (2002-2007).
Mr Stephen Couche Mr Stephen Shelmerdine AM Mr Robert Hill Smith	Australian Wine and Brandy Corporation Selection Committee	Industry nominated members	Mr Couche – Managing Director, Orlando Wines Mr Shelmerdine – Managing Director, Shelmerdine Vineyards Pty Ltd Mr Smith – Managing Director, The Yalumba Wine Company and member of the WFA board.
Mr Alf Cristaudo Mr Ian McMaster AM Mr Ross Walker Ms Anne Story	Sugar Research and Development Corporation Selection Committee	Industry nominated members	Mr Cristaudo has a long history in the sugar industry as an active grower, industry and community representation. He is currently President, World Association of Beef and Cane Growers, Chairman, Australian Cane Growers' Council Ltd, Chairman, Qld Canegrowers Organisation Limited as well as numerous other positions on canegrower organisations. Mr McMaster is currently Chairman, Australian Sugar Industry Alliance, Director Australian Sugar Milling Council, Chairman, Emperor Gold Mines and Director, CRC for Sugar Innovation. Mr Walker has been involved in the sugar industry for many years holding positions on many R&D committees. He is currently member of the Central Region Sugar Industry Regional Advisory Group. Ms Story is currently self-employed as a consultant in horticulture and has had many years experience in on boards and councils in the horticulture industry.

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Appointee	Name of body	Position	Credentials
<p>Mr John Crosby (Chair) Ms Gail Dowie Mr Geoff Honey Mr Dan Mangelsdorf Mr Geoff Nalder Mr Graham Shields Mr David Thomas</p>	<p>Wheat Industry Expert Group</p>	<p>Chair and six members</p>	<p>Mr Crosby is a grain grower from Lucindale. He is currently Chairman of QEAC, President of the Agribusiness Association of Australia.</p> <p>Ms Dowie is a grain, pulse and oilseed grower from Central Qld. She has extensive experience in the grains industry and has held senior positions in logistics, storage and handling and marketing.</p> <p>Mr Honey is currently CEO of the National Agricultural Commodities Marketing Association. He has extensive experience in the grains industry.</p> <p>Mr Mangelsdorf is a farmer from West Wyalong in NSW and has significant knowledge and experience in the east coast grains industry. He is currently Chairman of the Grain Growers Association and Deputy Chairman of GrainCorp Ltd.</p> <p>Mr Nalder operates a dryland farm at Swan Hill in Victoria. He is currently President of the Victorian Farmers Federation Grains Group, having held various positions within the organisation. He is a long standing member of the industry with extensive knowledge in public policy and the wheat industry.</p> <p>Mr Shields is a grain grower from WA, with 40 years experience in grain production on his family farmer businesses. He is also a former principal of a grain trading company.</p> <p>Mr Thomas is currently Chairman of Barley Australia and previously held positions with major grain companies including AusBulk and AWB Ltd. He has worked in the grain industry for over 30 years.</p>

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Question: CP 07

Division/Agency: Corporate Policy Division

Topic: Portfolio Appointments

Hansard Page: written question

Senator Minchin asked:

A list of all vacancies which remain to be filled by Ministerial (including Cabinet and Executive Council) appointments.

Answer:

Vacancies to be filled by Ministerial appointment are set out in the table below, as at February 2008.

Corporation/body	Position(s)
Statutory Fishing Rights Allocation Review Panel Selection Committee	Industry and other nominated members
Grape and Wine R&D Corporation Selection Committee	Presiding Member
Quarantine and Exports Advisory Council	Chairman
Land and Water Australia Selection Committee	Presiding Member
Australian Landcare Council	5 Members
Horticulture Code Committee	1 Member

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Question: CP 08

Division/Agency: Corporate Policy Division

Topic: Grants approved by minister

Hansard Page: written question

Senator Minchin asked:

All grants which have been approved by Ministers from within their portfolio.

Answer:

The Equine Influenza Non Government, Not for Profit Equestrian Organisation Grants are designed to provide funding to organisations who have incurred additional costs by providing assistance and services over and above their normal activities during the outbreak of equine influenza in Australia. On 1 February 2008, the Hon. Tony Burke MP, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry approved the grants for the following organisations:

- Australian Professional Rodeo Association Inc. (\$62,200)
- Balaklava Racing Club Inc. (\$12,700)
- Equestrian Queensland (\$33,400)
- Horse Safety Australia (\$20,000)
- Racing New South Wales (\$200,000)
- Rockhampton Jockey Club (\$7,200)
- Toowoomba Turf Club (\$25,100)

* Details correct to 20 March 2008