

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2008

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: MS 01

Division/Agency: MS

Topic: Estimates increases

Hansard Page: 8-9 (18/02/2008)

Senator McGauran asked:

Senator McGAURAN—Do these increases in estimates come from the new government or were they already in train?

Mr Pahl—It would be a mix of both.

Senator NASH—Which are which?

Senator McGAURAN—Can you single out the new government's increases?

Mr Pahl—We cannot do that right now but we can certainly come back to you on that. If we can get it to you later today, we will.

Answer:

Three of the estimate increases in Table 1.2 are for the new government's election commitments with funding implications from 2007-08. These are:

- Australia's Forestry Industry – preparing for the future
- Regional Food Productivity and Innovation Program
- Quarantine Research and Preparedness Program

The increase in funding for ABARE - Enhanced Economic Modelling for Climate is due to a decision by the new government.

The remaining increases are due to decisions that were made by the previous government and were reviewed and endorsed by the new government.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: MS 02

Division/Agency: MS

Topic: Efficiency dividend

Hansard Page: 10 (18/02/2008)

Senator Nash asked:

Senator NASH—For the committee, can you extrapolate the efficiency dividend within the department?

Dr O’Connell—We could give the committee an account of what it does and does not apply to, if that helps you. We could take that on notice.

Senator NASH—That would be good. We hear the term ‘efficiency dividend’ a lot, but there is not a lot of detail surrounding what it actually is.

Answer:

The Efficiency Dividend is applied to total departmental appropriation funding. This funding is provided to the department to meet its day to day operational expenses such as employee salaries, general supplier expenses, building leasing costs, utility charges, depreciation (for asset replacement) and accruing employee entitlements.

The Efficiency Dividend is not applied to independent sources of departmental revenue such as interest income and receipts from other sources. It is also not applied to administered funds.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: MS 03

Division/Agency: MS

Topic: Staffing figures

Hansard Page: 17 (18/02/2008)

Senator Scullion asked:

Senator SCULLION—I would like to ask some questions as to generic baseline figures as to staff numbers. Would you be able to provide, and I would understand it, Dr O’Connell, if you could get these only at some other stage, the numbers as to staffing of your department, being the full-time, part-time, casual and contract staff within the department?

Mr Pahl—Yes, we could do that for you, Senator.

Answer:

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) currently employs 4061 full time staff, 902 part time staff and 113 casual staff. Of these 211 would be considered to be ‘contract’ or ‘non-ongoing’ along with the 113 casual employees. These numbers include staff on long term leave.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: MS 04

Division/Agency: MS

Topic: Consultants

Hansard Page: 17 (18/02/2008)

Senator Scullion asked:

Senator SCULLION—Thank you; I would appreciate that. Could you tell me the number of consultants that are currently employed by the department and what they are employed for. This might be a significant list. I accept that perhaps we could get that at some stage today if possible. If that is not so, perhaps you could indicate to me now how many consultants you have currently.

Dr O’Connell—I would need to take that on notice.

Senator SCULLION—Certainly. Whilst you are taking that on notice, Dr O’Connell, I would appreciate it if you could give me—perhaps even now you could do this—an idea of any future consultancies you will be taking on and an appreciation of jobs that are coming up at the moment for which you know you will have a need for some sorts of consultancies.

Dr O’Connell—That would be a little bit harder in the sense there is always a range of things that people are thinking about that then do not come to fruition. It is probably best to sit with the things where we have got a clear agreement that we will have a consultant rather than something speculative.

Senator SCULLION—I would expect, Dr O’Connell, given your long history of good leadership and stewardship and governance arrangements, that you would have a very good handle on anticipating extra costs and changes in that regard. I am not saying for a moment that you are avoiding the question, but I wonder if you would be able to have another think about that as to particular areas. If you are unable to at the moment—and it is a very wide-ranging question—I wonder if you would be able to take that on notice and try to get back to me on it. We would expect it to be speculative in some ways, but you can appreciate that it does have a bearing on future budget costs.

Dr O’Connell—We will certainly take that on notice.

Mr Pahl—Senator Scullion, I can help with that. If you look at the annual report, at page 283, you will see there is an appendix that sets out the list of consultancies up to and including 30 June last year. That will give you a good starting point at least in terms of consultants that the department had on its books up to and including the annual report date of 30 June.

Senator SCULLION—Thank you, Mr Pahl. That would be a benchline. I guess my real interest is in the changes since then—

Mr Pahl—Yes, I understand that.

Senator SCULLION—and the projected employment of consultants.

Mr Pahl—Can I clarify it so that we do not go and do work that has already been done. So you would be happy if we updated from there to where we are now?

Senator SCULLION—Yes, as to the current set of arrangements as to who is on the books now and what is projected would be something of interest.

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Answer:

The consultancies entered into by the Department for the period from 1 July 2007 to 18 February 2008 are shown on Attachment A. The total number for this period is 220 at a total expected cost of \$18,982,885.

Projected consultancies for the remainder of this financial year are shown on Attachment B.

[MS 04 attachments A & B]

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: MS 05

Division/Agency: MS

Topic: Rephasing of funds

Hansard Page: 22-23 (18/02/2008)

Senator Scullion asked:

Senator SCULLION—For the committee's edification, the issues I spoke of this morning were about the efficiency dividend. I am really referring to the budget cuts. I know some of the portfolios indicated quite clearly that there was a cut or change. Are any of these simply rephasings? Have they been put in somewhere else? You have to accept that there are fundamental elements of previous policies which would have been transferred over. I just wondered if there was any way, in your determinations on that matter, you would be able to identify what was a rephasing and what was actually a cut.

Mr Pahl—I am almost certain that there are no rephasings in those decreases in estimates in 1.2. I will have a good look over the course of the morning and, if there is any change to that and there is something that has been rephased, I will come back to the table and advise you of that.

Answer:

There are no rephasings in Table 1.2.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: MS 06

Division/Agency: MS

Topic: Movement of funds

Hansard Page: written

Senator Minchin asked:

Requests to the Department of Finance to move funds within each portfolio

Answer:

Refer to part (4) of the response to Senate Question on Notice number 129.

[MS 06 attachment]