

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2009

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: Corporate Services 01

Division/Agency: Corporate Services

Topic: Average Staffing Levels

Hansard Page: 5 (23/02/2009)

Senator Colbeck asked:

Senator COLBECK—What is the current staffing of the agency and what has it varied since we last discussed that in November?

Mr Schaeffer—In the portfolio additional estimates statements on page 28, our revised target on the current staffing levels was 4,481.

Senator COLBECK—That is a target; I want to know what they are now though.

Ms Hazell—The department currently employs 4,255 full-time staff, 914 part-time staff and 141 casual staff. That gives you a total of 5,310 based on a headcount of staff.

Senator COLBECK—So how do I convert that so I can compare apples with apples?

Ms Hazell—With great difficulty. We could take on notice an ASL calculation for you but the FTE figure, I am advised, is broadly on track to meet that ASL target at year end.

Senator COLBECK—But there is no way known that I can check that because I do not have a conversion factor.

Dr O'Connell—We can undertake to give you our conversion from the headcount to the ASL number that was in the additional estimates.

Answer:

Full-time Equivalent (FTE) at 31 January 2009 was 4,721. FTE is used as a measure of standard full time workloads and is calculated by dividing an employee's hours by the normal full time hours for the employee's classification and it is a 'point in time' value such as 31 January 2009. The FTE figure includes ongoing employees, including staff on temporary transfer from other government agencies being paid by the department, non-ongoing employees, casual employees, and employees on leave without pay where they will return within three months.

The Average Staffing Level (ASL) at 31 January 2009 was 4,465 compared with an estimated ASL for 2008-09 of 4481 as disclosed in the Portfolio Additional Estimates Statements 2008-09 (page 28). This is defined as the year to date average of FTE and is most commonly used for forecasting purposes. ASL allows for comparison between employment in particular period, usually financial years, rather than reflecting the actual number of staff being employed on a specific date.

Headcount: The headcount as at 31 January 2009 was 5,310. Headcount is all ongoing, non-ongoing and casual staff employed in the department at a 'point in time' such as 31 January 2009, where each employee is given the same numeric value of

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one (1), regardless of whether they are full time, part time or casual employees. For reporting purposes this figure includes all staff, including staff on leave without pay for any length of time.

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Question: Corporate Services 02

Division/Agency: Corporate Services

Topic: Length of time each current FOI request has been with the department

Hansard Page: 12 (23/02/2009)

Senator Colbeck asked:

Senator COLBECK—How many FOI requests does the government have in front of it at the moment?

Ms Hazell—There are 12 freedom of information requests currently being processed within the department.

Senator COLBECK—What is the ageing on each of those?

Ms Hazell—I am not sure I have the ageing with me. I would need to take that on notice.

Answer:

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry does not have access to information regarding the number of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests currently before the Government. For FOI requests handled by the department, as at 23 February 2009, there were 12 current FOI requests.

Of the 12 requests, one had been with the department for five days; one for 27 days one for 31 days; one for 32 days; one for 35 days; one for 46 days; one for 62 days, two for 95 days; one for 188 days; one for 300 days and one for 375 days.

In five cases, the department was required to consult with third parties. In three cases, the matters were subject to third party consultation and multiple internal reviews, initiated by the applicant and/or one or more affected third parties. One request is now awaiting a determination by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. All requests were being processed within statutory time limits or within a revised timeframe agreed with the applicants.

An agency has 30 calendar days to process a request and notify the applicant of its access decision, and 60 days in most cases where third parties need to be consulted. The clock starts from when the request is received, but may stop intermittently where clarification is sought on the scope of the request, pending payment of associated charges, or to allow for review/appeal processes, if instituted, to be concluded.

While all of the above requests have included time periods where the clock stopped, the request with the department for 300 days was subject to time extensions sought by both the applicant and an affected third party.

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The request for 375 days was subject to four separate requests for internal review by third parties, each objecting to a different part of the original access decision. As this request also involved an unusually large number of documents, the department sought a time extension from the internal review applicants to enable it to fully consider the material evidence to support their contention that the documents should not be released.

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Question: Corporate Services 03

Division/Agency: Corporate Services

Topic: Electricity and fuel costs

Hansard Page: 13 (23/02/2009)

Senator Williams asked:

Senator WILLIAMS—A department your size would have a large electricity account, I would imagine. Do you have any idea what the estimated cost of electricity was in the last financial year?

Mr Quinlivan—I think we have to take that one on notice.

Senator WILLIAMS—Have you estimated the cost of your electricity for next year?

Mr Quinlivan—I will take that one on notice.

Senator WILLIAMS—Likewise with your fuel. Could you give us on notice the fuel costs for your department last year and this current year and what your estimations are for next year?

Mr Quinlivan—We will do what we can to provide you with that information. I am not quite sure whether our accounting process breaks down expenses to that level of detail, but we will do what we can.

Answer:

Electricity costs

The department's electricity costs for 2007-2008 were \$1,706,724, the year to date (to 23 February 2009) electricity costs for 2008-2009 are \$616,874 and the estimated electricity costs for 2009-2010 are \$1,665,225.

Fuel costs

The department's fuel costs for 2007-2008 were \$1,456,783, the year to date (to 31 January 2009) fuel costs for 2008-2009 are \$840,047 and the estimated fuel costs for 2009-2010 are \$1,448,500.

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Question: Corporate Services 04

Division/Agency: Corporate Services

Topic: Consultancies

Hansard Page: 14 (23/02/2009)

Senator Williams asked:

Senator WILLIAMS—Do you know how many reviews, committee task forces and inquiries have been started or formed since 24 November 2008?

Mr Williamson—Not off the top of my head. We have undertaken to provide an answer on notice on current reviews. I can backdate that to 24 November, if you like. We did also provide a question on notice at the last estimates that I think was from 24 November to whenever the last estimates were.

Senator WILLIAMS—You would know the purpose of each review, I suppose?

Mr Quinlivan—We would, yes.

Senator WILLIAMS—I mean here with us now. Obviously, you would.

Senator HEFFERNAN—Excuse me, you would!

Mr Quinlivan—We would.

Senator WILLIAMS—Could you provide a breakdown of all consultancies—the companies that were awarded and the cost, purpose, length of each contract for the years 2007-08 and 2008-09 and when they were awarded?

Dr O'Connell—I think that we agreed to provide the consultancies on notice in response to Senator Colbeck.

Senator WILLIAMS—And you will give us how many consultancies are currently tendered, et cetera?

Dr O'Connell—Yes.

Answer:

No major reviews, committee, taskforces or inquiries have been started or formed since 24 November 2008. An update on major reviews, committees, taskforces and inquiries underway by the department as at 23 February 2009 has been provided in response to a question asked by Senator Colbeck (Corporate Policy Division 02 refers).

The department has entered into 139 consultancies for the period 1 July 2008 to 16 February 2009 at a total cost of \$12,254,561. A complete list of consultancies for the 2008-09 year to date is at **Attachment A**. This list does not provide the date that the contract was awarded as it would be an unreasonable diversion of departmental resources to ascertain the information. It does include the contract start and end dates.

The department entered into 239 consultancies for the period from 1 July 2007 to 30 June 2008 at a total cost of \$19,699,870. A complete list of consultancies for the

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2007-08 year is at **Attachment B**. This list does not provide details of the length of each contract or the date awarded as, for ease of administration, the list was drawn from the department's annual report which does not detail this information. It would be an unreasonable diversion of departmental resources to ascertain the information.

Two consultancies are currently out to open tender.

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Question: Corporate Services 05

Division/Agency: Corporate Services

Topic: SES positions

Hansard Page: Written

Senator Humphries asked:

How many SES positions were there in this department as at:

- 24 November 2007
- 26 February 2009

Answer:

24 November 2007: 86

26 February 2009: 92

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Question: Corporate Services 06

Division/Agency: Corporate Services

Topic: FTE breakdown

Hansard Page: Written

Senator Williams asked:

What is the current EFT for the department? (Provide a yearly breakdown for 2005/06, 2006/07, 2007/08 and 2008/09)?

Answer:

The full time equivalent (FTE) numbers for the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry are as follows:

2005-2006: 4,306

2006-2007: 4,432

2007-2008: 4,545

2008-2009: 4,721 (as at 31 January 2009)

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Question: Corporate Services 07

Division/Agency: Corporate Services

Topic: Consultancies

Hansard Page: Written

Senator Williams asked:

Written questions

1. Provide a breakdown of all consultancies (companies they were awarded too and cost of each consultancy, and purpose of each consultancy, and length each contract was awarded for) for the years 2007/08 and 2008/09 and when they were awarded?
2. How many consultancies are currently being tendered?
3. What was the total dollar amount awarded in consultancies in 2006/07, 2007/08 and 2008/09?
4. How many of the consultancies awarded in 2007/08. 2008/09 have there been disputes or work not delivered as specified?
5. What is the Department doing to rectify its reputation for being one of the worst Departments when it comes to timely and accurate reporting of consultants and contracts let?

Answer:

1. Refer to Question on Notice **Corporate Services 04**.
2. Refer to Question on Notice **Corporate Services 04**.
3. The department entered into 209 consultancies for the period from 1 July 2006 to 30 June 2007 at a total cost of \$13,529,473. Refer to Question on Notice **Corporate Services 04** for total dollar amount awarded in 2007-2008 and 2008-2009.
4. The department does not keep a record of how many disputes occurred in relation to consultancies awarded in 2007/2008 and 2008/2009.
5. The department continually reviews its approval and reporting procedures to ensure all reporting requirements are met.