

Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: SRM 01

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management

Topic: Native Vegetation Regional Pilot Projects

Hansard Page: 53 (23/02/2009)

Senator Milne asked:

Senator MILNE—Thank you, Chair. I will just reiterate. I just wanted to have a report on the Native Vegetation Regional Pilot Projects. I understand from your annual report last year that you expected the knowledge and experience from these pilot projects to lead to established guidelines and templates that inform future national programs et cetera. I want to know where the evaluation of those projects is up to, what has been discovered, and have we got the guidelines and templates underway? What is the story?

Mr Hunter—I am not sure that we have a knowledge of that here at the table just now. Could we get an annual report page reference and, hopefully, get back to you on that before the day is out, if that is something that falls within the area of Sustainable Resource Management?

Senator MILNE—Yes. It is page 39 and 40 under ‘Natural Resources Access and Management’ in the 2007-08 annual report, in which you say that by early this year it would all be finished and evaluated. I was interested to know whether these pilot projects are finished, what are the lessons from them and what is the evaluation—all those kinds of issues.

Mr Shaw—I can confirm the pilots have been completed and we are undertaking some reviews of those at the moment. I am sorry I did not understand your question at the beginning.

Senator MILNE—So what can you tell me about what you have learnt?

Mr Shaw—I am sorry, I do not have that information. I am happy to take it on notice and provide it to the committee, but I do not have it with me here today. I am sorry.

Answer:

The Bureau of Rural Sciences was engaged to undertake an “Evaluation of the Native Vegetation Regional Pilot Projects.” This was completed and provided to the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry in November 2008. Seven of the eight projects are complete. A one page synopsis for each of these projects can be found on the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) website; www.daff.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/856306/native-veg-nov08.pdf with links to the main report.

The native vegetation regional pilot projects initiative was developed to investigate and pilot improved approaches for the management of native vegetation on farms in close partnership with state governments, landholders and regional organisations. It investigated;

- More flexible and practical regulatory implementation approaches

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- Least cost regulatory compliance mechanisms
- Complementary non-regulatory approaches, including government, industry and regional initiatives.

The individual project reports include an outline, the lessons learnt and outcomes that can potentially be applied to other areas of the country with similar native vegetation management issues. Some key lessons learned that can be applied beyond the individual pilot project included

- there are a range of cost-effective management options for native vegetation that can be adopted by catchment management organisations, non-government organisations and governments
- dissemination and transfer of information and knowledge about tools and practices remain important in improving natural resources management
- sound planning and extension services are necessary to most effectively engage landholders in market-based incentives programs
- legal and institutional arrangements which differ between jurisdictions can inhibit the wider application of approaches.

Details of particular lessons learnt from each pilot are contained in the individual reports that are available on the Australian Government DAFF website at <http://www.daff.gov.au/natural-resources/vegetation/native>.

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Question: SRM 02

Division/Agency: Sustainable resource Management

Topic: Defeating the Weed Menace – total spend and replacement program details.

Hansard Page: 60 (23/02/2009)

Senator MACDONALD asked:

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Take this on notice in view of the time—can you confirm for me in writing what the total funding for Defeating the Weed Menace was and then point out to me what the replacement program is and what money is involved and over what period of time?

Mr Shaw—Yes.

Answer:

The previous Government committed \$44.4 million over 4 years from 2004–2005 to 2007–2008 through the Defeating the Weed Menace Program, which focused on Weeds of National Significance (WoNs). Total expenditure was \$42.8 million with a further \$300,000 committed to improved management of fireweed.

There is no specific weeds replacement program. However, invasives, including weeds, is a major priority under the Caring for our Country initiative and projects addressing issues relating to WoNs, valued at approximately \$4 million, were funded through an open call in 2008–2009. Reducing the impact of weeds is a key target in the Caring for Our Country business plan 2009–2010, which also focuses on WoNs. In addition, the government is establishing a new Australian Weeds Research Centre and has allocated \$15.3 million over 4 years to fund it. On 16 January 2009 the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, the Hon. Tony Burke, MP announced funding of \$2.5 million for 28 weeds research projects.

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Question: SRM 03

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management

Topic: National Building and Jobs Plan

Hansard Page: 60-61 (23/02/2009)

Senator MacDonald asked:

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Can I also ask you on notice if you have—and I appreciate you do not do this—any indication of the staff employed in NRM groups and whether your department is able to use the \$42 billion spending package to try and get some funds to create employment projects in parts of Australia which perhaps would not otherwise benefit from the \$42 billion. I am referring to remoter country areas that employ three or four people in these NRM groups, most of which, on my understanding, have now been dismissed. Could you tell me if there is somewhere you could go to in the structure of the \$42 billion package to try and get some money for employment related to NRM.

Answer:

Information supplied by the regional Natural Resource Management (NRM) organisations indicates that they employed a total of 1785 full time equivalent positions as at 20 October 2008. While the Australian Government's \$42 billion National Building and Jobs Plan does not have any specific allocations to directly fund jobs relating to NRM, elements of the package have the potential to generate NRM-related employment – for example, the \$10 million committed for bioremediation and revegetation around the Murray River's Lower Lakes in South Australia will involve local communities. Other government initiatives are also creating new jobs in the more remote country areas – for example, some 100 indigenous ranger positions have been created since November 2007.

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Question: SRM 04

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management

Topic: Reef rescue package

Hansard Page: 61 (23/02/2009)

Senator Ian MacDonald asked:

Thirdly—and this is not on notice—can anyone tell me what actual tangible work has been done in relation to the Reef Rescue package, and I do not mean making plans, having conferences or doing assessments. Has any work actually been done in the last 12 months as part of the Reef Rescue package?

Mr Shaw—In relation to Reef Rescue, \$30 million was allocated in 2008-09 budget for Reef Rescue. That focused on the reef water quality component.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I know the money has been allocated. People are telling me the money has been allocated but has not been spent or, if it has, there is no tangible evidence—

CHAIR—Sorry to interrupt. I urge you to put this on notice, because Senator Colbeck is waiting for a couple of questions as well.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—I am just finishing. What I really want to know is have they planted trees along this section of the coastline to stop run-off. What practical things can I see for the money that has been allocated?

Mr Shaw—I can tell you that for 2008-09 under the water quality grants \$24.125 million has been paid into the Queensland government's single holding account.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—That is the trouble—it goes to the Queensland government's holding account and that is where it stops. So I am asking you on notice—we have not got time now—to actually ask the Queensland government what they spent it on, although you will only get a dodgy answer now. I want to know where I can go and see, somewhere along the coast of Queensland, the money having been spent on something. Can you do that?

Mr Shaw—Certainly.

Answer:

The Australian Government administers Reef Rescue funds through the Queensland Government single holding account, the mechanism by which Australian and Queensland government funds are distributed for the delivery of natural resource management (NRM) programs. Reef Rescue funds are directed via the five reef NRM bodies and Cape York Sustainable Futures, to land managers in catchments where the reduction of nutrients, sediment and chemicals entering the Great Barrier Reef is considered to be a high priority. A comprehensive process involving key agricultural and reef scientists has been used to establish these priorities.

Relevant industry and regional bodies delivering Reef Rescue in 2008-2009 received their first payments for on-ground activities in November 2008. Within a majority of catchments, farmer water quality grant programs have already been oversubscribed.

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Effective partnership arrangements between agricultural industries and regional bodies are in part responsible for generating high levels of interest from farmers.

Below is an indication of the type and quantity of on-ground Reef Rescue projects that are being contracted and implemented on-ground as of 24 February 2009:

- Mackay Whitsunday region - 106 projects to improve soil, chemical and nutrient management involving 140 landholders and covering approximately 25,000 ha of sugarcane land have been contracted and are being implemented.
- Wet Tropics - 178 project applications have been received. 16 projects, plus cross-farm projects, are being contracted covering 14,500 ha of sugarcane land. These projects focus on improvement to nutrient and chemical management.
- Burdekin Dry Tropics - 60 similar projects have been approved and cover approx 25,000 ha of sugarcane land.
- Fitzroy region - 75 farmers are being contracted to minimise delivery of sediments, nutrients, & chemicals to streams/GBR through ground cover improvement, tail water retention and other nutrient efficiency measures.

Rains and floods in Reef catchments may have an impact on 2008-2009 delivery of Reef Rescue. To avoid significant delays in program delivery, proponents are focusing on delivering those projects (such as machinery modifications) that can be completed regardless of current weather conditions.

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Question: SRM 05

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management

Topic: Open Grants

Hansard Page: 61 (23/02/2009)

Senator Colbeck asked:

On the Landcare grant round that has recently been announced, can you give us information on the value of applications received versus the amount of money that was actually handed out? I am trying to get a sense of the demand out there versus what is available. I have had very similar experiences to that which Senator Macdonald has had—that is, concerns being expressed to me about the future of Landcare across Tasmania. They basically believe they do not have one. I would be interested to know what the application amount was versus the amount that was actually handed out.

Mr Shaw—Senator, are you referring to the open grants which Landcare was a component of?

Senator COLBECK—There was an announcement on 20 November 2008 of \$8.9 million in Landcare projects. It is that allocation. And I have all the ones that have been granted so I do not need those. I am just interested in what the application level was.

Mr Shaw—We received 1,300 applications under open grants. They were not all Landcare and I would need to take that on notice to get a breakdown of the number that related to Landcare out of that total.

Senator COLBECK—You are talking about the total funding available under Caring for our Country as well in those 1,300, aren't you? So there would be applications that would be hived off to different streams?

Mr Shaw—That is correct.

Senator COLBECK—So I do not have to go through the process again later, could you provide us with a comprehensive breakdown of the various streams, allocated funding and the amount that was actually applied for?

Mr Shaw—Okay.

Answer:

The Caring for our Country Open Grants received 1346 applications worth over \$300 million.

Approximately 10 per cent of applications (138 worth nearly \$32 million) were successful in receiving funding.

The successful projects consisted of 47 landcare projects, worth over \$10 million. A breakdown across organisation types (**Attachment A**) is provided below, including the number and value of projects funded from the landcare component of Caring for our Country. Applicants were not required to nominate which stream of funding they applied for.

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Attachment A Open Grants - Organisation Type Breakdown

Organisation Type	Applications Received	Value of Applications Received	TOTAL Successful Projects	Value of Successful Projects	No. of Successful Landcare Projects	Value of Successful Landcare Projects
Australian Government	44	\$10,974,799	2	\$399,457	0	\$0
State Government	276	\$61,565,010	17	\$3,682,783	1	\$89,425
Local Government	81	\$16,725,763	4	\$942,726	0	\$0
Regional NRM Body	171	\$44,920,851	22	\$6,036,332	2	\$545,128
Community Group	197	\$40,482,262	32	\$6,971,761	10	\$1,701,736
University	84	\$14,438,496	4	\$564,903	1	\$240,900
Industry Organisation	66	\$14,639,481	17	\$3,915,267	17	\$3,915,267
NGO	61	\$13,254,224	9	\$2,610,342	2	\$876,800
Individual	89	\$17,096,235	4	\$737,038	4	\$737,038
Registered Company	262	\$64,414,188	25	\$5,696,313	10	\$2,150,034
Schools and Other	12	\$2,820,996	1	\$199,750	0	\$0
Consortium	3	\$937,430	1	\$99,930	0	\$0
TOTAL	1346	\$302,269,734	138	\$31,856,601	47	\$10,256,328

All Open Grants projects were funded from landcare and Natural Heritage Trust budget appropriations.

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Question: SRM 06

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management

Topic: Torres Strait commercial line fishery re-allocation – Difference between budgeted figure of \$7.5M and cost provided to last estimates of \$7.83M.

Hansard Page: 61/62 (23/02/2009)

Senator Colbeck asked:

Senator COLBECK—Thank you. I want to go onto fishing. Going back to the previous estimates, I asked a question on the final cost of the buybacks in the Torres Strait commercial line fishery re-allocation. The information came back that the Commonwealth provided \$7.83 million. The original figure was \$7.5. I was just interested in the difference.

Mr Pittar—I am going to have to take that one on notice. The amount of \$7½ million was in fact the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's contribution to the buyback. The total amount of the buyback was \$10½ million, which included also a contribution from the Torres Strait Regional Authority. In terms of the precise difference between 7.3 and 7.5, that is something I am going to have to take on notice.

Senator COLBECK—So 7.83 is the amount that we ended up putting in, so more than 7.5 was initially budgeted. That is what I am after. So it was not 7.3; it is 7.83.

Mr Pittar—Yes, 7.83.

Senator COLBECK—But you still do not know the answer?

Mr Pittar—I do not have that detail with me.

Answer:

A figure of \$7.5 million for the Torres Strait finfish buyout was contained in a Labor Party election commitment on 20 November 2007. The buyback itself was initiated in November 2005 with approved Commonwealth funding of \$2 million. Subsequent negotiations with fishers and further funding approvals led to a total Commonwealth contribution of \$7.9 million being approved in September 2007. The total Commonwealth expenditure through the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry was \$7.83 million after offers were made to fishers in November 2007.

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Question: SRM 07

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management Division

Topic: Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee

Hansard Page: 62 (23/02/2009)

Senator Macdonald asked:

There is a meeting on Wednesday and Thursday. Could you give us the results of that as a question on notice after the event?

Mr Pittar—I would be happy to consult with the minister's office on what information it may wish to put forward in that context. The minister is yet to meet with the committee as a whole, and I will suggest to the minister's office that they consider that question.

Senator IAN MACDONALD—Give us a report, whatever you can report on that that.

Answer:

The Recreational Fishing Advisory Committee held its first meeting on 25-26 February 2009 and a report of this meeting will be made available to the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport secretariat once the report is finalised.

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Question: SRM 08

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management

Topic: Input of Climate Change Research Strategy for Primary Industries database to consideration of projects under the Climate Change Research Program of Australia's Farming Future.

Hansard Page: 64 (23/03/2009)

Senator Milne asked:

Dr O'Connell, did you use that database in looking at these projects?

Dr O'Connell—The relevant people, of course, are in the climate change division, so I would have to take that on notice. But certainly, as Dr Robinson said, we are part of the CCRSPI process. It is not that it is a

separate process. We are partners in the exercise, so these things are well coordinated.

Senator MILNE—I would like you to take that on notice, because I would like to know what they took away from that analysis that will inform the grants. Dr Robinson, you just said a minute ago there were a couple of conclusions after the analysis that became apparent. What were they?

Dr Robinson—I am sorry, Senator, I cannot recall off the top of my head the detail. But, for example, the one I do recall that we shared with the Senate and the committee is that there are about 12 projects on soil carbon around the country out of that 404. But that is the only specific one I remember. I can take that on notice.

Answer:

The Climate Change Research Strategy for Primary Industries (CCRSPI) database was not included in the process for evaluation of project proposals submitted for funding under the Australia's Farming Future: Climate Change Research Program (CCRP). At the time the database was not considered sufficiently developed to provide comprehensive information on climate change related agricultural research.

The Department has recently entered into agreement with Land and Water Australia to further develop the Australian Agriculture and Natural Resources Online (AANRO) database to enable it to store and report on climate change related agricultural research.

Consideration of proposals submitted under the CCRP involved extensive consultation with government departments, industry and research institutions and included an overall assessment by an Expert Panel of industry and agricultural research leaders.

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Question: SRM 09

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management

Topic: AFMA Appointments

Hansard Page: 68 (23/02/2009)

Senator Colbeck asked:

Senator COLBECK—So all of the commissioners will be appointed for five years or will you have a process whereby it allows for rolling appointments—say, 50 per cent might get 2½ years to start with and then the other half will get five?

Mr Hurry—No. Under the initial arrangements, my understanding is it is five years.

Senator COLBECK—Are there any limits on terms? Say, for example, can a commissioner serve only two terms or something of that nature?

Mr Hurry—I am unsure.

Dr O'Connell—We will have to take that on notice, I think.

Mr Hurry—Yes, we will take it on notice.

Answer:

Under the *Fisheries Administration Act 1991*, there are no restrictions on the number of terms that the CEO, Chair, or Commissioners can serve.

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Question: SRM 10

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management

Topic: Fisheries Research Program

Hansard Page: 70 (23/02/2009)

Senator Colbeck asked:

Well, it was actually picked up by another vessel that was leaving at the same time and turned around and came back, Senator Sherry, but it was assisted by a wind change before it managed to get to Bellerive. I will leave that. I just want to broaden the horizons and bring in the rest of the ensemble at this stage. I want to go back to the fisheries research program. We were told at the previous estimates that \$1.1 million had been allocated to BRS. There was an allocation of \$1.87 million for this year. Where is the rest of that being allocated?

Mr Pittar—I am going to have to take that question on notice, I am afraid.

Answer:

Allocations from the Fisheries Research Program are shown in the table below. The Program's steering committee has identified further work that will reduce uncertainty in stock status.

Provider	Project title	Total funding
BRS	Reducing Uncertainty in Stock Status	\$1,300,995
ABARE	Performance measures in fisheries	\$99,342
FRDC/CSIRO	Estimating total allowable catches for Northern Prawn Fishery major prawn species	\$87,184
FRDC/CSIRO	Management strategies for multi-species longline fisheries	\$23,411
FRDC/CSIRO	Southwest Pacific Swordfish stock assessment	\$53,010
CSIRO	Population of albacore tuna in the pacific region	\$25,000
	Unallocated as of March 2009*	\$311,058
	Total 08-09 budget	\$1,900,000

*A funding application for this work is expected from CSIRO in late March.

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Question: SRM 11

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management

Topic: Securing our Fishing Future

Hansard Page: 72 (23/02/2009)

Senator Siewart asked:

Senator SIEWERT—I want to go to the Securing our Fishing Future package. Can you tell me what percentage of the funding was used to actually buy out fishing effort, actual fishing effort, versus latent effort? Have you done an analysis of that?

Mr Pittar—I do not believe that the buyback distinguished between latent effort and other effort per se. It was essentially directed at buying back Commonwealth fishing concessions without necessarily making that distinction.

Senator SIEWERT—Okay. So you do not think, or you know?

Mr Pittar—I am unsure. If there is any difference we will come back to you on notice.

Answer:

The Department has not analysed the percentage of the funding used to buy out fishing effort or latent effort. The purchase of both fishing effort and latent effort was necessary to improve the long term sustainability and profitability of Commonwealth fisheries.

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Question: SRM 12

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management

Topic: Caring for our Country

Hansard Page: Written

Senator Macdonald asked:

Please provide a comprehensive, interdepartmental matrix detailing:

1. the full range of Natural Resource Management Programs (including Coastcare, Reef Rescue, NRM Groups Base Funding, Caring for Country) and their inter-relationships;
2. a brief description of the purpose of each program;
3. the term/timeline for each program;
4. the amounts of funding available for whom for each program;
5. timetable for funding applications;
6. timetable for provision of funds to approved projects.

Answer:

The full range of natural resource management programs and their inter-relationships is explained in the Caring for our Country Outcomes 2008-2013 and the Caring for our Country Business Plan 2009-2010, located at:
www.nrm.gov.au/publications/index.html.

A table which summarises this information is provided as **QB 12- Attachment A**. Payments are provided to approved projects in accordance with individual contracts.

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Question: SRM 13

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management

Topic: Caring for our Country Landcare

Hansard Page: Written

Senator Colbeck asked:

1. 46 grants were made under the Caring for our Country Landcare round in November 2008. What was the total amount of applications received? What is the State/Territory breakdown of the number of applications received?
2. There are several organisations which are listed more than once? Was there any restriction on the number of applications an organisation or individual could put forward?
3. Why does the web address www.landcare.gov.au now re-route through to the DAFF website?
4. What future funding will the National Landcare Program receive?

Answer:

1. The Caring for our Country Open Grants received 1346 applications worth over \$300 million. A breakdown across locations is provided in the table at **Attachment A** below, including the number of projects funded from the landcare component of Caring for our Country.
2. There was no restriction on the number of applications an organisation or individual could put forward.
3. The Landcare website for national policy and Australian government funding of landcare activities has been hosted on the DAFF website for several years, as the department manages the landcare budget appropriation.
4. The current forward estimates of funding for Caring for Our Country – Landcare are as follows:
2009-10 = \$35.213M
2010-11 = \$38.047M
2011-12 = \$42.094M

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Attachment A Open Grants – Breakdown of projects by location

Project Location	Applications Received	TOTAL Successful Projects	No. of Successful Landcare Projects
WA	157	13	4
VIC	176	16	6
TAS	63	9	4
SA	94	15	1
QLD	287	26	10
NT	43	12	4
NSW	352	20	4
Norfolk Island	2	0	0
Christmas Island	1	0	0
ACT	12	2	0
Multistate or National	157	25	14
Not Available	2	0	0
TOTAL	1346	138	47

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Question: SRM 14

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management

Topic: Seafood website

Hansard Page: Written

Senator Colbeck asked:

What is the background of the project which saw \$500,000 allocated to the www.seafood.net.au website? What future involvement will DAFF have with this project?

Answer:

The Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) contributed \$515,422 over the past six years to the development of the Australian Fish Names Standard.

The FRDC contracted Seafood Services Australia (SSA) to develop the standard and the CSIRO to undertake an upgrade of the national fisheries database to include images and common names of Australian fishes. The FRDC advises that the work undertaken by SSA to develop the standard was done at a cost of approximately \$200,000, which included \$50,000 for the development of the *seafood.net.au* website. The CSIRO upgrade of the database was done at a cost of \$315,422.

DAFF was not directly involved in this project. There are no plans for future involvement in this project.

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Question: SRM 15

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management

Topic: Australian Landcare Council

Hansard Page: Written

Senator Colbeck asked:

Why are there 11 vacant positions on the Australian Landcare Council, as per advice on Agency Appointments and Vacancies at 19th January 2009?

Answer:

Following the announcement of the Caring for Our Country initiative by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and the Arts, in March 2008, the Ministers asked that the Australian Landcare Council and a number of other Nature Resource Management ministerial advisory bodies be put in recess pending a review of them and the legislation underpinning them.

During that time, one member resigned and terms of another ten members expired.