

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2013

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: 214

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management Division

Topic: Seafish Tasmania—Communication from the Tasmanian Premier on Proposal
Proof Hansard page: 82-83

Senator COLBECK asked:

Dr Rayns: Yes, there was information sought on the previous process about vessels that had fished in the fishery, catches, our arrangements in terms of sea bird mitigation, dolphin and seal mitigation and those sorts of things. But, as I have said, sometimes the department comes back and asks some more specific questions about specific issues. For example, they might ask us about what large vessels have fished in the fishery previously and they might then ask us for the exact sizes of some of those vessels and perhaps the gear they use. So we get into a lot more detail.

Senator COLBECK: Minister, have you had any communication from the Tasmanian Premier on this particular proposal?

Senator Ludwig: Not that I recall, not. I will check the record just to be on the safe side.

Senator Ludwig: No. I can confirm that there have been none into our office. I cannot speak for the department independently as to whether or not any correspondence has been forwarded, but they can check their records accordingly.

Mr Tucker: We can check, but there has been nothing to the recollection of officers here. We do not know if they made a submission through the submission process, but we have not seen anything. We can check that.

Answer:

The Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry's records indicate that the Minister for Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry has not received any communication from the Premier of Tasmania, The Hon. Lara Giddings MP, about the application for the FV *Abel Tasman* to tranship in the Small Pelagic Fishery.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: 215

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management Division

Topic: Fisheries Management Review

Proof Hansard page: 89

Senator WHISH-WILSON asked:

Senator WHISH-WILSON: I have a question that is very similar to one of Senator Colbeck's questions. With the public submissions you have received, was there any process for ranking them at all, or sorting them?

Dr Findlay: Yes, there is. We are still going through that.

Senator WHISH-WILSON: That was the only question I had.

Senator Ludwig: Chair, just on this question by Senator Whish-Wilson: it looks like it got overtaken by events, but we will take it on notice just to make sure that we give you an answer. The last paragraph of the review starts by saying that it will be completed, so that was done. It looks like events overtook that. That would be from recollection. But to make sure, we will take it on notice and provide you with the answer I have just given or a correction of that answer.

Answer:

The last paragraph of the terms of reference guiding the Fisheries Management Review refers to the passage of the *Fisheries Management (Amendment) Act 2012*. The Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) can confirm that an amendment to the *Fisheries Management Act 1991* has not occurred in relation to the Fisheries Management Review.

The Fisheries Management Review has been completed. Mr David Borthwick AO PSM reported to the Minister for Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry, Senator the Hon. Joe Ludwig MP (the minister) on the review in December 2012. The minister is considering the report, and has indicated his intention to make the report public and deal with it expeditiously.

DAFF will review the webpage references and update accordingly.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: 216

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management Division

Topic: Feral Camels

Proof Hansard page: 96

Senator EDWARDS asked:

Senator EDWARDS: We have spent \$19 million and we have still got more camels out there than we know what to do with.

Mr Tucker: Part of the reason is that the weather conditions improved substantially and they were able to spread right across the landscape, as we have said before. Now that it is warming and drying again, they will come back into those locations and they will be easier to manage.

Ms Lauder: One of the other things we have done with this project is build the capacity and skills of other land managers in the areas where there are camels. We never expected with \$19 million that we would eradicate camels from Australia. As you say, the problem is too large. So we were targeting specific biological communities that we were trying to protect and, as Mr Tucker said, we have got reports that the vegetation is recovering extremely well. But what we have done is build the skills in the Indigenous communities and in some of the government agencies to continue culling operations into the future beyond the life of this—

Senator EDWARDS: What is the recruitment rate of camels?

Mr Thompson: We would have to take that on notice

Answer:

The long-term reproduction rate of feral camels is estimated to be of the order of 10 per cent per annum. However the recruitment rate at any point of time will be influenced by seasonal weather conditions that affect both birth and death rates, and the effects of management.

There is evidence of a significant reduction in the feral camel population during the recent drought conditions due to adverse breeding conditions, increased natural mortality and the impact of the Caring for our Country Feral Camel Management Project. Consequently, the recruitment rate will have been negative for much of the recent drought.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: 217

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resources Management Division

Topic: Feral Pigs

Proof Hansard page: 97

Senator EDWARDS asked:

Senator EDWARDS: I refer to South Australia Murray-Darling Basin Natural Resource Management, *Working with landholders to reduce feral pig numbers in the Riverland, South Australia*, and the completion of an accredited feral pig training program—another one of these, as you said, on-the-ground outcomes issues. What outcomes have been achieved?

Senator EDWARDS: So there are no numbers that we are looking to target. We are not falling into that trap, we are just looking to manage it. When they come onto your property, you manage.

Mr Thompson: Or we would assist people where there is a group of landholders who are being hit by feral pigs. There might be assistance given by a regional body to take coordinated action to clean them out of an area so that they keep them at bay for an extended period of time.

Senator EDWARDS: With this particular program, how much does that cost?

Mr Thompson: I would have to take that on notice. That money is coming through what we call our base funding to regional bodies in the main.

Answer:

There is no project with the title *Working with landholders to reduce feral pig numbers in the Riverland, South Australia* that the Commonwealth is aware of. At present, there are only two Caring for our Country pig control funded projects being undertaken by the South Australian Murray-Darling Basin National Resource Management Board. Both of these are being managed by the Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities.

The two projects are:

- *Collaborative action to remove feral pigs from the Ramsar riverine environment.*
- *Destruction of the feral pig population in the Riverland Ramsar Wetlands.*

The first of the two projects above as this project has a focus on collaborative action to reduce feral pig numbers.

The South Australian Murray-Darling Basin Natural Resources Management Board runs the *Collaborative action to remove Feral Pigs from the Ramsar riverine environment* project, which was approved as a one year \$120 382.00 (GST exclusive) in 2012–13 to facilitate group action to implement feral pig management programs in the Riverland Ramsar wetlands. The project is working over eight properties, covering 130 000 hectares.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: 218

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management Division

Topic: Certification Schemes of Environmental Groups on Australian Primary Industries

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator WILLIAMS asked:

Are you aware that environmental non-government organisations are attempting to force primary producers to sign up to expensive third-party certification schemes auditing the sustainability of their production methods, most prominently to date in forestry and fisheries but also potentially in a wide range of other commodities?

Answer:

The Australian Government is aware of proposals put forward to implement certification in a range of industries. The use and implementation of the schemes should be a market driven issue and a commercial decision for those industries.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: 219

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management Division

Topic: Certification Schemes of Environmental Groups on Australian Primary Industries

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator WILLIAMS asked:

Given the fact that Australian primary producers are world leaders in sustainable production, are you prepared to stand up for Australian primary producers and publicly state that such third-party certification is unnecessary? Are you prepared to make such a statement?

Answer:

Australia farmers are among the most efficient and effective in the world. Industry is best placed to determine to what extent certification is useful. It may be used in response to specific market needs, either domestic or international.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: 220

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management Division

Topic: Caring for our Country funding

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator COLBECK asked:

Where is Caring for our Country (Phase 2) up to? Are all rounds / programs for 2012/13 now open?

Provide details of all programs under Caring for our Country, including opening date, closing date, total amount of money available per program and maximum amount of money that can be applied for. For any allocations from Caring for our Country that are not being made by open tender or application, provide details of the different projects/programs being funded including Last advice was that program planning was still underway but expectations were for rounds to be open in 2012/13.

How have Caring for our Country funds have been allocated so far this financial year? (trying to find out if C4oC funds have been used to support things like MPA and IGA)

Answer:

The five-year outcomes for the Sustainable Agriculture stream of Phase 2 of Caring for Our Country are still being finalised and decisions on how Caring for our Country funding will be allocated against priorities have not yet been made.

All 2012–13 funding rounds for Caring for our Country are now closed. All successful projects for 2012–13 have already been advertised, assessed, contracted and are currently being delivered.

The Community Landcare Grants 2013–14 are small grants that were announced on 24 January 2013. Applications will close on 20 March 2013. The grants are valued between \$5000 and \$50 000 (GST exclusive) and are available to help local community-based organisations and groups take on-ground action as well as build their capacity and skills to manage their natural environment and productive lands.

All Caring for our Country–Landcare funds appropriated in 2012–13 have been fully allocated. Funds were allocated through a mix of investment approaches; including community action grants, base-level funding to regional national resource management organisations and the 2012–13 Caring for our Country Business Plan. There has been a small amount of funding allocated to eradication, which is delivered through Intergovernmental Agreements. There have been no allocations to Marine Protected Areas.

Decisions on other delivery mechanisms for the second phase of Caring for our Country are yet to be finalised.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: 221

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management Division

Topic: Statutory Fishing Rights Allocation Review Panel

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator COLBECK asked:

Are there still 10 people on the Statutory Fishing Rights Allocation Review Panel?

Have Barbara Yeoh and Nicoletta Ciffolilli been replaced or had their term extended?

What role does this panel have in the annual establishment of SFRs?

Answer:

There are currently four panel members plus the Principal Member.

The number of panel members is not set by statute. Based on the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's assessment of the likely level of need for panel members and the cost of selecting new members, the department assessed that current and likely future requirements can be met with a panel of four members plus the principal member.

The panel does not have a role in the annual establishment of statutory fishing rights. The Statutory Fishing Rights Allocation Review Panel is an independent specialist panel that reviews decisions by the Australian Fisheries Management Authority or a Joint Authority on the allocation of statutory fishing rights under a management plan.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: 222

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management Division

Topic: Borthwick Review

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator COLBECK asked:

What was the final cost of the Borthwick Report?

Answer:

The cost of the *Review of Commonwealth Fisheries: Legislation, Policy and Management* (Fisheries Management Review), as at 25 February 2013, was \$361 825 GST exclusive.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: 223

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management Division

Topic: Review of Commonwealth fisheries harvest strategy policy and guidelines and Review of Commonwealth policy on fisheries bycatch

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator COLBECK asked:

How much extra has been spent or is anticipated to be spent on the harvest strategy review and on the bycatch review?

What was the nature of the additional scientific and technical work required?

Was this additional work put out to open tender?

Both these reviews are due to complete in March 2013. Is this still the anticipated end date?

Answer:

1. No further funds have been allocated to the review of the Harvest Strategy Policy and Guidelines or the Commonwealth Policy on Fisheries Bycatch since the response to question on notice 91 of Supplementary Budget Estimates, October 2012. No extra expenditure is anticipated.

Funding for technical and scientific work in 2012 for the review of the Harvest Strategy Policy and Guidelines included expanding a Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC) approved project (#2012/125) titled *A technical review of formal fisheries harvest strategies* to include a review of alternative indicators and approaches for setting formal economic target reference points. This funding was also used to expand the scope of FRDC project #2012/125 to include a detailed review of the implementation of the *Commonwealth Fisheries Harvest Strategy Policy* including the identification of potential performance measures and the drafting of a technical overview paper. Finally, the funding was used for an independent peer review of the outputs of FRDC project #2012/125.

2. No additional technical work was funded for the review of the Commonwealth Policy on Fisheries Bycatch.
3. No. The work was an extension of existing projects.
4. Yes.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: 224

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management Division

Topic: Refugee Boats Sunk in SBT Spawning Ground

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator COLBECK asked:

Given Minister Albanese increased penalties for polluting the ocean from a maximum of \$2 million to a maximum of \$11 million per offence, should the government be paying fines for the pollution resulting from the burning and sinking of refugee vessels?

What assessment has been undertaken on the likelihood that this action may have negative impacts on a Southern Blue Fin Tuna, an endangered species?

Answer:

This portfolio does not have responsibility for questions arising from ship pollution. Such questions should, in the first instance, be directed to the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport. Border Protection Command has responsibility for the destruction of suspected irregular entry vessels (SIEVs). Questions related to the destruction of SIEVs should be directed to the Minister for Home Affairs.

We have no evidence of any negative impact on recruitment of Southern Bluefin Tuna (SBT). Recent annual aerial surveys of juvenile SBT indicate positive signs for the stock.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: 225

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management Division

Topic: Caring for our Country and Fishing

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator COLBECK asked:

How much of the Caring for Our Country budget will be allocated to fishing related activities?

How much of the Caring for Our Country budget will be allocated to the fishing industry?

One of the stated aims of the increased funding is to reduce the impact of fisheries on the resource base. What level of reduction of impact of fisheries on the resource base is planned through this Caring for Our Country funding?

How will the funding be delivered to fishers?

Answer:

Decisions on how Caring for our Country funding will be allocated against priorities have not yet been made. However, it is not intended there be a cap on funding available to any one industry.

The five-year outcomes for the Sustainable Agriculture stream are still being finalised. The outcomes will outline how the Sustainable Agriculture stream will address relevant policy objectives, the specific outcomes to be delivered by 2018 and some of the strategies for achieving these outcomes.

A mix of funding approaches will be used to deliver the Sustainable Agriculture stream funding, including regional funding and small grants. Community Landcare Grants (the small grants program) were announced on 24 January 2013 and applications close on 20 March 2013. Decisions on other delivery mechanisms are yet to be finalised.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2013

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: 226

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management Division

Topic: Caring for our Country

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator COLBECK asked:

Has the financial oversight of Caring for our Country highlighted any significant differences between the performance of different regional NRM bodies?

Has Caring for our Country been subject to independent review by the ANAO in its own right, not as part of a review of the Department's performance?

Answer:

Yes. While all regional national resource management organisations currently have strong financial management practices, there are a number of differences in performance mainly in the areas of prioritisation and engagement.

No.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: 227

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management Division

Topic: Community Landcare Grants

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator COLBECK asked:

What progress has been made this year so far in meeting the key performance indicators of:

- >8400 land managers, primary producers and fishers to have improved their knowledge and skills in natural resource management and adoption of sustainable management practices.
- >1675 primary producers to have adopted activities that contribute to the conservation and protection of biodiversity
- >85 commercial fishers who have improved practices to optimise sustainability?

Recently there was a call for more Panel Members to assess Community Landcare Grants. Is this a regular occurrence?

What is the budget for the assessment process?

What percentage of the budget is being spent on administration compared to that being allocated to community groups?

Answer:

Based on progress reports from grantees, the following achievements have been made to date. Note that final figures for this financial year will not be available until all progress reports have been received in August 2013:

- 16 722 land managers, primary producers and fishers have improved their knowledge and skills in natural resource management and adoption of sustainable management practices.
- 892 primary producers have adopted activities that contribute to the conservation and protection of biodiversity
- 1495 commercial fishers have improved practices to optimise sustainability.

An expression of interest process seeking nominations from interested community members to form a natural resource management “assessor pool” was undertaken in October 2011. This process resulted in the establishment of a database of 354 community members with relevant skills and knowledge.

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Question: 227 (continued)

Independent grant assessment panel members are selected from a database of suitable community representatives to assess Caring for our Country rounds. Several individuals listed in the database were recently contacted to ascertain whether they were still interested in participating as assessors, including for the upcoming Community Landcare Grants round. We envisage undertaking Expression of Interest processes from time to time to refresh the database.

The budget for the assessment process is expected to be around \$200 000. The final figure will depend on the number of applications which are received, which in turn will affect the amount of time required to assess and hence the total cost of assessment.

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry spends less than 10 per cent of the budget on administration for Caring for our Country.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: 228

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management Division

Topic: Splitting Caring for our Country

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator COLBECK asked:

What proportion of the \$34.6 million in the May 2012-13 budget has been allocated to the Sustainable Agriculture stream of Caring for our Country?

What proportion has been allocated to the Sustainable Environment stream?

What are the expected administrative costs for the Sustainable Agriculture stream of Caring for our Country?

How do these administration costs compare to last year?

How are projects that cross the Agriculture / Environment divide handled now that there is no longer a joint management team?

Does this result in a double up of assessment and administration?

Answer:

The term 'Sustainable Agriculture stream' refers to funding for the second phase of Caring for our Country, which commences from 2013-14. All of the \$34.6 million from the 2012-13 budget is from the Caring for our Country—Landcare appropriation and used for the delivery of Sustainable Farm Practices outcomes.

None of the 2012-13 budget for Caring for our Country—Landcare has been allocated to the Sustainable Environment stream.

The details of the program and budget are still being finalised.

The administration costs for the joint agriculture and environment delivery of the Caring for our Country program was \$45.4 million which equated to 10.1 per cent of the budget.

In 2012-13 projects continue to be managed jointly across both portfolios. In the future the different streams will closely align to ensure processes are not duplicated for Regional Delivery funding. For competitive processes, applicants will choose which program to apply for by considering the best fit with the outcomes being sought.

The application and assessment process will allow each portfolio to target projects specific to the outcomes they are seeking to deliver. Agriculture stakeholders have responded positively to the government focussing efforts on sustainable agriculture.

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Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: 229

Division/Agency: Sustainable Resource Management Division

Topic: Camel Cull

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator EDWARDS asked:

1. How many camels have been culled since 31 October 2012? (refer to answer to QoN 37 from October Estimates)
2. Answer to QoN 37 from October 2012 states that the project is on track to report end-of-project densities at or below target levels at approximately 50% of the identified biological refugia and high conservation sites. Does the Department consider 50% a good success rate?
3. Given that the project funding ends on 30 June 2013 what plans does the Department have in place to deal with the feral camel population long term?
4. If you don't have plans how does the Department expect to continue to protect sensitive ecological sites?

Answer:

1. Since 31 October 2012, the latest confirmed count of feral camels removed through aerial culling through the National Feral Camel project is over 10 000.
2. The end-of-project densities at or below target levels at approximately 50 per cent of the identified biological refugia and high conservation sites are considered to be a good success rate given the impediments to the program.
3. The Australian Government became involved in feral camel management as a strategic intervention at a time of high camel densities and damage to environmental assets identified as national priorities. Designated land managers—public and private—and state and territory governments continue to have the responsibility for ongoing camel management. The evaluation of actions and investments to date will inform Commonwealth consideration of any future activity.
4. The Australian Government has an ongoing interest in the informed and effective management of environmental assets and pastoral lands, and future.

Australian Government investment programs could be expected to include opportunities for support of land managers.