

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2014

Agriculture

Question: 70

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Plant Division

Topic: Fruit Fly Strategy

Proof Hansard page: 31-32

Senator RUSTON asked:

Mr Aldred: The responsibility for the on-ground management of fruit fly rests with states and with industry. The Commonwealth's responsibility on fruit fly is as part of our export certification arrangements. In that respect, we overwhelmingly rely on the systems and arrangements in place in each of the jurisdictions, upon which our inspectors are able to certify produce for export.

Senator RUSTON: On that basis, obviously with the protocols that are in place for some fairly significant export markets, what role can we hope to see being played by your department in assisting in that area alone? This has ended up being the most frustrating exercise.

Mr Aldred: I understand the frustration. If we go back a few years and look at where a substantial amount of funding for the National Fruit Fly Strategy and so on came from, it came from the Commonwealth. That was not necessarily done under a direct responsibility, but it was a reflection of trying to bring the parties together to have a strategy. A number of the elements of that are still being carried forward, as Mr Fraser advised at last estimates, so there is work being done. The Fruit Fly Strategy is a relevant document in that work.

Senator RUSTON: Could you maybe point out some of the things that are actually on foot?

Mr Aldred: I will take it on notice and give you a more comprehensive rundown. There are about 20 recommendations in the Fruit Fly Strategy and we can run through those. A range of it related to the coordination of R&D and the nature of whether or not sterile fruit fly strategies could be examined. There are quite a range of things. Some of them require funding, so the communications and engagement component requires funding to do some of those things. In trying to coordinate that, we would obviously like to see the implementation group get up.

Answer:

To support international market access, the department continues to work with a range of trading partners to increase the acceptance of Australia's fruit fly pest free areas, and to harmonise requirements between trading partners to reduce regulatory burdens. Work is also underway to manage proposed changes to the Code of Practice for Management of Queensland Fruit Fly to minimise any disruption on trade.

Question: 70 (continued)

To improve coordination of fruit fly management activities and research, and support a national approach to the management of all fruit flies important to productivity and trade, the department has been committed to the National Fruit Fly Strategy Management Group since late 2012. As the group would be a government–industry partnership, it is being coordinated through Plant Health Australia and will bring together governments, industry and researchers to review the current fruit fly situation and to identify key research activities and management options. Confirmation of funding from industry to support one third of the costs of the Management Group’s secretariat has only recently been confirmed by Horticulture Australia Limited.

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Additional Estimates February 2014

Agriculture

Question: 71

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Plant Division

Topic: Money Spent on Fruit Fly

Proof Hansard page: 32

Senator RUSTON asked:

Senator RUSTON: You can probably take this question on notice. One of the things that has become extraordinarily apparent in this whole thing is that there are all of these silos of various activities undertaken. A huge amount of money is being spent in relation to fruit fly across Australia. Has there been any attempt, either through your organisation or through organisations that you are aware of, to try and coordinate and consolidate the research and the activities and actions of fruit fly?

Mr Aldred: Yes.

Answer:

Mr Aldred responded to this question at the hearing.

Senator RUSTON: Where is it and when can I see it?

Mr Aldred: For example, there was some work several years ago as part of and as a result of the Fruit Fly Strategy. It was called the Body of Knowledge project, where we tried to bring it together and actually have. I will provide the web link. It was a fruit fly body of knowledge that included looking at all of the grey literature and those sorts of things. A range of work is ongoing. There is coordination through the arrangements of the Plant Health Committee. We work with our state counterparts and with industries in considerable detail in managing outbreaks and in dealing with the market impacts of those. So I would not like to think it is a mess or totally uncoordinated. I understand some of the frustration, but I think when we look at it some of the fundamentals are about the arrangements of the three states.

Senator RUSTON: With the greatest amount of respect, we are heading to a horrible place if we do not do something. So, as I pointed out previously, for all the good will in the world with all of the things that we are talking about, they are obviously not working.

The website for the Fruit Fly Body of Knowledge project is hosted at <https://biosecurityportal.org.au/Pages/FFBOKLanding.aspx>

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

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Agriculture

Question: 72

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Plant Division

Topic: Export market wants GM-free

Proof Hansard page: 36

Senator SIEWERT asked:

It is just for if a particular export market wants GM-free.

Ms Calhoun: We provide non-GMO certification to markets that require it, but the certification is based on information that we get from the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator.

Senator SIEWERT: Could you provide on notice the details of the process that you go through to do that.

Answer:

The Office of Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR) provides the Department of Agriculture with statements on the non-GMO status of various crops within Australia. The OGTR statement advises whether GM varieties of the crops have been approved in Australia either for commercial release or for limited and controlled release (field trials).

The department issues a "Declaration and Certificate as to Condition" to accompany a consignment for export when non-GMO certification is required by the importing country authority. The "Declaration and Certificate as to Condition" endorses the OGTR statement with the following statement.

"The attached letter, dated [insert date], by the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR), the Australian Government agency responsible for a national scheme to regulate genetically modified organisms (GMO's) states:

No approvals have been issued by either the GMAC or the Gene Technology Regulator for the intentional release into the Australian environment of genetically modified [insert crop common and scientific name] as at [insert date]."

(Note GMAC in the above statement refers to the Genetic Manipulation Advisory Committee).

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

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Agriculture

Question: 73

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Plant Division

Topic: Strategies other than area-wide management strategy

Proof Hansard page: 73

Senator LINES asked:

Senator LINES: Have you suggested strategies other than an area-wide management strategy?

Mr Aldred: To add to the context, there was a recognition of the review process going on with fenthion and there was a range of activities run through the plant health committee, and in particular a subcommittee of that. The plant health committee consists of the senior plant health specialists of all jurisdictions. There was an arrangement through the plant health committee. There was also a government and industry arrangement that was established to try to get ahead of the game. That was done to look at the reviews of fenthion but also dimethoate. A whole range of strategies were looked at by that group, and a range of R&D that was funded through Horticulture Australia Limited and so on.

Senator LINES: Can you tell us when all of this took place?

Mr Aldred: It probably kicked off from about 2007. There was a range of meetings about different components of this that stretched out from about 2007 through to 2011-2012. That included more general awareness raising of the issue as well as some specific sessions that were held on alternative strategies.

Mr Tucker: My recollection is that we covered this detail in our submission to the specific inquiry on fenthion. I am looking for confirmation from my colleagues, but I think we have laid out quite a bit of detail in that document.

Mr Aldred: That is correct.

Senator LINES: I think you have. Since the change of government—since September 2013—has that dialogue continued to the intensity that you were undertaking it earlier?

Mr Aldred: In some respects a range of things have been done, in particular dimethoate. A lot of focus on that came to pass in newer radiation arrangements that were agreed with New Zealand. A range of projects have come to fruition. I would have to take on notice the level of detailed discussion over the last couple of months. There have been meetings of the Domestic Quarantine and Market Access Working Group that I referred to under the plant health committee, but I would need to take on notice the specifics.

Question: 73 (continued)

Answer:

The purpose of the Dimethoate and Fenthion Response Coordination Committee was to consider potential regulatory actions in regard to the use of those two chemicals and take early steps to facilitate ongoing domestic and international trade. From 2012 through to 2014, new trade protocols with New Zealand and agreement to new domestic movement conditions were achieved.

The most recent teleconference of the Dimethoate and Fenthion Response Coordination Committee was in August 2013. Participants agreed that as there had been few major developments recently, the future of the committee needed to be considered. It was agreed that future teleconferences would be held as required instead of being scheduled quarterly and that if members become aware of information that warranted a teleconference that one would be organised.

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ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

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Agriculture

Question: 74

Division/Agency: Biosecurity Plant Division

Topic: Crops that have the certificate

Proof Hansard page: 87-88

Senator SIEWERT asked:

Senator SIEWERT: Are you able to tell me if crops or exports are certified through the GM process as GM free?

Ms Calhoun: At the moment we certify when an importing country requires us to provide some additional certification about non-GMO product. We put that on what we call a certificate of condition, which is an additional certificate we provide in addition to a phytosanitary certificate. We base that certification on information that we get from the Office of Gene Technology. They will inform us as to what crops we can provide that certification for and if we do not have that on our list we will go back and consult with them. We are merely providing the certificate as to condition based on advice that they have provided us.

Senator SIEWERT: It is not on any field work?

Ms Calhoun: No.

Senator SIEWERT: What crops at the moment have that certificate?

Ms Calhoun: I would have to take that on notice, because I do not have a comprehensive list with me today.

Senator SIEWERT: Would it include canola?

Ms Calhoun: No. I believe at the moment we do not do any non-GMO certification for canola.

Senator SIEWERT: If you could take that on notice, that would be appreciated. Are you aware whether the importing country tests that?

Answer:

The list of commodities for which the Office of Gene Technology Regulator has provided statements regarding GMO approval status and for which the department issues a "Declaration and Certificate as to Condition" consists of:

Question: 74 (continued)

Angle blustem (*Dichanum aristatum*), Apple tree (*Malus domestica*), *Azoarcus* spp, *Azorhizobium* spp, *Azospirillum* spp, Azuki beans (*Vigna angularis*), Barley (*Hordeum vulgare*), Bambatsii Panic Grass (*Panicum coloratum*), Broad beans/Faba beans (*Vicia faba*), Butterfly peas (*Clitoria ternatea*), Carnation (*Dianthus caryophyllus*), Chia (*Salvia hispanica*), Chickpeas (*Cicer arietinum*), Coriander (*Coriandrum sativum*), Corn (*Zea mays*), Couch grass (*Agropyron repens*), *Cyamopsis tetragonoloba*, Digit grass (*Digitaria smutsii*), Fennel (*Foeniculum vulgare*), Greenleaf desmodium (*Desmodium intortum*), Jointvetch (*Aeschynomeene villosa*), Lentils (*Lens culinaris*), Leucaena seed (*Leucaena leucocephala*), Lucerne (*Medicago sativa*), Lupins (*Lupinus angustifolius*), Macadamia (*Macadamia integrifolia*), Mungbeans (*Vigna radiata*), Oats (*Avena sativa*), Potatoes (*Solanum tuberosum*), Purple bushbean (*Macroptilium atropurpureum*), Rhodes grass (*Chloris gayana*), Katambora Rhodes (*Chloris gayana*), Rice (*Oryza sativa*), Ryegrass (*Lolium perenne*), Italian ryegrass (*Lolium multiflorum*), Tall fescue (*Lolium arundinaceum*), Sesame (*Sesamum indicum*), Signal grass (*Brachiaria decumbens*), Creeping Signal grass (*Brachiaria humidicola*), Sorghum (*Sorghum* spp), Soybeans (*Glycine max*), Stylo (*Stylosanthes* spp), Sugarcane (*Saccharum* spp), Sunflower (*Helianthus annuus*), Tinaroo Glycine/Cooper Glycine (*Neonotonia wightii*) and Wheat (*Triticum aestivum*).

Canola is not included for the crops for which the department issues a “Declaration and Certificate as to Condition” for non-GMO certification. Currently only New Zealand requires evidence that exported canola seeds for sowing are non-GMO. A consignment of canola to New Zealand is required to be representatively sampled, tested and found free of unapproved GM seeds through laboratory testing. Commercial laboratory certification is obtained to meet this requirement and the department does not provide non-GMO certification for this market.