

**Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee**

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2014

**Agriculture**

**Question:** 173

**Division/Agency:** Sustainable Resource Management Division

**Topic:** Work currently undertaken which will enhance the natural resource base

**Proof Hansard page:** Written

**Senator STERLE asked:**

Can you update the committee on key work currently being undertaken which will enhance the natural resource base on which the department's portfolio industries rely on?

**Answer:**

The Department of Agriculture is undertaking a range of activities which assist in enhancing the natural resource base. This includes:

- Working with the Department of the Environment to implement the new National Landcare Programme.
- Working with the Department of the Environment to implement the Green Army Programme, including links to the National Landcare Programme to better enable feral animal and weed control projects.
- Finalising the sustainable agriculture component of the previous Caring for our Country Program.
- Finalising the National Soil Research, Development and Extension Strategy.
- Working with the Advocate Soil Health, Major General the Hon. Michael Jeffery.
- Developing an assistance package for pest animal management and access to water in drought affected areas.
- Working with the states and territories on a consistent approach to the management of established weeds and pest animals in Australia.
- Working with the Attorney-General's Department on a National Bushfire Mitigation Programme in support of long term bushfire mitigation strategies and better fuel reduction programmes.
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**Question: 173 (continued)**

- Providing advice to Government on how its election commitment to maintain support for long-term Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) could be implemented to achieve a 20 year rolling life for each RFA.
- Providing a range of advice across government on implications of other programmes which may impact on portfolio industries.

**Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee**

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2014

**Agriculture**

**Question:** 174

**Division/Agency:** Sustainable Resource Management Division

**Topic:** Bioregional Advisory Panels

**Proof Hansard page:** Written

**Senator STERLE asked:**

Has the government established the Bioregional Advisory Panels for each of the five marine bioregions? And has the Advisory panel met? What were the topics discussed?

**Answer:**

The Department of Environment has primary carriage of this matter. Minister Hunt has yet to make an announcement on the membership of the Bioregional Advisory Panels.

Panels have yet to be formed.

See previous answer.

**Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee**

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2014

**Agriculture**

**Question:** 175

**Division/Agency:** Sustainable Resource Management Division

**Topic:** National Recreational Fishing Council

**Proof Hansard page:** Written

**Senator STERLE asked:**

Has the recreational fishing council been established, if yes, please provide detail of the makeup of the council.

**Answer:**

No, it has not yet been established.

**Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee**

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2014

**Agriculture**

**Question:** 176

**Division/Agency:** Sustainable Resource Management Division

**Topic:** The Queensland Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate

**Proof Hansard page:** 114-115

**Senator SIEWERT asked:**

**Senator SIEWERT:** Over a period of time there has been a lot of money spent capping bores in the GAB. Is this money being spent putting new bores down in that area and are there any restrictions on the use of that money where that previous funding has been spent?

**Mr Thompson:** My understanding is the amount of money that is available for these activities would not be sufficient to put new bores into the Great Artesian Basin. It is being administered by Queensland; we have looked over it. My understanding is it is intended to be complementary to some of those activities which were about cleaning up old water supply schemes and capping those bores. It is not meant to be duplicative and nor is it intended to put a greater drain on the Great Artesian Basin.

**Senator SIEWERT:** But you do not have a condition in place to ensure that requirement?

**Mr Thompson:** I would have to take that on notice. I have not checked the guidelines, personally, for that.

**Answer:**

No. The Queensland Government's Emergency Water Infrastructure Rebate does not have restrictions on where bores can be sunk. To be eligible to access the rebate, a farmer must be in a drought declared area or on an individually droughted property and have an approved water availability statement endorsing emergency animal welfare needs. Decisions on groundwater licensing are the responsibility of the Queensland Government.

**Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee**

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2014

**Agriculture**

**Question:** 177

**Division/Agency:** Sustainable Resource Management Division

**Topic:** Job losses from departments programs

**Proof Hansard page:** 8-9

**Senator SIEWERT asked:**

**Senator SIEWERT:** I have a question about jobs, on two fronts in particular. In natural resource management, with the restructuring of the programs, are there going to be any job losses from the NRM/Landcare programs?

**Dr Grimes:** We are currently in the process of working through our budget for 2014-15, and part of that will be looking at resourcing that can be applied to NRM programs through the National Landcare Program. There is no doubt that we are going to have to make staffing reductions across the department. We have a voluntary redundancy process underway at the moment. We are not in a position to give you any finalised numbers at this stage, because we are very much in the process of aligning our staffing with our budget for next year.

**Senator SIEWERT:** Presumably in budget estimates you will have that clear?

**Dr Grimes:** Yes, we should have that clear or close to finalised by the budget estimates. The issue, of course, is that we finalise our budget immediately after the government has published its budget. There may be some details that we need to still work through in those couple of weeks after the budget. We will be well-advanced on our planning.

**Senator SIEWERT:** Have there been losses from those programs already?

**Dr Grimes:** I would probably have to either take that on notice or answer the question when we have the officers from that program here later today. There may have been some minor adjustments in staffing levels over recent times, but in terms of our budgeting arrangements we are currently working through that process at the moment.

**Senator SIEWERT:** I am never clear about where to ask about—

**Dr Grimes:** I appreciate that. We are very happy to cover it off there; otherwise, we will make sure that that material is provided to you on notice.

**Question:** 177 (continued)

**Answer:**

Yes

**2013-14**

6.6 FTE has departed from the programs. Over 50 per cent of those were resignations, with the remainder, transfers within the department and 1 FTE on extended leave.

**Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee**

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2014

**Agriculture**

**Question:** 178

**Division/Agency:** Sustainable Resource Management Division

**Topic:** Funding for pest control

**Proof Hansard page:** 98-99

**Senator EDWARDS asked:**

**Senator EDWARDS:** In addition, did former ministers Ludwig or Fitzgibbon consider providing funds for farmers to control pests during the drought?

**Mr Tucker:** I think we would have to take that on notice. Certainly respective governments over many years have provided grants for pest activity, but I cannot remember the exact timing.

**Senator EDWARDS:** So you will let me know?

**Mr Tucker:** We can take that on notice.

**Answer:**

Under the previous Government's natural resource management programs, Ministers Ludwig and Fitzgibbon approved a range of grants which included elements of pest control, and some of these will have been for drought-affected lands. However, drought status was not a formal criterion in the evaluation of proposals.



**Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee**

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2014

**Agriculture**

**Question:** 179

**Division/Agency:** Sustainable Resource Management Division

**Topic:** Commonwealth funds spent on restoration of the Anglesea River

**Proof Hansard page:** 80

**Senator MADIGAN asked:**

**Senator MADIGAN:** Could you tell us who would be responsible for instituting your findings.

**Dr Hone:** In the first instance I imagine that the primary responsibility would be with the Victorian government. It may be that there has been some funding provided by the Commonwealth in the past. I am not aware of any, but that may be a possibility through the Environment Department. We would have to check a detail like that, but responsibility would be fundamentally with the state government.

**Senator MADIGAN:** Would you be able to take on notice to let us know if there has been money allocated?

**Dr Hone:** We would be happy to take that on notice and, if necessary, liaise with the Environment Department on that question.

**Answer:**

The Department of Agriculture has no current or planned government funded programs directly targeted to the Anglesea River.

**Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee**

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2014

**Agriculture**

**Question:** 180

**Division/Agency:** Sustainable Resource Management Division

**Topic:** OceanWatch

**Proof Hansard page:** 117

**Senator BACK asked:**

**Senator BACK:** Can you give us any indication of the number of commercial fishers with whom OceanWatch would be interacting to try to make these improvements?

**Mr Thompson:** I would have to take on notice the numbers, but compared to agriculture fisheries is a much smaller space. There would not be quite the same number but there are an awful lot of recreational fishers, like five or six million, and OceanWatch have run some very successful campaigns in coastal areas. I think one of them is called Loaves and Fishes where, on Good Friday, they get together the coastal fishers and recreational fishers in the area to make peace. They do interact with quite a few people. My understanding, having looked at some of their previous reports, is that in the ports that they work at, like Ulladulla or Port Lincoln or Devonport or Hobart, they probably work with almost all the fishing boats coming in and out of that port. They have got very good links into the fishing industry. Because there are not thousands of people and they do tend to focus into a handful of ports, OceanWatch can have a very high penetration rate with a relatively low staff base.

**Answer:**

OceanWatch will work on a national scale to continue the adoption of industry best harvesting practices that help improve long-term returns for Australian fishers. OceanWatch is developing a strategic plan which will identify priority activities and an associated stakeholder engagement process for the period 2014-15 to 2017-18.

The Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES) *Australian Fisheries Statistics 2012* indicates that in 2011-12, 10 633 people were employed in the commercial fishing, hunting and trapping industry, with 6991 employed in the fishing, hunting and trapping sector, and 3642 in aquaculture enterprises.

In 2012-13, OceanWatch reported engaging with 11 852 seafood professionals (including processors and merchants). The full 2012-13 report is available through the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission at [www.acnc.gov.au](http://www.acnc.gov.au).

**Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee**

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Additional Estimates February 2014

**Agriculture**

**Question:** 181

**Division/Agency:** Sustainable Resource Management

**Topic:** Livestock and watering points

**Proof Hansard page:** 121

**Senator O'SULLIVAN asked:**

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** My question is probably a bit more specific. Do you know of any study that has established that livestock will not travel further than a particular distance from a watering point?

**Mr Thompson:** I am not familiar with the particular studies, but I am aware that significant studies have been done about different livestock on different sorts of feed and how far they will travel from water over a day. I believe there is work on that. I would have to take on notice that detail.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** Would you do that?

**Mr Thompson:** Yes.

**Senator O'SULLIVAN:** I just have a comment as I close. Some mapping data was shown to me that, if it is accurate—and I think one of the big pastoral houses has been involved in the trial—would change my view of the patterns of what cattle do in a 24-hour period, based on my experiences.

**Mr Thompson:** But we will have to take that on notice. I understand that there is some research around, but I am not familiar with the details of it.

**Answer:**

In general, areas more than 15km from a water source are thought to be outside the normal grazing range for cattle, and cattle will generally move within a 4-10 km radius of a water source.

A 1999 journal article (James, C. D., Landsberg, J., & Morton, S. R. (1999). Provision of watering points in the Australian arid zone: a review of effects on biota. *Journal of arid environments*, 41(1), 87-121.) mentioned the distance from water that stock will travel to feed is a balance between water demands driven by temperature, physiology and body condition, and the availability of forage. For cattle in central Australia, with a well balanced supply of water and

**Question:** 181 (continued)

high quality forage, results in cattle movements of only 4 km from water. Under dry conditions, when feed is sparse or of poor quality, movements up to 10 km result, and in very poor quality habitat, or during winter, cattle may occasionally move over 20 km from water.

A 2007 study involving CSIRO (Tomkins, N., & Filmer, M. (2007). GPS tracking to boost sustainability. *Farming Ahead*, 185, 65-71.) used GPS to track cattle on a property with watering points in north Queensland. The study showed the mean distance travelled per day was 8.1 km when the average distance from water was 1.5 km (with a maximum distance from water of 4.1 km). The distance travelled between visits to water was 13.8 km (with a maximum distance travelled between visits of 26.7 km).