

Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Budget Estimates May 2012
Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

Question: 21

Division/Agency: Biosecurity - Animal Division

Topic: Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test for canine ehrlichiosis

Proof Hansard page: 32 (21/05/2012)

Senator ABETZ asked:

Senator ABETZ: Thank you. What about the PCR test which is undertaken in the United States for this particular disease?

Dr A Cupit: I would have to take on notice the specific test but there would be a range of tests. PCR would be one. There might be an ELISA test as well. Usually the manual allows for a number of tests. We sometimes give all that but we generally examine each test and its sensitivity and specificity to work out whether it is a good test.

Answer:

Australia's current biosecurity measures for canine ehrlichiosis include serological testing for *Ehrlichia canis* (*E. canis*). A blood sample obtained from the dog within 30 days before export to Australia is tested using an indirect fluorescent antibody test (IFAT). A negative result at a dilution of 1:40 is required for a dog to be eligible for importation into Australia.

The IFAT is recognised as the most effective serological screening test for detecting immunoglobulinG antibodies that are produced following exposure to *E. canis*.

Following infection, the length of time that the organism is present in the plasma of an infected dog is short and variable. However persistent subclinical infection, in which *E. canis* sequesters in body organs outside the bloodstream, is a feature of canine ehrlichiosis.

A polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test is available and is typically used for detecting the presence of *E. canis* in the plasma in the early stages of clinical disease. The capacity of the PCR test to detect *E. canis* infection is limited by the short and variable time that the organism is present in the plasma of an infected dog.

From a biosecurity perspective the IFAT provides a much more reliable screening test for exposure to *E. canis* than detection of *E. canis* antigen by PCR. The PCR test is therefore not considered suitable for biosecurity screening purposes.

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Question: 22

Division/Agency: Biosecurity - Animal Division
Topic: Advice to Ms Armstrong about *E. canis* testing
Proof Hansard page: 32 (21/05/2012)

Senator ABETZ asked:

Senator ABETZ: That is fine. Can you take on notice whether anybody advised a Ms Armstrong that that would be a test that she could undertake for her canine—which is currently residing in Singapore, as I understand it—and whether, when that suggestion was made to her, she had the test done, it came back negative and she thought it was all good, only to be told, ‘Sorry, we don’t recognise that test.’ Can you see whether that occurred and, if so, what the department might do about that in the future; because to give people false hope about an alternative test—and I accept there may be another view that the department might express as to whether they made that suggestion but I will leave that with you.

Answer:

Ms Armstrong advised the department on 31 January 2012 that her dog had tested positive for *E. canis* using the Indirect Fluorescent Antibody (IFA) test. On 1 February 2012, Ms Armstrong was advised that her dog would be ineligible for import into Australia until it had tested negative for *E. canis* at a dilution of 1:40 using the IFA test.

Ms Armstrong subsequently advised the department on 22 March 2012 that she had undertaken a polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test on her dog and that the result was negative. Upon receiving the report, and confirming that a PCR test was used, the department advised Ms Armstrong that PCR tests are not acceptable for detecting the *E. canis* organism and that the dog would need to test negative at a dilution of 1:40 using the IFA test.

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has no record of ever advising Ms Armstrong, at any time, that a PCR test could be used to test her dog for *Ehrlichia canis* (*E. canis*). The department publishes details about the testing requirements for importing dogs on its website. Information packs are also provided to prospective importers that detail the acceptable tests for the diseases of concern.

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Question: 23

Division/Agency: Biosecurity - Animal Division

Topic: Countries approved for export of spray dried egg products

Proof Hansard page: 32 (21/05/2012)

Senator RHIANNON asked:

Dr A Cupit: It is impossible. Even for spray dried egg products we only have a select group of approved countries and there are only about five or six on that list.

Senator RHIANNON: What countries are those, please?

Dr A Cupit: Canada, the United States, Denmark, Belgium and France—although I would have to take that on notice to make sure that that is correct.

Answer:

Approved countries for the import of spray dried egg products are Canada, the United States of America, Denmark, Belgium and the Netherlands.

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Question: 24

Division/Agency: Biosecurity - Animal Division
Topic: Late notifications of change in circumstances
Proof Hansard page: 35 (21/05/2012)

Senator RHIANNON asked:

Mr Merrilees: What will likely happen when we conclude that investigation is that we will record, because of the late notification, a minor noncompliance due to a failure to meet the reporting timeline. But that would be a small part of the broader investigation.

Senator RHIANNON: How many days were they overdue, please?

Mr Merrilees: I would have to take that on notice, Senator.

Answer:

The exporter was two days overdue in notification.

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Question: 25

Division/Agency: Biosecurity - Animal Division

Topic: Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System (ESCAS) checklist criteria

Proof Hansard page: 44 (21/05/2012)

Senator BACK asked:

Senator BACK: That use their services. Am I correct in saying that I read there are around 130 criteria against which ESCAS comparisons are made?

Mr Merrilees: I think you are referring to the number of points in the checklist.

Senator BACK: That is correct.

Mr Merrilees: That checklist operationalises the OIE guidelines. I cannot confirm off the top of my head—

Senator BACK: Take it on notice. My understanding is that there are five criteria that have been assessed here. This particular abattoir, as I understand it, Mr Merrilees, has already moved, with this particular chain, to stunning; is that correct—or they are in a position to move to stunning immediately?

Answer:

There are 88 check points, divided into 6 sections, in the Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System Animal Welfare Performance Targets and Measurements checklist (available at www.daff.gov.au/aqis/export/live-animals/livestock).

The abattoir referred to in the question has been assessed for slaughter with stunning and was included in an approved supply chain on 10 June 2012.

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Question: 26

Division/Agency: Biosecurity - Animal Division

Topic: Applications for financial assistance packages to help industry meet Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System (ESCAS) requirements

Proof Hansard page: 46 (21/05/2012)

Senator BACK asked:

Ms Svarcas: There are two assistance packages available. The first one is a \$5 million program that was designed and developed with industry to provide assistance where they needed to invest in improving supply chains to meet the ESCAS requirements.

Senator BACK: Is that \$5 million or \$15 million?

Ms Svarcas: That one is a \$5 million program.

Senator BACK: Is that to be expended in this financial year or is it to carry over?

Ms Svarcas: That is over two financial years, concluding on 30 June next year.

Senator BACK: Is there any funding in addition to that \$5 million?

Ms Svarcas: There is a \$10 million program that comes from our official development assistance program. That program is designed to improve animal welfare outcomes in ODA eligible countries that we export animals to.

Senator BACK: Perhaps you could take this on notice for me: in both instances, the \$5 million and the \$10 million, how many applications have been received to date and what they represent. In the case of the \$5 million is there a set amount of money per exporter or per supply chain?

Ms Svarcas: I am happy to take that on notice.

Answer:

On 21 October 2011, the Australian Government, as part of the livestock export reforms, announced a \$5 million funding assistance package - the Approved Supply Chain Improvement Program (ASCIP) to support Australian livestock exporters in establishing supply chains in overseas markets.

Information on the ASCIP and applicable limits is available on the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry website at: www.daff.gov.au/animal-plant-health/welfare/export-trade/approved-supply-chain-improvements-program.

As at 22 June 2012, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry has received three applications seeking reimbursement under this program.

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Question: 27

Division/Agency: Biosecurity - Animal Division

Topic: Financial Assistance Packages

Proof Hansard page: 46 (21/05/2012)

Senator BACK asked:

Senator BACK: There is presumably a ceiling per exporter or per supply chain?

Ms Svarcas: Per supply chain for exporters.

Senator BACK: Could you let me know what that is? In terms of the importing countries, or importers now, could you also take on notice advice on just where they can spend those funds. Can they actually spend the money on upgrading their own supply chain?

Answer:

Information on the Approved Supply Chain Improvement Program (ASCIP) is available on the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry website at: www.daff.gov.au/animal-plant-health/welfare/export-trade/approved-supply-chain-improvements-program.

Please refer to the answer to QoN 26 Biosecurity Animal Division from Budget Estimates May 2012 for further information..

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Question: 28

Division/Agency: Biosecurity - Animal Division

Topic: Cost of Foot-and-Mouth Disease plan

Proof Hansard page: 48 (21/5/2012)

Senator NASH asked:

Ms Schneider: We have established an FMD task force in animal division. There are approximately six FTEs in that task force at the moment and they have been reallocated from other tasks.

Senator NASH: Would you mind taking on notice the exact cost of the plan.

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Senator NASH: If you would not mind, when you provide the costings, could you say exactly where those staff were redeployed from?

Answer:

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry's Foot-and-Mouth (FMD) program is delivered by the FMD Taskforce established on 1 December 2011. The Taskforce is comprised of 6 staff. Five of these staff were reallocated from their previous duties within the Biosecurity Strategy section of the Office of the Chief Veterinary Officer and one staff member returned from a period of leave without pay in December 2011. The ongoing work that was undertaken by these staff has been reallocated to other areas in Animal Division.

The cost of the department's FMD program for 2011–12 (Dec 1 – June 30) is \$1.8 million.

The FMD program budget for 2012–13 is expected to be \$1.8 million.

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Question: 34

Division/Agency: Biosecurity - Animal Division

Topic: Horse movements out of Sydney

Proof Hansard page: 61 (21/05/2012)

Senator NASH asked:

Senator NASH: It has been raised that most of the horses actually go to Sydney and north of Sydney. Have you got any quantum break-up—again, I am happy for you to take this on notice—of how many horses that arrive, on average, either go to Sydney or north of Sydney rather than south?

Ms Mellor: What we will have is who is importing it and how long it is staying at Eastern Creek and where the shuttle stallions, for example, go or the pets go—maybe not. But we will see what we can get.

Answer:

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry does not maintain data on the final destination of imported animals, including horses, once they have met quarantine standards and following release from post-arrival quarantine.

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Question: 55

Division/Agency: Biosecurity - Animal Division
Topic: Aquatic Animal Health Training Scheme
Proof Hansard page: 102-103 (21/05/2012)

Senator EDWARDS asked:

Senator EDWARDS: I would like to move to the Aquatic Animal Health Training Scheme. Given that the applications closed in April 2012 and the scheme is being touted to improve skills in aquatic animal health management and a lot of things in Australia's fishing and agriculture industry, and that the work is underway to expand the concept to other areas of biosecurity, how many applications had the department had for that at the end of April?

Ms Mellor: I would love to tell you the answer right now, but I will take that one on notice if you do not mind.

Senator EDWARDS: Yes, that is fine. Could you break that down by state and region?

Ms Mellor: Yes, that is not a problem.

Senator EDWARDS: In my home state, where aquaculture is a big issue, they cannot get people, education is a big issue for them and it is a highly technical area, so I am very keen to follow this one. What is the cost to the department and the participants? I will move on.

Answer:

The Aquatic Animal Health Training Scheme is jointly funded by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) and the Fisheries Research and Development Corporation (FRDC). The scheme commenced in 2010 with an investment of \$62,000 by DAFF and \$150,000 by the FRDC. DAFF invested an additional \$25,000 into the scheme in 2011. The scheme is terminating in 2012.

In the 2012 funding round there were six applications for funding: two from New South Wales (north coast, \$14 673; Sydney, \$10 000); two from Victoria (Melbourne, \$10 127; Geelong, \$3 300); one from Western Australia (Perth, \$7 251); and one from Queensland (Brisbane, \$3 000). The scheme is competitive and applications are assessed on merit. The applications from Melbourne, Perth and Sydney were successful in this round.

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Question: 56

Division/Agency: Biosecurity - Animal Division

Topic: Name of website launched to improve intelligence-gathering and analysis capacity

Proof Hansard page: 103 (21/05/2012)

Senator EDWARDS asked:

Senator EDWARDS: In my home state, where aquaculture is a big issue, they cannot get people, education is a big issue for them and it is a highly technical area, so I am very keen to follow this one. What is the cost to the department and the participants? I will move on.

In May 2011 there was a new online open-source website that was launched to dramatically improve intelligence-gathering and analysis capacity for aquatic animal health and it has been extended to terrestrial animal health and plant health. What do you call that? What is that program now? It has improved intelligence gathering. How are you promoting it?

Ms Mellor: I am not sure what the name of it is right now, but it is a quite detailed project that has a number of people feeding into it. I will come back to you on notice with that.

Senator EDWARDS: We could not find the name of it either.

Ms Mellor: No. It is an intelligence project and it escapes me at the moment, sorry. No, not my intelligence!

Senator EDWARDS: Given that it has dramatically improved intelligence gathering and analysis, we would just like to see what it is doing. If you could provide us with a brief on that, that would be good.

Ms Mellor: Yes.

Senator EDWARDS: Who is using it and how is it advertised and promoted? It is important, if it is doing these things.

Dr O'Connell: The people who can answer that have gone; they are the Animal Health people. But we know what it is, yes.

Answer:

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF), with researchers from the Australian Centre of Excellence in Risk Analysis (ACERA) has developed an innovative, online open source intelligence gathering and analysis tool called AquaticHealth.net.

The system searches internet sites worldwide and collates all information available on aquatic animal diseases and signals, such as market prices and changes in the aquaculture industry, that can give early warning of outbreaks occurring.

DAFF has used AquaticHealth.net to capture emerging disease information, analyse disease trends, map diseases, organise data, forecast disease events, provide biosecurity alerts, build biosecurity risk profiles and support responsive decision-making relating to imports and exports.

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The current registered user community for the aquatic site encompasses hundreds of aquatic animal health experts, government decision makers, veterinarians, fish farmers and seafood industry representatives from around the world.

AquaticHealth.net was launched at two international conferences in July and September in 2011, and at the Digital Disease Detection conference hosted by the HealthMap.org group, held at Harvard Medical School in Boston February 2012. ACERA manages the marketing and promotional activities related to the websites.

The technology from this research has been extended to plant and animal health. DAFF and ACERA are now developing PlantHealth.org and AnimalHealth.org.

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Question: 59

Division/Agency: Biosecurity - Animal Division

Topic: Departmental staff enrolled in Master of Veterinary Public Health (Emergency Animal Disease) course

Proof Hansard page: 104 (21/05/2012)

Senator EDWARDS asked:

Senator EDWARDS: But if you could clarify, that would be great. The new Master of Veterinary Public Health (Emergency Animal Diseases) course has been developed. What are the anticipated enrolment numbers there? You do not know?

Dr O'Connell: No. Our veterinary people have no—

Senator EDWARDS: No problem at all.

Dr Martin: It has only just started. There is another postgraduate course at Sydney university in veterinary public health, and that has good enrolments. Quite a number of veterinary staff from the department are doing that masters, but we can look to see what we can find for you.

Answer:

The University of Melbourne has extended the application deadline until 10 June 2012 for the new Master of Veterinary Public Health (Emergency Animal Diseases) course. The Course Selection Committee is presently processing the applications. It anticipates meeting its first class-size target of 5-10 students for Semester 2, 2012. This information was provided by University of Melbourne.

The established postgraduate course at Sydney University, the Master of Veterinary Public Health Management, has had the following enrolment numbers since 2007. Numbers are provided by the University of Sydney.

	2007		2008		2009		2010		2011
	Sem 1	Sem 2	Sem 1	Sem 2	Sem 1	Sem 2	Sem 1	Sem 2	Sem 1
Veterinary Public Health Management	40	37	35	46	36	33	36	33	35

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Question: 200

Division/Agency: Biosecurity - Animal Division

Topic: Animal welfare

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator COLBECK asked:

1. What is the estimated cost of investigations into animal welfare claims in the last 12 months?
2. Where in the budget are these costs allocated?
3. When claims are found to be without basis, is there a cost recovery process relating to those making the claims?
4. What arrangements are in place to stop animal welfare activists interfering with law abiding industry operations?

Answer:

1. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry undertakes investigations as part of normal activities and does not specifically record the cost of this activity.
2. The costs of investigations into animal welfare claims fall within the overheads of the program.
3. No.
4. Animal welfare activists are subject to the same range of Commonwealth, state and territory legislation that is applicable to other groups in the community who wish to protest.

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Question: 258

Division/Agency: Biosecurity - Animal Division

Topic: Weekly exports of small livestock (sheep and goats) to Malaysia

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator BACK asked:

Can the department explain why the costs would differ as much as \$400 per load of animals from shipment to shipment?

Answer:

The Export Control (Fees) Order 2001 sets the fee-for-service at \$101.25 per quarter hour for the export of livestock by air (or approximately \$400 per hour). Factors influencing the time spent include the number of animals, the type of inspection required, the efficiency of loading at the airport and the complexity of the paperwork.

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Question: 259

Division/Agency: Biosecurity - Animal Division

Topic: Details of inspections

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator BACK asked:

Why is the exporter compelled to employ a third party vet to inspect animals when the AQIS vet inspects the animals an hour later at the airport?

Answer:

The 2003 Keniry Livestock Export Review recommended that third-party veterinarians be accredited by the government for undertaking examinations, treatment, or testing of livestock under approved export programs. The then Howard government accepted this recommendation and developed legislation to give effect to this process under part 4A of the Export Control (Animals) Order 2004.

The 2011 Independent Review of Australia's Livestock Export Trade supported this existing third-party veterinarian system and recommended that it be supplemented by enhanced training and induction.

The roles and responsibilities of the third-party and government veterinarian are different as prescribed under Australian law.

The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry veterinarian's role is to inspect the loading process for each consignment and issue an export permit and health certificate.

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Question: 265

Division/Agency: Biosecurity - Animal Division

Topic: Joint Expert Technical Advisory Committee on Antibiotic Resistance

Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator Di NATALE asked:

The Department initiated the Pilot Surveillance Program for Antimicrobial resistance in Bacteria of Animal Origin in 2007 as part of the response to Recommendation 10 of the report of the Joint Expert Technical Advisory Committee on Antibiotic Resistance. This was described as a pilot to provide baseline information for the period from November 2003 to July 2004 against which similar future surveillance activities in Australia could be compared.

The Department also committed to a “formal evaluation”.

1. Please outline any other surveillance programs which have occurred since then (if any) and provide details of these programs.
2. Please produce the results of these surveillance programs.
3. Please produce the formal evaluation referred to.

Answer:

1. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) has not commissioned any similar programs since then.

In 2007, the Food Regulation Standing Committee (FRSC) commissioned a pilot survey to detect antibiotic resistance in a range of bacteria isolated from select foods. The project was funded by the Australian, state and territory governments. The Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing managed the survey on behalf of FRSC. The FRSC report titled Pilot Survey for Antimicrobial Resistant (AMR) Bacteria in Australian Food was released in 2009.

2. In the FRSC Pilot Survey for Antimicrobial Resistant (AMR) Bacteria in Australian Food, testing of bacteria isolated from foods indicated that overall resistance to the majority of antibiotics was low. When compared with reports from other countries, Australia was found to have a very low prevalence of bacteria that are resistant to antibiotics on these foods, particularly those antibiotics “critically important” for human medicine. The full FRSC report can be found on the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing website:
www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/foodsecretariat-standing-priority-list.
3. The planned formal evaluation of the 2007 DAFF Pilot Surveillance Program has not been undertaken.

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Question: 305

Division/Agency: Biosecurity - Animal Division
Topic: Australian Action on Live Exports website
Proof Hansard page: Written

Senator NASH asked:

On the Australian Action on Live Exports website it states there was \$5 million to support exporters to improve supply chains and comply with the new Australian Livestock Exporter Supply Chain Assurance System. Has that funding been accounted for in the current budget?

Answer:

The \$5 million Approved Supply Chain Improvement Program has been appropriated under the “Live Animal Exports – Business Assistance” budget measure in the Portfolio Additional Estimates Statements 2011–12.