



Australian Government

Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

ACTING SECRETARY

24 November, 2005

Ms Roxanne Le Guen
Secretary
Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Don Banfield

In the course of reviewing comments made by officers of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry during the Supplementary Budget Estimates hearings conducted by the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee on 1 November 2005, it has been determined that several of the answers provided were not accurate in relation to the specific questions asked.

I would like to note that these errors occurred through not having precise details to hand at the hearing and attempting to answer the Committee's questions, in good faith, from memory. We have since had the opportunity to check the answers provided at the hearings and the following pages present our corrections and/or further information for the consideration of the Committee.

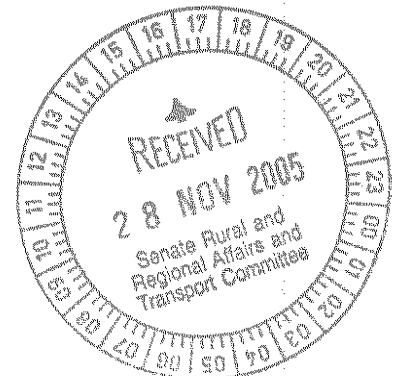
In all cases, where incorrect or incomplete information was supplied at the hearings we sincerely apologise for any misunderstanding that may have arisen as a result. It would be appreciated if these corrections could be brought to the attention of the members of the Committee.

If you have any queries on this matter please contact Ms Nicola Hinder, General Manager, Parliamentary and Media on 6272 5590.

Yours sincerely

Don Banfield

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Corrections for the consideration of the Committee as follows:

In answering Senator Heffernan's question (Hansard page 70; 1 November 2005):

Chair—Have you seen it? One of the problems with citrus canker was that no-one knew what they were looking for. Do you know what it is?

Ms Ransom answered:

Ms Ransom—Yes.

Ms Ransom wishes to clarify to the committee that she has only seen photographs of Eucalyptus rust. Ms Ransom apologises if this has in any way been misleading to the committee as this was not her intention.

In answering Senator Heffernan's question (Hansard page 72; 1 November 2005):

Senator Heffernan —What is the test over there; is it individual testing?

Dr Clegg answered:

Dr Clegg— They are tested for Newcastle disease antibodies individually. Samples are collected from all birds and then pooled to test for hemagglutinating viruses and agents.

Dr Clegg wishes to advise the committee that the answer was incomplete.

Blood and cloacal swab samples are collected from each bird then pooled to test for Newcastle disease antibodies (blood samples) and Newcastle disease virus (cloacal swabs). If a pool of samples under test for Newcastle disease antibodies is positive, the birds in that pool are re-sampled and tested individually to determine which birds in the pool are positive for antibodies and which are negative. The positive birds are excluded from the consignment; the negative birds continue preparation for export. If a pool of samples under test for Newcastle disease viruses, avian influenza viruses and other haemagglutinating agents is positive, the entire consignment is immediately ineligible for export.

Dr Clegg apologises if this has in any way been misleading to the committee as this was not her intention.

In answering Senator O'Brien's question (Hansard page 72; 1 November 2005):

Senator O'Brien—The section I am reading, if I am correct, says that a government vet certifies that the country of export is free from avian influenza, Newcastle disease and paramyxovirus then testing is not required. Is that right? What is the test over there; is it individual testing?

Dr Clegg answered:

Dr Clegg—That is right. That is testing for Newcastle disease antibodies and also for avian influenza.

Senator O'Brien- Antibodies or the disease ?

Dr Clegg answered:

Dr Clegg—No, avian influenza virus.

Dr Clegg wishes to advise the committee that the answer was incomplete; the testing is for Newcastle disease antibodies and virus, and for avian influenza virus.

Dr Clegg apologises if this has in any way been misleading to the committee as this was not her intention.

In answering Senator O'Brien's question (Hansard page 72; 1 November 2005):

Senator O'Brien— Why the difference between the antibodies in one case and the virus in the other?

Dr Clegg answered:

Dr Clegg— In the other?

Senator O'Brien- Yes, why the difference?

Dr Clegg answered:

Dr Clegg—We are looking also for animals that may have been vaccinated. You might have a vaccinated population of birds and we do not want birds coming in that have been vaccinated.

Dr Clegg wishes to advise the committee that the answer was incomplete; while her answer explained why the protocol requires testing for Newcastle disease antibodies it did not address the difference in testing requirements for Newcastle disease and avian influenza viruses.

With respect to the testing for viruses, there is no difference in testing. The protocol requires testing for both avian influenza and Newcastle disease viruses. Dr Clegg incorrectly informed Senator O'Brien in response to his previous question that the only virus testing undertaken prior to export was for avian influenza viruses.

Dr Clegg apologises if this has in any way been misleading to the committee as this was not her intention.

In answering Senator Heffernan's questions (Hansard page 86; 1 November 2005):

Senator Heffernan —Going back to my earlier question is it possible logistically to have meat imported into New Zealand from another country that we do not accept it from and then for that meat to turn up in Australia without cheating the system?

Dr Clegg answered:

Dr Clegg—You would have to be cheating the system. To bring in consignments of meat from New Zealand you need official veterinary certification from New Zealand MAFF that it is of New Zealand origin. You need to be able to demonstrate that.

Senator Heffernan. —The reason I ask that—and I may have raised this before—is that we used to have a problem with fortified soft drinks, one of those Poweraid type things, which you could not manufacture here but you could bring them in from New Zealand. They were bringing them in from somewhere else. But you cannot do that with meat — the meat has to be grown in New Zealand?

Dr Clegg answered:

Dr Clegg —Yes.

Senator Heffernan —Not like those Raptis prawns that have on the packet “Manufactured in Australia” and they are actually from Indonesia?

Dr Clegg answered:

Dr Clegg —You have to have the official government veterinary certification. So if you were able to forge that—

Dr Clegg wishes to advise the committee that the answers given referred to New Zealand meat from cattle, pigs or poultry. For these species, to clear the border, official New Zealand government certification as to the origin of the meat is required. Meat from other animals (for example deer, possum, sheep) may be imported from New Zealand with either official New Zealand government certification or a manufacturer's declaration that the meat is of New Zealand origin.

Dr Clegg apologises if this has in any way been misleading to the committee as this was not her intention.

In answering Senator Milne's question (Hansard page 95, 1 November 2005):

Senator Milne—With your work in relation to climate change, I noted that most of it seems to be looking at climate change from the point of view of incremental change rather than a threshold and step approach. Is that a fair comment, or are you looking at it from both perspectives?

Dr Grant answered:

Dr Grant—In terms of climate change, we are looking at—and we are not the premier climate change group in Australia—the implications for agriculture in terms of variability of climate. Farmers tell us that the interesting issue for them, and what they most need to understand, is what the variability is within season. If we can project it out a few years, that helps; but 20 and 30 years is not generally within their scope of consideration. Having said that, I should also say that essentially the sort of stuff we do is to try and develop tools to allow them to make decisions on risk associated with variable climate as it happens. For example, we are developing a tool called the national agricultural monitoring system, which assists to pull together information on the what-ifs—what if rainfall dips; what if the soil moisture drops; what does that mean?—and project it out about 13 or so weeks. We can do that in a reasonably good fashion, and that is a tool that they can use. But, in terms of climate modelling, we are not the organisation responsible for climate modelling.

Dr Grant wishes to advise the committee that while he referred to the tool described above as the 'national agricultural monitoring system, its correct title is the 'Rainfall to Pasture Growth Outlook Tool'. Dr Grant apologises if this has in any way been misleading to the committee as this was not his intention.
