

Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee
Answers to questions on notice
Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities portfolio
Additional Budget Estimates, February 2012

Program: Division or Agency: 1.1: Parks **Question No:** 016

Topic: Australian National Botanic Gardens
Non-Potable Pipeline project

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written
or Written Question:

Senator Joyce asked:

1. How much did the Australian government contribute to the Australian National Botanic Gardens Non-Potable Pipeline Project? How much did the project cost in total?

Answer:

1. The Australian Government contributed all the funding for this project. The total cost was \$2,953,622.

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Program: Division or Agency:	1.1: Parks	Question No:	017
Topic:	Christmas Island oil spill and shipwreck – allocation of funding		
Proof Hansard Page and Date	93-94		
or Written Question:	(13/2/12)		

Senator Siewert asked:

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Senator SIEWERT: I want to talk about the oil spill and the shipwreck at Christmas Island. Could you tell me where we are up to with environmental impact assessment and how much money has been committed to the assessment process or any clean-up process?

Mr Cochrane: I can answer the first question but not the next two. So far, the environmental impact of the foundering of that ship has been minimal. However, that is qualified by the fact that only limited surveys have been done. It is a very preliminary assessment. It is only just until recently that the large swells in the Flying Fish Cove have started to abate. Scientists have been up there from a few days after the shipwreck and, as they can, they have undertaken surveys of the reef and the fish populations in Flying Fish Cove. Their preliminary reports suggest there has been no impact at this stage.

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Senator SIEWERT: Mr Cochrane, you said you could not answer my second and third questions around allocation of funding. I want to go back to them and ask why you cannot answer them.

Mr Cochrane: Primarily because the issues of insurance have not yet been sorted out. From our perspective, we have been accounting for all our activities and expenditure. We anticipate that they will be claimable against an insurer when that is sorted. But that is a question for AMSA.

Senator SIEWERT: How much have you spent to date, or do you need to take that on notice?

Mr Cochrane: I would have to take that on notice.

Answer:

As at 28 February 2012, Christmas Island National Park has accounted for a total of \$18,893 in staff time and resource costs in supporting the response to the foundering of the MV Tycoon.

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Program: Division or Agency:	1.1: Parks	Question No:	018
Topic:	Christmas Island oil spill and shipwreck – Monitoring of impacts		
Proof Hansard Page and Date	93		
or Written Question:	(13/2/12)		

Senator Siewert asked:

Senator SIEWERT: How many scientists have been up there and what work has been undertaken?

Mr Cochrane: I would have to take that on notice.

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Mr Cochrane: I have this information: Dr Jean-Paul Hobbs from the University of Western Australia has resurveyed some of his sites in the last couple of weeks.

Senator SIEWERT: How many? I am trying to find out the extent of the monitoring that has been done and long-term monitoring.

Mr Cochrane: He has looked at Ethel Beach and Ryan's Ravine on the east coast. There was no obvious immediate impact on habitats or fish species there or at sites surveyed in Flying Fish Cove.

Senator SIEWERT: Sorry, all sites have been surveyed?

Mr Cochrane: Not all sites. They are the sites that he was able to get to.

Senator SIEWERT: Do we know how many that is?

Mr Cochrane: No. I would have to take that on notice.

Answer:

Due to unfavourable weather conditions preliminary fieldwork by Dr Jean-Paul Hobbs from the University of Western Australia in January was restricted to 3 of the 10 monitoring sites around the Island. This included one impact site on the west side of Flyingfish Cove (the area immediately to the west of the jetty) and two control sites on the northeast coast (Ethel Beach and Ryan's Ravine).

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Program: Division or Agency: 1.1: Parks **Question No:** 019

Topic: Current conservation status of lizard species on Christmas Island

Proof Hansard Page and Date Written

or Written Question:

Senator Waters asked:

1. What is the current conservation status of the following lizard species on Christmas Island:
 - a. Coastal skink (*Emoia atrocostata*)
 - b. Forest skink (*Emoia nativitatis*)
 - c. Blue-tailed skink (*Cryptoblepharus egeriae*)
 - d. Lister's gecko (*Leipodactylus listeri*)
2. What is the known or estimated size of the wild populations for each of these species?
3. Was there evidence indicating a major decline in these species by 2009, the year in which Christmas Island pipistrelle became extinct?
4. What is the likelihood of these species going extinct in the near future?
5. What budget has been allocated specifically for their conservation?
6. What management actions are being taken to conserve them? Under what management plan have these actions been taken?
7. Does the Australian Government have reptile experts stationed on the island to manage their conservation?
8. Why are these species not listed under the EPBC Act as threatened species?

Answer:

- 1a. Protected in Commonwealth Areas on Christmas Island under Part 9 of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Regulations 2000 (EPBC Regulations 2000); and within Christmas Island National Park under section 354 of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (the EPBC Act).
- b. Protected in Commonwealth Areas on Christmas Island under Part 9 of the EPBC Regulations 2000; and within Christmas Island National Park under section 354 of the EPBC Act.
- c. Protected in Commonwealth Areas on Christmas Island under Part 9 of the EPBC Regulations 2000; and within Christmas Island National Park under section 354 of the EPBC Act.
- d. Listed as a threatened species in the vulnerable category for the EPBC Act and is protected under section 196 of the EPBC Act.

2. Coastal Skink: The actual population is effectively unknown. Observation records indicate they were last seen in the wild in 2009.

The species does exist in other tropical parts of Australia (e.g. Cape York) and in South East Asia (Indonesia, Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia) and western Pacific (e.g. Solomon Islands).

Forest Skink: The actual population is effectively unknown. Observation records indicate they were last seen in the wild February 2011.

Blue-tailed Skink: The actual population is effectively unknown. Observation records indicate they were last seen in the wild June 2010.

Lister's Gecko: The actual population is effectively unknown. There is a small number of populations known to occur at Egeria Point, Christmas Island. Since the recorded observation of living specimens in 1987, individuals have been sighted in October 2009 and September 2011 through systematic spotlighting.

3. Yes. A decline has been noticed since the early 2000s. A captive breeding program was instigated in 2009.
4. The Christmas Island Expert Working Group report states that endemic reptile species are at risk of extinction in the short to medium term.
5. The budget allocated includes three components: \$50,000 per year over three years for a position to manage the captive breeding program on Christmas Island; \$50,000 per year for five years for captive breeding by Taronga Park Zoo; and a dedicated reptile breeding enclosure is to be built at The Pink House, Christmas Island as part of a \$500,000 general upgrade at this location.
6. Captive breeding programs for three of the species (Forest Skink, Blue-tailed Skink and Lister's Gecko) have been initiated; management of invasive species (eg cats, yellow crazy ants, wolfsnakes, giant centipedes etc) is being implemented and/or researched; surveys and monitoring of areas to ascertain status of populations of the reptiles continue.

Lister's Gecko has a current recovery plan: The National Recovery Plan for Lister's Gecko (*Lepidodactylus listeri*).

7. Although there are none currently stationed on Christmas Island, reptile experts have been appointed to The Christmas Island Reptile Advisory Panel, and are involved through the Taronga Park Zoo captive breeding program.
8. Lister's Gecko (*Lepidodactylus listeri*) is listed as vulnerable under the EPBC Act. A nomination has been submitted for changing the category of a native species in the list of threatened species under the EPBC Act for Lister's Gecko (*Lepidodactylus listeri*), from vulnerable to the critically endangered category. Nominations for adding native species in the list of threatened species under the EPBC Act have been submitted for the Blue-tailed Skink (*Cryptoblepharus egeriae*), Forest Skink (*Emoia nativitatis*) and Coastal Skink (*Emoia atrocostata*).

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Program: Division or Agency: 1.1: Parks **Question No:** 020
Topic: Carbon Farming – Henbury Station
Proof Hansard Page and Date Written
or Written Question:

Senator Colbeck asked:

1. Papers obtained from the NT government estimate there will be a \$327,000 benefit under the Carbon price of taking the cattle off Henbury Station and a \$78 million annual benefit from increased carbon storage from vegetation growth given that no baseline has been recorded for the current level of carbon storage on Henbury Station and given carbon in conservation areas is currently not counted in national greenhouse inventories are these figures realistic?
2. Is the Commonwealth aware of these calculations? If the commonwealth were aware of these figures was it prudent to give the private company \$9 million for the purchase when they were going to make such a windfall.
3. Given the Government in its press release said that Henbury station would lead the way in Carbon farming what calculations or estimations did the government use to justify this assertion in the Press Release?
4. During the last senate estimates Senate Environment and Legislation committee hearing on Monday 17 October the Environment Department (page 150 of the committee Hansard) Mr Cochrane states that whether the station qualifies for the CFI is not their problem and that RM Williams bears the risk. Why then did Minister Burke in his press release say this project would lead the way in Carbon Farming?

Answer:

1. The department is unaware of this assessment and is unable to comment on the underlying assumptions or accuracy of the estimated benefits.
2. Australian Government funding through the National Reserve System component of the Caring for our Country program was provided to ensure that the significant biodiversity and conservation values of Henbury Station are protected for the long term. As with all purchases for the National Reserve System, it is the responsibility of the property owner to support the ongoing environmental management of the property. Property owner, RM Williams Agricultural Holdings, is seeking to fund these conservation activities through generating carbon credits.

3-4. The Henbury Conservation Project is a “learning by doing” project which aims to demonstrate that significant carbon can be sequestered through managing land for nature conservation. In addition to the long-term conservation benefits, the project is exploring a new model for pastoralists and others to earn alternative income and provide further options to enhance sustainability and profitability for land owners. R.M. Williams is working with respected scientists, the Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency and other stakeholders to develop a new methodology to generate carbon credits across Australian rangelands. This methodology must be approved by the Domestic Offsets Integrity Commission. Information on the project methodologies will be made publically available over the life of the project so that other land holders may consider a similar approach to developing an alternate income stream.