

Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE Supplementary Budget Estimates 2013-2014

Agency - Australian Research Council

Department of Education Question No. ED0170_14

Senator Ruston asked on 20 November 2013 , Hansard page 42

Question

ARC - research project funding

Senator RUSTON: Following on from my questioning before, which I think Senator Wright also asked a little bit about: have you done any quantification, or do you have any idea, about whether in the different areas that you fund in your programs you get a better return—and I know it is difficult to quantify return on investments in this sort of area, but you obviously have to assess it in some way—for particular areas, types of projects? For instance, do you do better at the post-graduate level, the subsequent levels of people's careers or research paths? Is there a particular point at which you can say, 'If we fund research projects that are centred around people who have already undertaken X amount of years of research in a particular area, we are likely to get a better bang for our buck than we would if we fund someone who is in a less mature stage of their research career'? Prof. Byrne: Again, that is a really good but tricky question, unfortunately. We are an agency that funds, as I said, across all disciplines and at all levels—and all levels are important. Although we do not fund graduate students, they get supported off our grants. Early post-docs definitely get supported by us, directly and indirectly. Researchers at all stages of their careers get supported. That is actually important. If you have to pick winners and Pg. 43 say, 'Let's focus on this particular group rather than that one', that is very difficult to do because you have to do this nurturing at the early stages and you have to do the support at the later stages. A system that tries to emphasise one at the expense of the others is likely to have failures. So one of the very delicate balancing acts that we do have is that we have tried to get a balance across all stages of careers. This is a dilemma faced not just by us but by every funding agency in the world. I think every funding agency would have this aspiration to support research across all of that space in terms of careers of researchers, and the outcomes you get are going to be different. Again, I don't want to dwell on the science prizes, but they were good instances. There were two instances there where support at quite early stages was quite crucial for the two winners of those prizes. I have a bias, in a way—a personal one, not an agency one, I should say, based on my experience of working in universities—and think it is really important to try and nurture the young talent in the system. Senator RUSTON: Yes. I suppose that goes to the very fundamental basis of education. I have to ask this because my great passion is the Murray River. With respect to the whole analysis of the Murray-Darling Basin—and there was quite a lot of debate last year about the fact that we looked at the environmental aspects of that particular project more so than at the economic and social aspects of it—were you involved in any way in the research— Prof. Byrne: I would be happy to take that on notice, if I may. Again, I do not remember every single grant that we fund—but, looking through the successful grants for this year, there are a number on issues like salinity and the effect it has on communities. I know there have been a number looking at that area—certainly in applications. Whether we funded them well, I don't

remember. Senator RUSTON: I hope you did. Prof. Byrne: We can certainly dig out that information and provide it to the committee. Senator RUSTON: That would be great. CHAIR: You can take it on notice.

Answer

The Australian Research Council provided the following response.

The ARC has funded the projects below (identified using a keyword search) commencing in the years 2010 to 2014 involving research directly and indirectly related to the Murray-Darling Basin.

The ARC is unable to identify if any of these research projects were used to inform the inquiry into the management of the Murray-Darling Basin conducted by the Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport References Committee.

Proposal ID	Scheme	Administering organisation	Start year	Total funding awarded	Project title
LP100200409	Linkage Projects	The Flinders University of South Australia	2010	\$405,000	Restoration genetics of five endangered fish species from the Murray-Darling Basin
DP1094869	Discovery Projects	University of South Australia	2010	\$226,000	Negotiating a space in the nation: the case of Ngarrindjeri
FS100100054	Super Science Fellowships	The University of New South Wales	2010	\$835,200	Precipitation-groundwater interactions over eastern Australia: climate change impacts at multiple scales
LP100100215	Linkage Projects	The University of Adelaide	2010	\$145,000	Establishing baseline ecological conditions for the Lower Lakes, South Australia: the applications of palaeoecology to sustainable resource management
LP100100567	Linkage Projects	The Australian National University	2010	\$618,004	Climate variability, water allocation and land use change impacts on surface-groundwater interactions and salinity discharge
LP100100756	Linkage Projects	The University of Melbourne	2010	\$240,000	Narrowing the scatter and assessing the uncertainty of climate change projections of Australian river flows
LP100100890	Linkage Projects	University of South Australia	2010	\$162,663	People, Pumps and Pipes: A social study of change in the collaborative supply of irrigation services
LP100200665	Linkage Projects	The University of Newcastle	2010	\$185,000	An integrated modelling approach for efficient management of irrigated landscapes
LP110200211	Linkage Projects	The University of Melbourne	2011	\$91,000	Assessing the impact of habitat restoration on the rates of recovery of four native fish species using advanced statistical models
LP120200117	Linkage Projects	University of Technology, Sydney	2012	\$313,975	Talking fish: researching oral history and local knowledge in building community participation in Murray-Darling Basin river rehabilitation
DP120102917	Discovery Projects	The University of Melbourne	2012	\$240,000	Understanding cultural and ecological triggers for policies against water catchment degradation

Proposal ID	Scheme	Administering organisation	Start year	Total funding awarded	Project title
FT130101145	ARC Future Fellowships	Griffith University	2013	\$807,410	Recasting solutions to the Murray-Darling Basin crisis: recognising and valuing the role of Indigenous people
LP130100676	Linkage Projects	Monash University	2013	\$150,000	Social sustainability in dairying communities impacted by the Murray-Darling Basin Plan
DP140100835	Discovery Projects	University of Technology, Sydney	2014	\$155,709	Developing an innovative high performance thin-film composite membrane using functionalized nanofibrous support layers for engineered osmosis
DP140103946	Discovery Projects	University of South Australia	2014	\$172,000	Transitioning to a water-secure future in the Basin