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SENATE

RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT
LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

**Financial Framework (Supplementary Powers) Amendment (Agriculture,
Water and the Environment Measures No. 1) Regulations 2021 [F2021L00288]**

MONDAY, 2 AUGUST 2021

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SENATE

RURAL AND REGIONAL AFFAIRS AND TRANSPORT LEGISLATION COMMITTEE

Monday, 2 August 2021

Members in attendance: Senators Antic, Davey, McDonald, Sterle.

WITNESSES

DERHAM, Dr Peta, Assistant Secretary, Healthy Rivers Branch, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment [by video link] 1

DERHAM, Dr Peta, Assistant Secretary, Healthy Rivers Branch, Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment [by video link]**Committee met at 16:05**

CHAIR (Senator McDonald): I declare open this public hearing of the Senate Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport Legislation Committee. The committee is examining the Financial Framework (Supplementary Powers) Amendment (Agriculture, Water and the Environment Measures No. 1) Regulations 2021. I welcome all of you here today. This is a public hearing and a Hansard transcript of the proceedings is being made. Before the committee starts taking evidence, I remind all witnesses that in giving evidence they are protected by parliamentary privilege. It is unlawful for anyone to threaten or disadvantage a witness on account of evidence given to a committee, and such action may be treated by the Senate as a contempt. It is also a contempt to give false or misleading evidence to a committee. The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public, but under the Senate's resolution witnesses have the right to request to be heard in private session. It is important that witnesses give the committee notice that they intend to ask to give evidence in camera. I remind senators that the Senate has resolved that an officer of a department of the Commonwealth or of a state shall not be asked to give opinions on matters of policy and shall be given reasonable opportunity to refer questions asked of the officer to superior officers or to a minister. This resolution prohibits only questions asking for opinions on matters of policy and does not preclude questions asking for explanations of policy or factual questions about when and how policies were adopted. Officers are also reminded that any claim that it would be contrary to the public interest to answer a questions must be made by a minister and should be accompanied by a statement setting out the basis for the claim. If a witness other than a public servant objects to answering a question, the witness should state the grounds on which the objection is taken. The committee will determine whether it will insist on an answer, having regard to the grounds that are claimed. If the committee determines to insist on an answer, the witness may request that the answer be given in camera. Such a request may of course also may be made at any other time.

I now welcome Dr Peta Derham. I invite you to make a brief opening statement before the committee asks questions. Do you wish to make an opening statement?

Dr Derham: No, I don't.

Senator STERLE: Can you tell us how this instrument came about?

Dr Derham: Off the back of Minister Pitt's announcement on 4 September 2020, some of the initiatives that were announced as part of that package included an opportunity for community based grants to be issued for the health of our rivers and wetlands. As a result, this instrument is giving effect to that announcement.

Senator STERLE: Will any water be recovered for the environment through this program?

Dr Derham: I think we have provided written advice in relation to this question previously from questions on notice in the Senate hearing, but I can confirm that there will be no entitlements acquired for the environment from this program.

Senator STERLE: Could you tell us why not?

Dr Derham: This program is oriented at providing on-ground works, measures and opportunities for community members to participate in improving the health of the river and the wetland environment that surrounds them and is adjacent to their properties. It's an opportunity for the community to become involved in improving the health of the environment around them.

Senator STERLE: How were groups or individuals notified of this grants program?

Dr Derham: This particular grant was announced in early March, advising the community of their ability to make a submission. That was made by public announcement by Minister Pitt, Minister Ley and Senator Davey. In addition to that, and prior to that announcement, community representatives were afforded the opportunity to provide advice in terms of the design of this particular program. That ran from December 2020 through to January 2021. The advice that they provided on how to design this program was taken into consideration as the guidelines were established for this particular initiative.

Senator STERLE: Were there organisations? Were there adverts in the newspaper? Were there letters written? How were they notified?

Dr Derham: It was advertised in papers. Over 280 individuals and organisations were emailed with the details to participate.

Senator STERLE: Advertisements and email. Were MPs or senators notified of this grants program?

Dr Derham: That's a matter for the minister's office. All I am aware of is that we had the initiative to seek public input around the design of the program, and we have done that in good faith.

Senator STERLE: Doctor, just to make that clear for me—I don't play games—when I ask 'were they notified' do you know whether they were or weren't?

Dr Derham: I'm unaware.

Senator STERLE: Okay. That's a lot easier. Was anyone else in the department aware? Are you on your own?

Dr Derham: I'm on my own, Senator. I cannot answer that question. I'm not aware.

Senator STERLE: I'll you what I'll ask you to do—I don't do this very often, so I'm making myself vomit here. I'll ask you to take that on notice. I hate anything being taken on notice. If you could go back to your department and ask if anyone else through the department would be able to tell me if senators or MPs were notified of the grants program.

Dr Derham: I'm happy to take that on notice.

Senator STERLE: Thank you. While you're at it, and I'm happy to put this on notice if I have to too, could you tell me if the MPs or senators were provided with any materials to notify their community about the grants program? Is that one to be taken on notice as well?

Dr Derham: I can advise that some media material was provided to some ministers as part of promoting that community feedback, but I can provide that information to you on notice.

Senator STERLE: That was to ministers?

Dr Derham: Yes. For example, Damian Drum provided some media releases that helped encourage the community to get involved in this particular program and its design.

Senator STERLE: You must forgive my ignorance here: is Mr Drum a minister?

Dr Derham: Not currently, Senator.

Senator STERLE: Okay. So am I right to assume that there were other MPs or senators who were also advised or provided with media material?

Dr Derham: We'll certainly provide that detail to you on notice, Senator, as requested.

Senator STERLE: Chair, what date are we setting aside for answers to questions taken on notice? Tomorrow?

CHAIR: We normally say 14 days. I'll ask the secretariat to provide confirmation of that.

Senator STERLE: Alright. Dr Derham, if there were senators, members or ministers provided with media materials or whatever for notifying the community, could you provide who and on what dates they were notified, please?

Dr Derham: Certainly.

Senator STERLE: Have successful participants been selected?

Dr Derham: Minister Pitt on, I think, 29 July announced a number of successful applicants under the first round of this grant.

Senator STERLE: And that's public knowledge?

Dr Derham: The successful applicants are available on the Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment's website. That was made publicly available through a media release.

Senator STERLE: That's good. Thank you. Could you tell me how they were selected?

Dr Derham: Yes. The guidelines associated with this particular grant set out that process. We worked very closely with the Community Grants Hub in the administration of this particular program. Naturally, the Community Grants Hub undertook an initial assessment of all of the submissions that were put forward. An independent selection advisory panel was also established, for which I was the chair. We met quite regularly, and we vigorously went through the submissions that were put forward. On the advice of the Community Grants Hub and the selection panel, a brief was put forward to Minister Pitt, who was the decision-maker under the guidelines and under the Community Grants Hub advisory protocols. As a result of that, Minister Pitt was able to make decisions on the successful applicants.

Senator STERLE: That's good. So the Community Grants Hub—we know who that is or what's that all about? Is that public information?

Dr Derham: It most definitely is. Their guidelines are available on the website as well.

Senator STERLE: Tremendous. Who else was on the independent advisory panel that you said you chaired?

Dr Derham: The panel was made up of six members, of which I was the chair. Also joining me on that panel were Emma Bradbury, Gabrielle Coupland, Phil Duncan, Rachel Kelly and Michelle Hobbs.

Senator STERLE: And that information is publicly available?

Dr Derham: No, it's not.

Senator STERLE: Could you provide to the committee not only the members but their backgrounds, who they actually are and why they were chosen to be on the independent advisory panel, please?

Dr Derham: I'll take that on notice, Senator.

Senator STERLE: Sure. No worries. How many applicants have we had so far?

Dr Derham: We had, I'm going to say, 93 submissions. Of those submissions, 74 were recommended to Minister Pitt for his consideration and approval.

Senator STERLE: Is that list still on the minister's desk, or have they been given the grant?

Dr Derham: No-one's been given a grant yet, Senator. What I can tell you, as I mentioned just before, is that 73 of those 74 applications that were put forward as recommended for approval were announced by Minister Pitt on 29 July as being successful.

Senator STERLE: So they know who they are? That's good. Is that public information?

Dr Derham: That information on the successful candidates is available on the department's website.

Senator STERLE: Great. Thank you. It will be on the website but, if possible, could you provide me with what electorates those successful recipients are in?

Dr Derham: What I can provide you with is some regional information, so the location of the successful applicants. I can provide you with that information. How you choose to analyse that, I'll leave to you.

Senator STERLE: That's fine. So that information you provide me will be their home town, their home region or home area?

Dr Derham: That's correct. The town for which the application is being granted. That information is on our website currently.

Senator STERLE: Good. Thanks. Are there grant guidelines for this fund?

Dr Derham: Yes, there are, and they are publicly available.

Senator STERLE: Tremendous. Were they circulated for consultation?

Dr Derham: Yes, they were.

Senator STERLE: And when they were circulated is publicly available?

Dr Derham: Yes, as well as the feedback that was received on those guidelines and the changes that were made in response to that feedback, and that's publicly available on our website.

Senator STERLE: Tremendous. And what about when they occurred? Is that available on the website as well?

Dr Derham: Yes, and I'm just checking if I can find the actual date of that for you now to save you looking that up yourself. Just bear with me, Senator, sorry. I'm not as organised as I thought I was.

Senator STERLE: You're a lot more organised than previous departments I was questioning this morning, so well done, Doctor. You've got a big tick from me so far—whatever that's worth!

Dr Derham: Thank you, Senator. Consultation on the program design, including the draft guidelines, was conducted between 18 December 2020 and 22 January 2021.

Senator STERLE: Beautiful. Thank you very much. Doctor, were guidelines provided to Finance for their advice?

Dr Derham: Part of the process in working with the Community Grants Hub is that we worked with them and through them to ensure that the central agencies were able to see and endorse those guidelines as they were developed.

Senator STERLE: Sorry, I'm a bit blank there. So did Finance—

Dr Derham: Yes, Senator.

Senator STERLE: They were. Good. And could you tell us when they were provided to Finance?

Dr Derham: I'll have to take that on notice to give you an exact date, but it was certainly done as part of our arrangements with the Community Grants Hub, so well and truly before they were finalised.

Senator STERLE: Good, thanks. Could you let us know how eligibility has been determined.

Dr Derham: The Community Grants Hub and the policy approval that we were seeking sets out quite clearly the range of eligibility associated with this particular grant. You might find a useful summary as part of the explanatory statement associated with the regulation that we're here to talk about today. As such, the guidance provided in that regulatory statement also was reflected in the guidelines that were set forward.

Senator STERLE: Right. You were chair of the advisory group, but you did say to me that the final decision-maker for the grants is the minister, isn't it?

Dr Derham: That's correct, as provided by written response to previous questions on notice from you.

Senator STERLE: Good. Thank you. I haven't had the pleasure of reading them yet; I've had too much fun doing other things. Sorry about that, Doctor.

Dr Derham: That's okay. I'm here to help.

Senator STERLE: Fantastic. When were the recipients first able to apply for grants?

Dr Derham: The first round of the grant opened on 3 March this year.

Senator STERLE: Great. It seems so long ago, doesn't it?

Dr Derham: It does, unfortunately. Here we are in August.

Senator STERLE: Now the tricky question: when will grants be paid to the recipients?

Dr Derham: We're currently working through the contractual arrangements through the Community Grants Hub at the moment. That's an activity in progress as we speak.

Senator STERLE: Do we have a target date we're setting ourselves to get the money out?

Dr Derham: Not at this stage. Obviously as soon as practical.

Senator STERLE: Sure. When it was first put out, did we suggest any time lines before all the successful parties were determined?

Dr Derham: The way that the guidelines represent payment is that it's a single upfront payment, and successful candidates have 12 months to implement their projects.

Senator STERLE: Twelve months from receiving the money?

Dr Derham: Yes. That's associated with having the contract in place between parties.

Senator STERLE: Sure. So 3 March was when the recipients were first able to apply. The cut-off date you told me—I'm sorry, I can't remember when that was. When was it that we found out 74 out of the 93 were successful?

Dr Derham: They were announced on 29 July.

Senator STERLE: Alright. Do we think that money will be hitting the bank accounts this year? Is that what we're striving for?

Dr Derham: Yes. That's our hope and aim.

Senator STERLE: What kinds of projects have been selected?

Dr Derham: There are a range of successful projects out there. The important nature of these projects is that they deliver on-ground works that improve the health of our rivers and wetlands, as per the guidelines and the eligibility nature of these particular grants. The sorts of successful grants that we have been able to see are fencing off of river lands and dams to keep stock out; revegetation of river lands and habitats, predominantly with native species. We have also seen successful candidates in the area of improving habitat for native fish. We have even seen some pest and invasive species removal and treatments as well. So a wide range of what we would call 'natural resource management-type initiatives'.

Senator STERLE: Yes. Sounds like it too. Are you able to tell us how many farmers are expected to receive a grant?

Dr Derham: I'll take that on notice because I don't have those exact splits right in front of me.

Senator STERLE: While you're taking that on notice, I'd also throw into that mix the number of landholders, if there are any expected to receive a grant, and also the number of community organisations—if you could break that up for us, please?

Dr Derham: I certainly will.

Senator STERLE: Thank you. Could you tell us how the department is ensuring that projects deliver for the environment?

Dr Derham: Yes, certainly. We will have an evaluation component to the program as it's run out. The department is currently still developing that monitoring and evaluation reporting program. That will help us quite clearly see the success of these projects against the objectives of the grant. Hopefully we can provide some more information about it as we move forward. We certainly anticipate, COVID pending, that we'll be able to go out on country and see, as part of an auditing process, the actual works that have been conducted. We may not get out to everyone but we'll certainly be looking to get out as many as we can.

Senator STERLE: I can understand the challenges for the COVID-pending stuff so my thoughts are with everyone. How will you measure the success of the project?

Dr Derham: That's a good question, Senator. I think when you think about what are we trying to achieve with success of this program it's about making sure that the community is engaged in ensuring the health of our environment through projects that can help improve and restore the condition of our environment, through some of the initiatives that I've spoken of. Our aim would be to ensure that the grant recipients are able to deliver their projects as they've identified and nominated them. Part of that, as I said, will be getting photographic evidence. We'll be going out on country. We'll be going out and ensuring that what the proponent puts forward, and their management plans for implementing the projects, has been achieved.

Senator STERLE: Are funds contingent upon the success of a project?

Dr Derham: No, they're not.

Senator STERLE: No, because they is just one lump payment, isn't there?

Dr Derham: That's correct, an up-front payment. Obviously we want to make sure that people deliver on their commitment and there is a contract between parties—all best endeavours.

Senator STERLE: Can you tell me how the department will measure whether the health of the river has improved as a result of the grant?

Dr Derham: That will be about those field observations and ensuring that we're seeing the improvements that we're looking for. It will be very difficult to measure all of the outcomes. As I mentioned, some of the projects are about restoring habitat for native fish. Not many of the initiatives have direct monitoring programs associated with them. However, what we would like to ensure is that the cumulative benefit of doing all of these works, from small scale up to large scale, will ultimately contribute to the outcomes of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan and the outcomes that it sets for environmental health.

Senator STERLE: My shorthand is pretty poor but I've been fiercely writing. When we talked about the examples of the projects you said fencing, dams, keep stock out, revegetation, improving the habitats of native fish. There was one more I just could not get down—

Dr Derham: That's pest and invasive species control.

Senator STERLE: That's it. How could I forget that as a senator! Thank you. Of those initiatives, and I understand them very clearly, are there any that are associated with water savings?

Dr Derham: Generally not. These are more complementary measures that work to help improve, so they're commensurate to the health of the system. If we're fencing off a waterway to keep stock out, what we're doing is minimising bank erosion and water quality degradation. So they have commensurate benefits to the health of the system.

Senator STERLE: Sure. This is pretty open ended, but I will ask: do we think any of the projects will contribute to the 450-gigalitre target?

Dr Derham: No, that's not correct.

Senator STERLE: No, I didn't think so. I've just asked a question I already thought I knew the answer to, pretty clearly. Are conflicts of interest managed?

Dr Derham: Yes, they most definitely are. What I can advise you is that the program, all the way along, from development through to design sign-off, had independent probity advisers associated with it—we used O'Connor Marsden & Associates—and all of the staff, as well as all of the selection advisory panel members, filled out conflict-of-interest declarations.

Senator STERLE: Very good. Is the grants program a one-off appropriation?

Dr Derham: Yes, it is, but it's run over two rounds. At the moment, we're just making our way through the first round, which is a small grant round. We'll have a second round, hopefully launching very, very soon, which will include another small grant round but also a larger grant round.

Senator STERLE: What is the difference between the small and the large rounds, in dollar terms?

Dr Derham: At the moment, round 1, which is a small grant, is in the order of \$5,000 to \$50,000 for successful applicants. As we move into the larger round, I think it can be from \$100,000 up to \$2 million. I think that's set out in the guidelines that are provided.

Senator STERLE: Yes. That's pretty clear. Thank you for that. Could you tell us which rivers these grants are going towards?

Dr Derham: It's an open and competitive grant round, so applications are available anywhere within the Murray-Darling Basin boundary.

Senator STERLE: Thank you. Has any funding gone out the door for the Healthy Rivers program?

Dr Derham: No funding has yet gone out to any successful applicants. As I mentioned before, we are just now working through the process with the Community Grants Hub for those contracts.

Senator STERLE: Do we have a time line for when we may expect to see expressions of interest, successful applicants or anything like that?

Dr Derham: In relation to round 1, that's in hand, and, as I said, the contracts are currently being prepared for successful applicants. We'll be opening up round 2 in the not-too-distant future.

Senator STERLE: Thank you. Have there been any representations made to the minister's office by MPs and senators, to the best of your knowledge, in relation to the Murray-Darling Communities Investment Package?

Dr Derham: Not that I'm aware of.

Senator STERLE: I'll put that as a broader question to take on notice, applying to the whole department too. Now that the Murray-Darling Communities Investment Package rules out buybacks, can you tell us what happens to sellers who want to sell their water to the government?

Dr Derham: Minister Pitt has been very clear in response to this matter. The primary focus for the Australian government at this stage is to seek any additional environmental water entitlements through the infrastructure project.

Senator STERLE: That's pretty clear. Could you tell us: what is the progress of implementation for the Murray-Darling Communities Investment Package?

Dr Derham: I'd have to take that on notice, but I do believe that release of another update is pending in the not-too-distant future.

CHAIR: Senator Sterle, I might have to ask you to pass the call shortly.

Senator STERLE: I have two more, Chair. Your timing is impeccable.

CHAIR: Terrific. Thank you.

Senator STERLE: How much has been allocated from this program?

Dr Derham: In relation to the Healthy Rivers grants?

Senator STERLE: Yes.

Dr Derham: For this particular program, \$20 million has been set aside. As I indicated, we had 73 successful applications, and we are anticipating—I'm just getting the number in front of me—that about \$2.8 million, GST exclusive, will be put out as part of the successful candidates of round 1. So that additional funding still remains available for the subsequent round.

Senator STERLE: As you clearly said, it hasn't gone out yet and you are working towards, hopefully, before the end of the year—correct?

Dr Derham: Absolutely.

Senator STERLE: Doctor, thank you very much for your answers. Chair, I'm done.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Senator Sterle. Senator Davey, I will pass to you.

Senator DAVEY: Thank you, Dr Derham, for appearing before us. I've just taken the opportunity to have a look at the successful grant applicants. To flag this before Senator Sterle does, I do know, and have had previous working relationships with, several successful applicants, but I had nothing to do with the process; it was completely hands-off. In saying that, Dr Derham, I would like to understand the process. The applications were

submitted. What was the date that they had to be submitted by? Applications opened on 3 March. When were they closed?

Dr Derham: Applications opened on 3 March and closed on 31 March.

Senator DAVEY: Then they went through the process of an initial assessment where they were assessed by the Community Grants Hub and the panel. The recommendations then went to the minister, and, as per the guidelines, the minister made the final decision. Of the 93 applications that were accepted, are you in a position to tell us how many were recommended by the panel?

Dr Derham: Yes, 74 of the 93 were recommended by the panel.

Senator DAVEY: In the 74 that were successful, with 73 having been announced, were any changes made that you're aware of?

Dr Derham: Just to be clear, 74 were recommended by the panel and 73 were approved by the minister. For one out of the 74, the minister didn't support the panel's recommendation.

Senator DAVEY: Thank you for that. To clarify, because I know Senator Sterle has been asking about water recovery and trying to get to the bottom of why no water recovery has come through this program, this program is not part of the Basin Plan or the associated budget for the Basin Plan—am I right to make that statement?

Dr Derham: Yes, that's correct.

Senator DAVEY: Although it is entirely complementary when we're talking about environmental outcomes?

Dr Derham: Yes, that's a very good analogy. It's about ensuring that the community feel that they can be part of restoring the health of their environment.

Senator DAVEY: The outcomes that we hope to see through the rollout of this funding—I've had a quick scan of the list—include fencing off, wetland restoration, riparian vegetation restoration and aquatic revegetation for fish stocks. There is a really wide variety of projects on offer. It's actually quite exciting. But none of those projects would create water or could be supported under a water recovery program because there are no associated water licences with such projects, are there?

Dr Derham: That's correct. These are genuinely complementary and natural resource management activities. They complement the health of our river system. They are not rolled out in such a way that they generate a water saving.

Senator DAVEY: As to the types of organisations, I see that it's gone out to landcare organisations, which I'm very happy to see, as well as private citizens or trusts. There's also a school project, which is quite exciting because it's getting the children engaged. With the assessment panel, was any weighting given to the type of organisation, or was it purely focusing on the project?

Dr Derham: The guidelines are very clear about eligibility and the types of entities that were able to apply. So the panel—well, actually, it was the Community Grants Hub—did their preliminary assessment against applications and their eligibility. As a result, that was the only criterion. There was no weighting. It really was, 'You're eligible or you're not.'

Senator DAVEY: So, of the 93 submissions received, were the ones that weren't recommended not recommended because they weren't eligible or because they just didn't stack up?

Dr Derham: A lot of it really came down to their ability to meet the requirements of the guidelines. In most cases, it was about the nature of the project and whether or not it met the objectives that we're striving for.

Senator DAVEY: Thank you. I just want to understand a bit more about the second round, which you said will combine another round of the small grants stream, from \$5,000 to \$50,000, with a large grants scheme. What would the value of those projects under the large grants scheme be?

Dr Derham: For the large grants, it would be up to \$2 million.

Senator DAVEY: Can you give us some sort of example or indication of what kinds of projects would fall into the larger grants process? Would these be larger scale—maybe revegetating a larger stretch of riparian area? Might that include infrastructure? There doesn't look to be much infrastructure, aside from fencing, in the smaller round.

Dr Derham: Absolutely. They would be types of initiatives that would come forward. Predominantly, it would be upscaling what we've already seen with the small grants, but there would also be larger consortia coming together to do larger-scale projects.

Senator DAVEY: Might they also cross river systems? By the looks of round 1, a lot of those are very geographically specific. Would there be potential for an organisation, if they'd done a small grant in one area, to roll out similar projects across multiple sites?

Dr Derham: Absolutely. We would expect that multijurisdictional submissions may very well come forward.

Senator DAVEY: We know that part of this program is to allow us to get the community engaged in projects that will help us to deliver against Australia's obligations under several international treaties, including migratory bird treaties and wetland treaties. Some of these treaties are the same as those referenced in the Basin Plan, so can you explain the difference between what the Basin Plan is trying to achieve with water recovery and what this program is achieving on the ground with actual physical complementary measures?

Dr Derham: Thank you, Senator. The same constitutional head of power applies here. What I would say to you is that I can, on notice, provide you with a list of all the threatened species identified in the submissions that we have received that these grants are going to under the round 1 applications.

Senator DAVEY: I would very much appreciate that. I'd like to be able to see the link between the projects and those threatened species. That would be very interesting. Off the top of your head, have you got any clear examples, just for the sake of those listening today?

Dr Derham: I'm just pulling my list out. Here we go. There's quite a number of threatened fauna and flora as well as ecological communities. For example, we have the Booroolong frog, the painted honeyeater and the yakka skink under threatened fauna. Under threatened flora, for example, we have river swamp wallaby grass and winged peppergrass. Under threatened ecological communities, for example, they have the derived native grasslands and white box-yellow box. But I can provide you with a more comprehensive list.

Senator DAVEY: It sounds like there are a lot of target species there, but I look forward to seeing the wider list. I just want to quickly go back to the notification processes that you had. You advertised, you emailed 280 organisations and you put out a press release. For the next round, will you be following the same processes, or have you done a bit of a review—lessons learnt—to try and see if you can get more uptake?

Dr Derham: That's a really good question. I would love to see more uptake. We probably didn't hit the levels that we were hoping for under round 1. But, in response to that, today, for example, we have just launched an additional feedback survey. We have gone back out to those who we worked with in the development of the original design of the program and have sought their feedback on how well we went and also to try and find and identify opportunities for where we can make improvements for round 2. That opened today and closes by the end of this week. That information will also help us ensure that we have the guidelines set at a level that encourages more people to participate and also helps us to target our media strategy on how we promote this particular program.

Senator DAVEY: Do you foresee any significant changes to the guidelines, or are you satisfied that the guidelines ensured you got projects that would deliver on the intent of the program? Also, have you got a separate set of guidelines for the larger stream, and, if so, when will they be released?

Dr Derham: We anticipate that for the small rounds there will be some minor adjustments to the guidelines just in terms of ensuring that we can target as many participants as possible. So there will be some minor changes there, but more to open it up than anything else. And, yes, there are separate guidelines being developed for the larger grant round, and we anticipate that they will be published as soon as we get approval on those. That's currently underway.

Senator DAVEY: On the concern about electorates, when you're reviewing these programs, do you actually even consider what electorate the grant is coming from, or are you just concerned that it is within the Murray-Darling Basin boundaries?

Dr Derham: We are only concerned that the successful applicant is within the bounds of the Murray-Darling Basin, which is part of the guideline requirements. In terms of electorates, we have no consideration or line of sight to that at all.

Senator DAVEY: I just note that the Murray-Darling Basin boundaries cover south and south-west Queensland, a lot of New South Wales, Victoria and sections of South Australia. I do note that Hindmarsh Island Landcare is successful on your list. Congratulations. Are Hindmarsh Island, Coorong, Lower Lakes and Murray Mouth considered to be in the basin for the purpose of this grants funding?

Dr Derham: Yes, they're within the boundary of the basin, Senator.

Senator DAVEY: Thank you. I just flag that my quick glance shows that most of the electorates within the Murray-Darling Basin are coalition held. That's for Senator Sterle, because I'm sure he is running off to check the

computer. But that is not to say that it is only coalition. There is Eden-Monaro, for example. They've also been successful, with Jerrabomberra Creek getting some funding. So congratulations to them as well.

Dr Derham: If it would be of use, I can table or make available a map to the committee that shows the boundary of the Murray-Darling Basin, and a dot point for where the successful projects are located, if that would be a useful visual tool?

Senator DAVEY: I think that would be a very helpful visual tool to understand the basin and the areas that we're talking about. I also note that some of the smaller creeks and stream systems have been successful. So this is not limited to just our major arterial waterways, is it?

Dr Derham: No, that's correct. There have been quite a number of individual landholders who have been successful, and their properties reside on those smaller little creeks and tributaries.

Senator DAVEY: Some Landcare organisations that I'm aware of deal with lagoons and wetlands—disconnected wetlands. For future reference, is this program also open to those sorts of projects where it might be an ephemeral lagoon or a disconnected billabong or wetland, but it's still within the Murray-Darling Basin and still has significant environmental value to the district and the community?

Dr Derham: That's correct.

Senator DAVEY: You said it was a \$20 million program—

Dr Derham: That's correct.

Senator DAVEY: and successful applicants to the value of \$2.8 million. So there's \$17.2 million to go out in the next round in both small and large projects. Is that correct?

Dr Derham: Yes, that's correct. Just to confirm, they are GST exclusive figures as well.

Senator DAVEY: Have we got a breakdown of how much will be allocated to the small grants and how much will be allocated to the large grants?

Dr Derham: Yes. At the moment, it's notionally \$10 million for small grants and \$10 million for large.

Senator DAVEY: Thank you very much. That's all I have.

CHAIR: Dr Derham, please return questions that you have taken on notice to the secretariat by Monday 9 August. Senator Sterle, do you have any additional questions?

Senator STERLE: No, Chair. And I would not for one minute suggest that the good doctor or anyone at the department would ever look at electorates! Although the minister has the final say. There you go, Senator Davey, I had the last word! Bye!

Senator DAVEY: I wasn't saying that's what you were implying; I was just being proactive to highlight that. I just wanted to double-check for my own sake that they're looking at the boundaries, and not the electorates.

Senator STERLE: I love your work!

CHAIR: Thank you very much to everybody. That concludes today's hearing. Thank you very much, Dr Derham, for your presentation, and thanks also to Hansard and to broadcasting. The committee stands adjourned.

Committee adjourned at 16:52